



Bodleian Libraries

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

This book is part of the collection held by the Bodleian Libraries
and scanned by Google, Inc. for the Google Books Library Project.

For more information see:

<http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/dbooks>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-
ShareAlike 2.0 UK: England & Wales (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) licence.



Binder,
xford Street,
Swansea.

1419. e. 611.

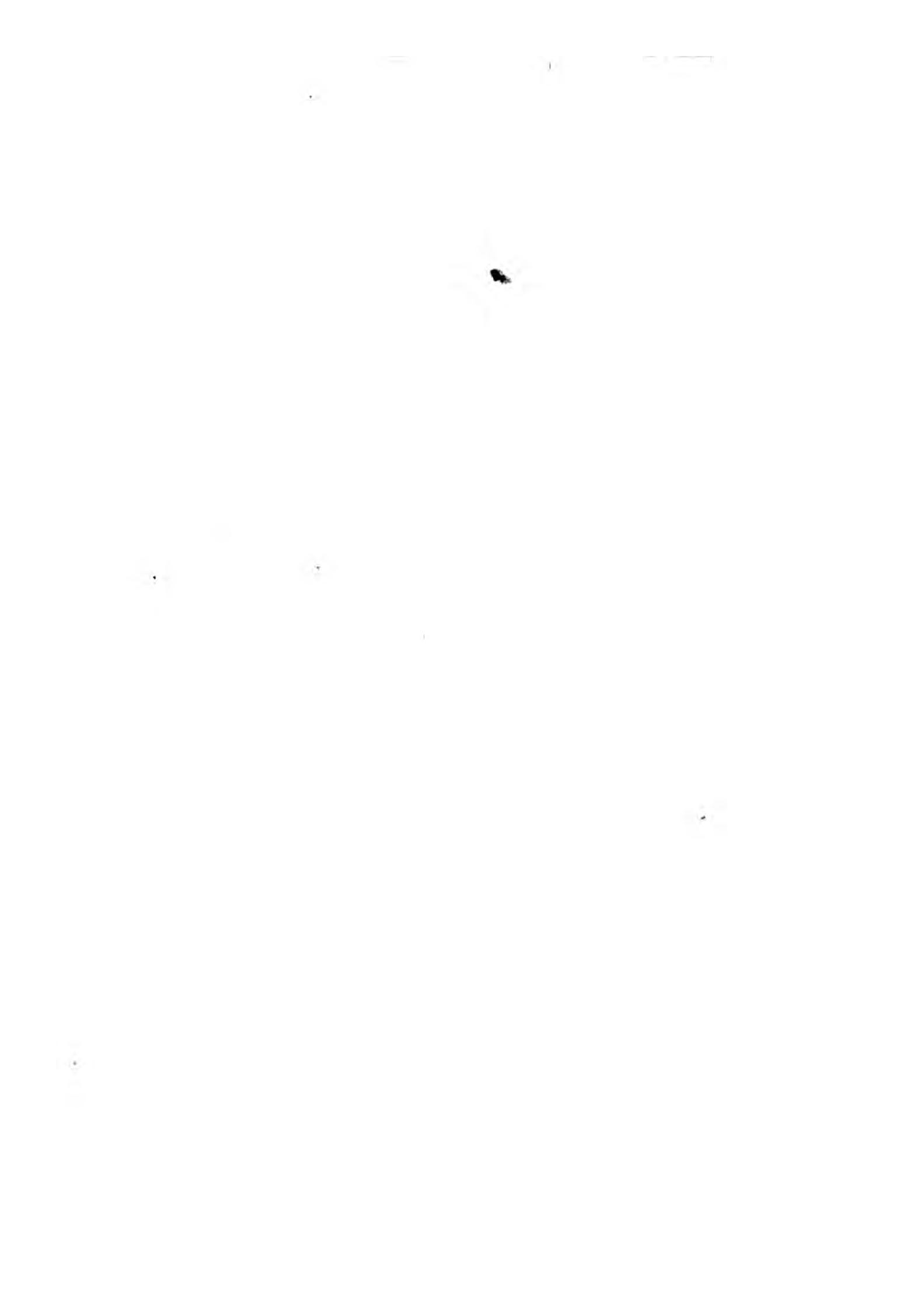
1419. e. 611.

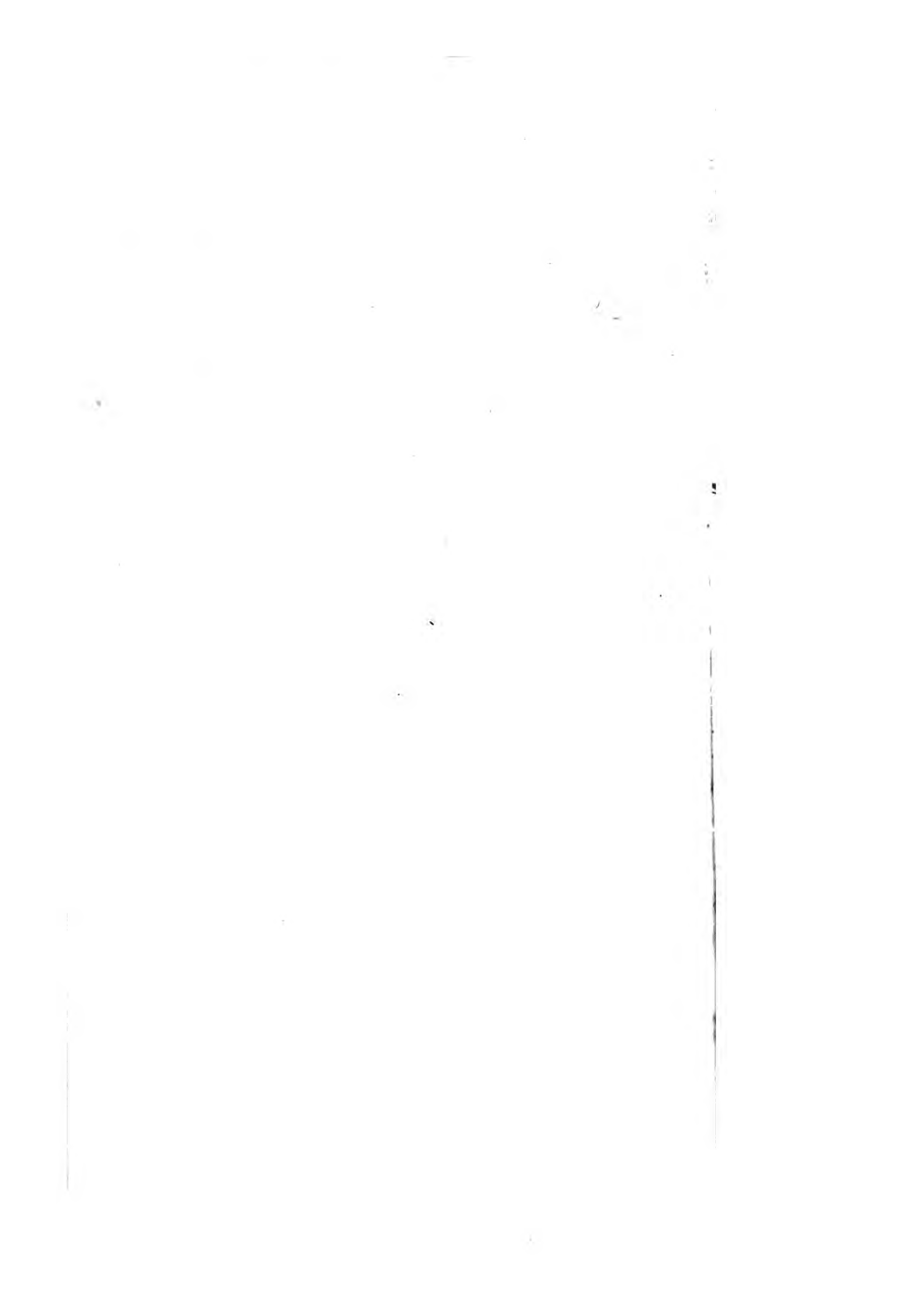
1419. e. 611.

1419. e. 611.

Eliza Catherine Tappan.

October 1842.





Martha Jefferys
with affectionate regard
her friend R. E. Smith

LETTERS,

CHIEFLY

PRACTICAL AND CONSOLATORY.

The grace of God that brings
salvation hath appeared in
men teaching us that deny
ungodliness & worldly lusts
live soberly righteously & godly
in the present evil world, looking
for the blessed hope & glorious appearing
of the great God & our Saviour Jesus
Christ who gave himself for us the
redemption from all iniquity
unto himself a peculiar people
zealous of good works. Tit. III

LETTERS,

CHIEFLY

PRACTICAL AND CONSOLATORY:

DESIGNED TO ILLUSTRATE

THE NATURE AND TENDENCY

OF

THE GOSPEL.

BY DAVID RUSSELL,

Minister of the Gospel, Dundee.

"The joy of the Lord is your strength."—NEH. viii. 10.

EDINBURGH:

PRINTED FOR WAUGH AND INNES.

AND SOLD BY CHALMERS & COLLINS, GLASGOW; E. LESLIE,
DUNDEE; AND OGLE, DUNCAN & CO.
LONDON.

~~~~~  
1821



---

**DUNDEE:**  
*Printed by A. Colville.*

### ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following Letters were addressed, for the most part, to persons in affliction. They are not, however, merely consolatory. Sorrow is the fruit of sin, and therefore its true cure lies only in that medicinal truth which purifies the heart, and "saves and sets the sinner free!" With this conviction, it was the Writer's object in these Letters to state that great truth in the different lights and connections in which it appears in Scripture. The individuals to whom they were written believed that they received benefit from them, and they thought that others might do so likewise.—This is the history of their publication.



## CONTENTS.

|                                                               | Page     |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| <b>LET. 1. On the Sufferings of Christ, .....</b>             | <b>1</b> |
| 2. On the Glory of Christ, .....                              | 20       |
| 3. On the Invitations and Promises of the Gospel, .....       | 37       |
| 4. On the Design of our Lord's Mission, .....                 | 54       |
| 5. Thoughts on the Law and the Gospel, .....                  | 82       |
| 6. On Christian Comfort, .....                                | 102      |
| 7. On the Practical Influence of the Truth, .....             | 123      |
| 8. Hints on the Means and happy Effects of Sanctification, .. | 138      |
| 9. On the Perseverance of Christians, .....                   | 157      |
| 10. On the Death of a Relative, .....                         | 181      |
| 11. On the Benefit of Affliction, .....                       | 196      |
| 12. On our Lord's Answer to the Sons of Zebedee, .....        | 219      |
| 13. On the Diversity of Degrees in Glory, .....               | 242      |
| 14. On some Difficulties relative to Coming to Christ, .....  | 272      |
| 15. On Christian Confidence in Prayer, .....                  | 296      |

#### **ERRATA.**

**Page 1, line 13 from bottom, for "pre-eminently," read "prominently."**

**—48, line 12                   for "wonderous," read "wondrous."**

**—89, line 4                   for "hear," read "bear."**

**—274, line 11               for "Penticost," read "Pentecost."**

**—276, line 20               for "by him out," read "out by him."**

**—158, foot note,           for "John ix." read "John x."**

# LETTERS,

## *PRACTICAL AND CONSOLATORY.*

---

### LETTER I.

#### ON THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST.

General observations on the sufferings of Christ—They continued through his life—The nature of those he endured in Gethsemane and on the Cross—Their expiatory design—Were inflicted by God, as the lawgiver—Flowed from a sense of the evil of sin and of the Divine displeasure, and from the desertion of his Father—This typified under the law—Were endured in circumstances of shame—Were increased by the powers of darkness, and by many other secondary causes; and terminated in death.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

THE sufferings of Christ constitute so important a part of Christianity, and are so pre-eminently exhibited in Scripture, that our comfort and deportment in religion must be much influenced by our views of their nature and design. To this subject, allow me to direct your attention in the present letter. I begin with observing, that, it appears from Scripture, the sufferings of our Lord continued through life; and that his one righteousness includes the whole of his obedience and his death. It is wrong to confine his righteousness to any one part of his humiliation and woe. The Scriptures represent it as including all that he did; in taking upon him our nature; in perfectly obeying the Divine law; in submitting to the pains,



sorrows, and sufferings which so grievously afflicted him; and in giving himself an offering and a sacrifice unto God. These all form that one work, by which the glory of the Divine character is vindicated and illustrated; the law magnified and made honourable; and a way opened through which God appears the just God, and yet the Saviour.

But though his sufferings continued through life, they were not at all times equally severe. There were times in which he enjoyed comparative ease, and there were seasons of gladness which occasionally brightened the dark and dreary path of his humiliation. He rejoiced in spirit when he saw Satan fall as lightning from heaven; and when the Samaritans were about to acknowledge him, he said to his disciples, that he had meat to eat that they knew not of. As he stood in the room of sinners, it behoved him to suffer all those miseries to which they are obnoxious through life; while, at the same time, as God exercises much long-suffering and forbearance towards them, and moderates the evils of life, by many instances of kindness; so, in like manner, the Saviour when on earth had not always the same sense of the painful effects of our sins, but sometimes enjoyed a measure of gladness, till the hour and power of darkness came, when the unmixed curse of the violated law of Heaven fell upon his devoted head. How comfortable is it to us, that his joy arose from the conversion of sinners; that his intervals of gladness were seasons in which the salvation of the guilty was contemplated as the certain and blissful result of his work!

But as he had seasons of gladness, so he had also many seasons of extreme distress in the course of his life. Gethsemane and Calvary were not the *only* scenes of his sorrow. Before the last and awful conflict in the garden and on the cross, he exclaimed, "Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say?" This marks the deep and distressful agitation of his spirit, and must be viewed as similar to what he endured in the night on which he was betrayed. "In the days of his flesh, he offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears." "The days of his flesh" include more than the hour of his agony in Gethsemane, and his distressing hours upon the cross—they must include the entire period of his humiliation, and particularly that of his public ministry. We accordingly find, from the history of these days, that he dismissed the multitude and his disciples, and then retired, not to repose himself, but to pray\*; that rising at a very early hour, he went to a solitary place, and there prayed†; that he went to a mountain to pray, and continued in that exercise the whole of the night‡; and that, when he went to the Mount of Olives, after the observance of the passover, it was as *he was wont*§. Compare all this with what is said of the nature of those prayers, and of the circumstances in which they were offered, in those psalms in which he is the speaker. His language in Psalm xxii. 2. cannot refer merely to what took place in his

---

\* Matt. xiv. 23, 25. † Mark i. 35. ‡ Luke vi. 12. § Luke xxii. 39

last agony in the *garden*, for that took place about midnight: and here he says, "O my God, I cry in the *day*-time, but thou hearest not;" neither can it refer merely to what took place on the *cross*, because that happened during the *day*: and here he says, that he cried unto God in "the *night season*." Nor is this all. The words cannot be confined to *any one* particular night and day, but are clearly expressive of daily and nightly, *continual* sorrow, as is confirmed by the expression which follows: "And am not silent;" or, as in the margin, there is no silence to me. This mode of speaking leads at once to the passages I have quoted respecting his prayers—his continuing in them all night—his doing so on mountains, and in solitary places—and of this being his usual custom. It ought likewise to be observed, that as the *second* verse of this psalm cannot be confined to the scenes of Gethsemane and Calvary, so neither can the *first*; for these two verses are evidently connected, and form one complaint. He had often then, by night and by day, *thus* cried unto God, and had frequently expressed himself in the doleful language which he at last uttered *publicly* on Calvary. In the instance already mentioned, which is recorded in John xii. 27. there is the same state of anguish which is exhibited on the cross, though less in degree. This illustrates his complaint, that he had "been afflicted and ready to die from his youth up\*." It accords with what David says, as his

---

\* Psalm lxxxviii. 15.

type, "My life is spent with grief, and my years with sighing"\*; and shews the importance of such of the psalms as contain the substance of the prayers offered up by him on earth. We are in these psalms brought as it were into his closet, are made the witnesses of his secret devotions, and are enabled to see even the inward workings of his heart. It is affecting thus to contemplate his feelings, and the exercise of his high and hallowed principles, in the presence of his Father.

The Scriptures, however, do certainly direct us in a particular manner to the *last* scene of his work and of his woes; because it was the grand *completion* of his sufferings and undertaking in the room of sinners. The Evangelists have spoken fully of what he endured during the night on which he was betrayed. The seat of his sufferings at that time was his soul, for no human hand had as yet touched him. His body, it is true, was greatly affected, but this was occasioned by the distress and anguish of his mind. He was overwhelmed with *sorrow* of the most excruciating nature, which made him exclaim, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death†." Sorrow is the very essence of the curse denounced against sin‡, and he who was made "a curse for us" endured it to the utmost. The sorrows of death compassed him, and the pains of the invisible world got hold upon him§. He felt as if besieged with sorrow; so that to whatever quarter he turned, the bitter cup of anguish pre-

---

\* Psalm xxxi. 10. † Matt. xxvi. 38. ‡ Gen. iii. 17. Matt. viii. 12.  
§ Psalm cxvi. 3.



sented itself. His anguish was of so *deadly* a nature, that it threatened the dissolution of his frame even before he had reached the cross, and at last did *actually* cause his death.

We are also told, that he was *sore amazed*.—This denotes a state of the utmost horror and consternation. He is said to have been *very heavy*, or in a state of the deepest dejection and depression of spirit. Let us turn aside and see this great sight—the *Son of God* in an *agony*. See him, in this bitter conflict of nature, starting back, as overwhelmed with horror—struck with amazement and consternation—and encompassed with sorrow and anguish! See him going backward and forward; at one time kneeling, and at another falling prostrate on the ground, seeking for comforters in his disciples, and piteously complaining, “What! could ye not watch with me one hour?”—going again and again to his Father, and praying with increasing intenseness of mind, that this bitter cup might for a time be withdrawn! Consider the labours and the strivings of his thoughts; the flaming passions and affections which rushed upon his mind at once; and it will not be matter of wonder that he should have exclaimed, “Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto my soul. I sink in the deep mire, where there is no standing; I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me\*!” His heart was preternaturally fired within him, so as to force a

---

\* Psalm lxi. 1, 2.

passage through the body for his rarified blood; for his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. The agony of his soul must have been bitter beyond conception, when such was its effect upon his body in the open air, at midnight, and when they who were within found it necessary to defend themselves against the cold. His firm heart was ready to break, and immediate death was threatened; but knowing that much remained to be accomplished, it was his prayer that the cup might for a time pass from him. His prayer was heard; an angel appeared to strengthen him; and he regained composure to act with propriety before his Judges and the people, and to suffer what he endured before he reached the cross\*.

On the cross, the scene of Gethsemane was renewed—the cup was again presented to him, and there he drank it to the very dregs! On Calvary his distress reached its height, and drew from him the bitter exclamation, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” Mysterious dereliction! only to be accounted for by the nature of his death. *Here* he could not manifest the deep and restless agitation of his heart by going to and fro, and changing his posture, as he

---

\* See Doddridge on Luke xxii. 42. Our Lord did not pray to be entirely excused from sufferings and death. Such a petition had been inconsistent with that steady constancy he always shewed, and with his language in John xii. 27, 28. in which he disowns such a prayer. He speaks of the severity of the present combat which threatened dissolution, before the Scriptures, relative to his last sufferings, had been fulfilled.

did in the Garden; but it was indicated by other circumstances. His *words* marked it, as did also his *countenance*. The sun was clothed with darkness; not only as an expression of the Divine displeasure against his foes, and a token of the awful darkness of his mind when under the frown of Heaven, but also as an expression of respect for the sufferer, whose mental torture must at that time have "marred his visage more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men." Over this a veil was thrown, yet it must have been in some degree apparent\*. He at last expired under the curse; not so much in consequence of the exhaustion of nature by bodily pain and the loss of blood (for in the article of death he cried with a loud voice, and Pilate marvelled when he heard of it), as in consequence of the extreme pressure of mental torture. This was too racking, too exquisite, for nature to support—it literally broke his heart. That sorrow which is the very soul of the curse, terminated his life; and thus discovered the nature of his sufferings, together with their great and glorious design.

It must be of the first importance to ascertain the causes of sufferings so great, and so deeply interesting to us. It cannot be that they arose merely from the fear of death. If, to a person so exalted and so distinguished, death *itself* had been so terrible, how dreadful would it be to us! Instead of having set us

---

\* See, in connection with this, such passages as Psalm xxii. 6—8, 14, 15. lxi. 3, 9. cii. 3—5, 11. Isa. lii. 14. liii. 3.

free from the fear of death, this king of terrors would have been rendered more formidable than ever. But blessed be God, the death of the Redeemer was no *common* death; we need not, therefore, dread the last enemy. Many of the children of God, who have been naturally timid and deeply sensible of their guilt and their weakness, have engaged in the last struggle with peaceful hearts, yea with unutterable gladness, even when death appeared in its most painful and frightful forms. They have met the most cruel deadly tortures with fortitude, and have discovered no dread or dejection; but, on the contrary, the most placid tranquillity, and even the highest emotions of joy. Whence the difference betwixt the *Master*, who is all dejection and consternation, even to such a degree as to affect his body in the most extraordinary manner; and the *servant*, who, in the prospect of martyrdom, exults in the hope of the "crown of righteousness?" The difference is to be found in *this*—that Christ died as a *sacrifice* for sin, and in the *peculiar nature and measure* of the sufferings which were necessary to that sacrifice. He bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that he might redeem us from the curse of the law and the power of death; that, dying under the weight of the Divine displeasure, *we* might be blessed in life, at death, and throughout eternity. Thus the curse is exhausted, and the cup put into our hands has nothing of wrath in it, but is entirely medicinal, even in its most bitter ingredients.

It is evident, my dear friend, that the sufferings of Christ arose from the hand of his Father, in the cha-



racter of Judge and Lawgiver\*. As such, it became him to express his displeasure against sin; that, while mercy triumphed, it might not be at the expence of justice, or of the general good. He loved the guilty, and would have had no difficulty in saving them without an atonement, had this been consistent with righteousness, with the glory of his character, the honour of the law, the good of the universe and of the guilty themselves. Christ did not purchase the love of God; his death is the *fruit*, and not the *price* of it. It opened a channel through which it flows to the guilty, in a way at once honourable to him and beneficial to them. There is nothing here bordering on rigour or cruelty; but a sacred regard to rectitude and the Divine law, united with the warmest benevolence towards sinners. The Saviour, *personally* considered, was never the object of the Divine displeasure. Even when the hand of God was most heavily upon him, he was the object of Divine delight; and confident of this, he said, "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life for the sheep†."

One great cause of the sufferings of Christ was, the clear perception which he had of the sins of his people, in all their odiousness and malignity. His holy mind was deeply affected by the evil and hatefulness of rebellion against God. Well did he know the high and righteous claims of God on the love and the obedi-

---

\* Isa. liii. 6.—Zech. xiii. 7.

† John x. 17.

ence of all; and the violated obligations of man, with the tendency and awful effects of sin, were fully before him. The more dearly he loved his people, the more would his trouble be increased; as we are much more affected by the crimes of a relative or friend, than by the crimes of others\*. Such a view of the evil and hateful nature of sin must have been inconceivably painful to the Saviour, when not counterbalanced by an equally clear view of good, which during his last sufferings he had not, because at that time he was left to distress unmingled with gladness.

In this hour of anguish he had a deep sense of the Divine wrath against sin. Though he was *personally* the object of the Divine love, he endured that which to the guilty is the awful expression of the Divine displeasure. The God of our spirits can easily deluge the soul with sorrow and anguish, even when the spirit is pure, and is the object of his approbation. In such a case, the painful feelings cannot be those of a guilty conscience; and, in the case of our Lord, there could be nothing of this kind. It is utterly wrong to represent his sufferings as, in all respects, the same with those of the impenitent in the world of woe. They eat of the fruit of their own ways—they are under the dominion of the most sinful propensities—their ungovernable passions are for ever excited, and never find gratification—they have no self-respect, but are conscious of personal guilt, and filled with remorse—

---

\* Psalm xl. 12.

and their final despair is accompanied with every furious and malignant principle, and with settled hostility to the character and government of God. Nothing of this nature could have place in the breast of the Saviour. He knew, and he confessed, the sinfulness and demerit of man. He acquitted the throne of God, and laid the undivided blame on the sinner. Even when he exclaimed in the bitterness of his soul, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" he murmured not, but said, "Thou art holy." When his heart was broken, and his spirit distracted with agonies passing comprehension, he bowed with profound and cheerful submission to the hand of God, and with perfect resignation drank the whole of the bitter cup. It were equally wrong, on the other hand, to infer, from the difference between his sufferings and those of the finally condemned, that his woes were not of the most intense kind. That difference arises from the opposite *characters* of the parties. Where no difference of *character* exists, there must be a similarity of suffering or enjoyment. We are apt to connect future punishment with *place* to such a degree, as to suppose that the former cannot be endured but in a particular local situation; but place is only a *circumstance*, not at all affecting the essence of punishment. In as far as Jesus *could* feel it, he endured the wrath of God due to sin. It was not death in *itself* from which he suffered so much, but death as penal, or as the wages of sin. He contemplated God in the character of the offended Judge; and, under a sense of his anger against sin, he was filled with dread.

His outward sufferings were nothing to the distresses of his soul; of the former we find him, accordingly, speaking with the greatest composure, while the latter called forth the most bitter exclamations and the most intense supplications.

Another ingredient in his cup was the desertion of his Father: Of this he speaks in the most plaintive manner\*. Separation from God is a part of the curse: hence Adam was expelled Eden; and the wicked shall be doomed to depart from the presence of Him in whose favour is life. This may be thought light here, but in the other world it causes inexpressible misery. As it forms an essential part of the curse due to sin, it behoved our Lord to experience it when he stood for the guilty. This, however, is a subject awfully mysterious, and on which little can be said. If life lies in the favour of God, and his frown be destructive of the bliss of a spiritual being, the sufferings of the Redeemer must have been inconceivably great when the frown of Jehovah fell upon him. The bitter lamentations which this extorted from him discover the feelings of his heart. Although he was kept from utterly sinking, there were seasons when he endured the total absence of Divine joy, and the entire want of every kind of comfort. Not that his mind was *always* in this state, even in the deepest of his trials; but this was on such occasions, and particularly in the last scenes of his suffering, the *general* state of his soul. To him the sun of consolation was then totally eclipsed.

---

\* Psalm xxii. 1. lxxxviii. 14.



Our depravity and the weakness of our powers hinder us from forming adequate ideas of his distress, when deprived of the light of his Father's countenance, and doomed to suffer his frown. This is the deepest misery which man can feel, and misery of which the Redeemer must have been most painfully sensible, in consequence of his situation, the greatness of his powers, and the holiness of his character. No evil principle obscured his view of the Divine glory—no sinful bias kept him from perceiving, in the most vivid light, the worth of the Divine favour—and nothing could cool his love to Jehovah, or turn away his heart from him. The more he loved God the clearer views he had of his glory; and the more that he delighted in fellowship with him the greater must have been his sorrow and anguish of heart when the Father hid his face from him. His aversion to this was the language of nature, which must ever be averse to pain; but it was much more: it was also the fruit of piety. As the more he was devoted to God, the greater must have been his aversion to that which cut him off from the enjoyment of him. The more too that he was averse to the cup on *such* principles, the more glorious does his drinking of it appear, that the Divine law, character, and government might be honoured, and the salvation of sinners thus completely secured. The reluctance of our Lord to the cup, and the distress of his soul when drinking of it, shew the strength of his love both to God and man. It admirably manifests the perfection of his character. His sufferings afforded an opportunity for the exercise and display of all

that is great and good—of all that can command the highest veneration, the warmest love, and the most heartfelt gratitude.

To prefigure our Lord's endurance of that separation which is an essential part of the curse, the most remarkable of the sin-offerings were burnt without the camp. As polluted victims, they were removed from the place where God dwelt. In like manner, Jesus suffered without the gate of the holy city, because he was in the eye of the law an unclean victim\*. This was but an indication of his *actual* state as separated from the enjoyment of fellowship with God. He died in an unclean place, where the bones of many of the dead, and these of the worst character too, lay all around: every thing in the *place*, as well as in the *manner* of his death, marking him out as dying under the frown of Heaven, and in a state of exclusion from the holy sanctuary of Jehovah. From this sanctuary every thing unclean was excluded under the law; and in allusion to this, our Lord speaks of his sufferings as a pollution, and in this light they were viewed by the Jews†. Every one saw that our Lord's sufferings were of no common character. The circumstances attending his bodily sufferings were unprecedented, and their effects upon his mind were remarkable; while, on the other hand, the effects of his mental torture upon his body were still more striking‡. Much must have been visible which was calculated to offend those who could look only to the outward appearance,

---

\* Heb. xiii. 11, 12.

† Psalm xxii. 6, 7.

‡ Psalm cix. 22—25.

and to give occasion to his enemies to triumph over him. While the people of God, when they cried unto him had been heard and delivered, *his* prayers were not heard in the same way; because he suffered for the guilty in a state of seclusion from the habitation and favour of God. He was treated as a leper, whose lamentations, instead of meeting with condolence, could only be made in a state of excommunication\*, and whose malady was viewed as resulting from the immediate visitation of God. The people treated him thus; because they could not account for his unparalleled sufferings in any other way, than that of his being an unparalleled sinner; and he himself acted as one unclean in the eye of the law, because he had devoted himself to be a sacrifice for sin†. The higher our views are of the perfect purity and holiness of his character, the more deeply impressive will be our views of his condition when separated from all delightful fellowship with God, and treated as a polluted victim. This was prefigured by the animals offered under the law, which were to be the purest and most perfect in themselves, while, in consequence of being substituted in the room of the guilty, they were treated as unclean. From all this legal impurity was our Lord delivered by his expiatory death.

Connected with this was the *shame* to which he was subjected. Shame forms a part of the curse due to sin‡. This arises from the nature of sin, which in-

---

\* Lev. xiii. 45, with Num. v. 1—3.

† Isaiah liii. 3—5.

‡ Dan. xii. 2. Isaiah lxvi. 24.



cludes in it the contempt of excellence and opposition to all that is good—the perverse abuse of the faculties of the mind; of the bounties of Providence and the ways of God—which involves in it the most wicked rebellion and the basest ingratitude; and which manifests the government of the most despicable and hateful propensity. A principle inducing such a character and conduct, must merit the most decided reprobation and the most marked contempt. The conviction that this contempt is deserved, must torment the condemned in that world where the clearest light shall be united with the most deep-rooted hostility to all that is good. The Saviour having appeared in the cause of sinners, was exposed to the keenest reproach and the most galling shame. We ought not to look upon this as a slight part of his woes; for shame is a most painful emotion, which has driven many from the haunts of men, and to offer violence to nature itself. The Redeemer often speaks of the shame and the scorn he endured, and says that “reproach had broken his heart.” These bitter consequences and effects of sin account for the *manner* of our Lord’s death. It was necessary not only that he should die, but that he should die in circumstances shameful and degrading: He accordingly died the death of the cross, *that* being the most shameful death then known among men. He indeed knew that he merited not reproach, but praise; but his circumstances of shame and contempt forcibly impressed him with the baseness and malignity of sin, and the unworthiness of those for whom he suffered.

It is of importance to observe farther, that our

Lord's sufferings were increased by the assaults of the powers of darkness\*. The serpent bruised his heel, as had been early foretold. There are times when the mind is in a situation very susceptible of trouble and anguish; and this was the case with the Saviour, when the prince of darkness attacked him. Every fresh calamity laid his mind more open to pain from another; and at this time calamity came after calamity, and deluged his soul with the most bitter and complicated distress. No wonder then that he was filled with a shocking mixture of terror and amazement—of dejection and sorrow.

I may add, that a number of inferior causes contributed to increase his sufferings. All the evils which sin hath introduced seemed to conspire against him. While his soul was overwhelmed with bitter sorrow, and his body racked with the tortures of the cross, he had to endure the mockery of the Jews—the conduct of his own disciples, and numerous other circumstances of the most painful nature†. All of these, however, the Redeemer traced to God, as well as what came *immediately* from him. When apprehended by the officers sent to take him, he said, “The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?” The things which *led* to his death, as well as the death itself, he considered as the effects of the Divine wrath against sin; and viewing them in *this* light, he must have had the bitterness of his cup exceedingly in-

---

\* John xiv. 30.

† Psal. xxii. 6—18. lxi. 7—12. 19—21. Isaiah l. 6. liii.

creased. It is this view of the many events and circumstances in the death of the Redeemer which makes them illustrative of the nature and the causes of his sufferings, and leads us to perceive the glory of his character.

Thus did the Son of God endure the curse of the Divine law, in suffering that sorrow, dejection, and consternation—that shame and degradation, which marked his career. He suffered under the frown of the Lawgiver and the Judge of all; and that in such circumstances, that in the prime of life *he died of a wounded spirit*. Thus sin was expiated—the Divine law magnified and made honourable—the character of God vindicated and fully displayed—and the salvation of the guilty completely secured. “It is finished!” said the wondrous Sufferer. Resigning himself into the hands of his God, he exclaimed, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit!” and “bowing his head, he gave up the ghost.” Thus died he at once as a sacrifice for sin, and as “the Prince of Life.” Let the philanthropy of God our Saviour expand our minds and enlarge our hearts. Into his views let us enter, his character let us imitate, and thus his bliss we shall ultimately possess.

Praying that He who knows all our afflictions, and hath taken their bitterness away, may be with you and bless you,

I remain,

My Dear Friend,

Yours, &c.

## LETTER II.

### ON THE GLORY OF CHRIST.

General remarks on the glory of Christ as illustrated by his sufferings.

His glory a striking manifestation of the Divine character—Appears in his resurrection—In his ascension—The completion of the atonement—The Divine approbation of his work—And his ministrations and bliss in the heavenly sanctuary. Was the subject of his prayer and conversation on earth. Demonstrates the perfection of his sacrifice—Is the source of peace before God—of sanctification—of consolation under affliction, and in the prospect of death and eternity.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

HAVING in my last letter made some observations on the sufferings of Christ, I shall now direct your attention to the glory which followed. These two subjects mutually illustrate each other, and formed the great topics of prophetic teaching\*. That we may understand the true nature of the glory of the Saviour, it is necessary to advert again to the character in which he viewed God in the time of his sufferings. He then contemplated him chiefly as the Lawgiver and the Judge of all, highly displeased with the violation of his authority, and as in the act of executing the sentence of the law. He viewed death as the wages of sin, and as the infliction of the curse of Jehovah. The wrath of God, as revealed in the cross of Christ, gives the most awful display of Divine justice; and in the death of the Redeemer, we receive the deepest impressions of the moral character of God. Here we are

---

\* 1 Peter i. 11.

taught by irresistible evidence, that life lies in the Divine favour, and that the frown of Heaven is the very essence of death. In the mortal agonies of Him who expired under the frown of the God of all blessedness, we see the lowest degradation to which human nature can be brought, and the deepest misery to which man can be subjected, as the fruit of sin.

In the resurrection of Christ there is also a wonderful manifestation of the Divine character. The power displayed in it is not merely physical, like that which was manifested in the resurrection of those whom our Lord brought from the dead in the days of his flesh. Hence Paul, in his prayer for the Ephesians, labours for words to express the amazing grandeur of that power which was exerted in the Redeemer's deliverance from death\*. He terms it "the *exceeding greatness* of the power of God," and "the working of his *mighty* power." He also leads our attention beyond the resurrection of the Saviour, to the glory bestowed on him in his exaltation to the right hand of God, to the government of the church, and thus of all things for its sake. In raising and glorifying Christ, God must be viewed, not so much as Almighty, but rather as the Lawgiver and the Judge of all, raising and glorifying the Surety of sinners, in consistency with, and infinitely to the honour of, his law and government. The Moral Governor was enabled to act in this manner in consequence of the infinite worth of the sacrifice of Christ, which satisfied all the claims of justice,

---

\* Ephes. i. 18—23.



and fully vindicated and illustrated the character of Jehovah.

But while the unutterable value of the death of Christ is that from which his reward arose, its worth does not spring from suffering simply, but from the excellence of the principles and views which animated the illustrious sufferer. Hence God, while exercising this power in rewarding Christ, was not only doing what in his public character he had a right to do, or what he could do, in full consistency with the demands of law and justice; but was at the same time expressing the strength of his love to the character of the Redeemer, and the ineffable complacency with which he rests in his work. The meaning of the prayer I refer to appears to be this,—“That the eyes of the mind being freed from error and sin, Christians may clearly discern and rightly judge of the great object of hope to which they have been called out of the world, and of the riches and grandeur of that lot, or place, given them among the saints, as citizens of the heavenly city; and apprehend aright the grandeur of the power of God manifested on account of his people, who believe *in* the energy of his mighty power which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead and glorified him in heaven\*.”

The subject spoken of is not the power exerted in leading us to believe the gospel, which is doubtless the

---

\* Ephesians ii. 19.—The Apostle is speaking, not of the correspondence between the power exerted in the resurrection of Christ and that exerted in causing us to believe, but of the object of faith—namely, the display of the Divine character in raising him in our behalf.



energy of the Spirit of God ; but the power exerted in our behalf, when the Father raised the Redeemer, and gave him glory as our public Head. The power here displayed is that of raising and glorifying the very Person who had died under the curse, and by means of the frown of the Lawgiver. Had not the death of the Surety expiated sin, and glorified the Divine law—had it not vindicated and illustrated the Divine character—and had it not opened a channel through which mercy might flow to sinners, in consistency with and to the glory of justice—in that case, the Judge could not legally have released him. But such is the value of the Redeemer's work, and such the glory of his character, that the Moral Governor, under whose awful frown he had died, could, with infinite propriety, deliver him from that very death which he had inflicted as the curse of his violated law. In the death of Christ we have an *awful* display of the power of God in punishing sin; in his resurrection a *delightful* exhibition of his power in rewarding righteousness. In the cross of the Saviour, we see his soul wounded, and that by the hand of God ; but in his resurrection and glorification, we see the same God healing his wounded spirit, and gladdening his heart. That soul which was surrounded with bitter and deadly sorrows, is now made exceeding glad with the light of God's countenance. He who was sunk into the deepest wretchedness, is now inheriting blessedness beyond—infinately beyond—our most exalted conceptions. The fulness of the Divine delight now rests upon Him, who, as a victim polluted and accursed in

the eye of the law, suffered without the gates of the city. He who once was excluded the presence and the house of God, is now in the heavenly holy place, and at the right hand of the Majesty on high. How delightful to turn from that preternatural darkness which covered him on Calvary, and which was so expressive of the Divine displeasure against sin,—to his resurrection and his glory, as the most expressive signs of the Divine complacency in his finished righteousness! How cheering to contrast his misery on earth with his bliss in Heaven—the gloom of Gethsemane and the cross, with the meridian sunshine which now encompasses him on Mount Zion—his bitter and heart-rending exclamations in the house of mourning, with his songs of praise in that temple, where the glory of God as his God and Father for ever rests.

In considering the glory of Christ, it is necessary to contemplate his ascension into heaven, and the station he there fills. He entered the heavenly holy place as a triumphant conqueror, having overcome Satan, and sin, and death\*. He ascended amidst the loud and joyful acclamations of the heavenly hosts†. He entered the temple in the character of the High Priest with his own blood, and solemnly offered it unto God. The character which he had displayed in his sufferings upon earth, and which his manifold woes had served to illustrate, must have given the greatest weight to what he solemnly declared by his sacrifice in the heavenly sanctuary. He there afresh exhibited

---

\* Psalm xxiv. 7—10.

† Psalm lxviii. 17, 18.

the collected excellencies which he had manifested on the cross. In the midst of the invisible hosts he vindicated the injured character of God ; declared his law to be holy, and just, and good ; condemned sin as exceeding sinful, and laid its undivided blame upon man. The solemn declaration of such a Personage, who was so fully competent in every respect to judge in the case—and who, moreover, had suffered unto death—must have produced the most powerful impressions on the whole of the heavenly worshippers. Thus did he complete the atonement, and thus did he inspire all around, whether angels or redeemed sinners, with the highest reverence and love for the character of God, the deepest abhorrence of sin, and the most sacred regard to righteousness.

Having finished this part of his undertaking, God called him to his right hand ; set him on the throne of David, as the King of the spiritual Israel ; and invested him with the government of all worlds, for the sake of his church. By this exaltation Jehovah gave the brightest display of that infinite complacency with which he viewed the high and hallowed character of the Mediator, and of the delight he felt on seeing the redemption of sinners secured in a way so honourable to him, and so suited to them. The songs of angels, and of redeemed sinners, in which the Lamb is declared to be worthy of “ all blessing, and honour, and glory, and riches,” are but an echo of the language of the Father, when he seated him as a Priest upon his throne, and called all orders of creatures to worship and serve him. He delighted in so glorious

a demonstration of his holiness,—such security for the ends and honour of his government,—such a display of his manifold wisdom and of the riches of his grace,—and such a proof and illustration of the full harmony of his perfections as were furnished by the sufferings and reward of his Son. Must it not, then, be a part, and a great part, of the glory of the Saviour, to be thus acknowledged as worthy of all honour and blessedness, by Him who is the best judge of genuine merit?

In heaven the Redeemer appears as the first-born of the family of God, and exhibits in himself that glory to which his redeemed are destined to be conformed. His body is spiritual, glorious, vigorous, and incorruptible, and completely adapted to his exalted station as Lord of all. His spirit is filled with unutterable blessedness in the enjoyment of the Divine love. He is happy in a constant sense of the Divine complacency in his obedience and death, and in his official administration in the heavenly temple. In this temple he sits as Lord, having the whole charge of its sacred services. There he leads the song, intercedes for his people, presents and procures the acceptance of their services, and communicates all the blessings of the everlasting covenant. There he exhibits to the whole of the heavenly hosts the full effulgence of the Divine perfections. In this delightful abode, his redeemed cleave to him with the utmost ardour of love, contemplate his personal and official glory with exquisite delight, and ever triumph in him with the highest exultation. He is blessed in seeing



them blessed, and delights in communicating to them fresh enjoyments, and causing them to participate in all his manifold and exalted joys. He exults as he surveys and forwards his work of salvation. This work he considers his highest glory. All his external grandeur is viewed by him as subordinate and subservient to his mediatorial character. In a word, the noble,—the divine—feelings, which animated him when, for the sake of removing misery, and imparting happiness, he bled, and groaned, and died, are in heaven completely gratified. Thus he sees the travail of his soul, and is satisfied.

The deep interest taken by the Saviour in the glory promised him, appears in the prayers which he poured out unto God for deliverance from the power of death, and for that life which is now given him. In Psal. xxi. we read of the request of his lips, and the desire of his heart, as occupied with the blessings of the Divine goodness,—with the crown of glory which he now wears,—with his everlasting life as Mediator,—with his being constituted the medium of blessings to many, and with the enjoyment of the light of his Father's countenance. In Psal. xxii. he fervently prays for deliverance; and he intimates, that, upon his request being granted, he should declare the character of God to his brethren, in the midst of the general assembly and church of the first-born. He himself blesses God for hearing his prayers, and calls upon the people to join in the delightful exercise of praising *Him* who had not despised the affliction of the afflicted One, but had granted him the desire of his

heart. He also exults in the prospect of all the ends of the earth being blessed with his salvation, and made to rejoice in the benefits of his sacrifice. Similar are his prayers and thanksgivings in Psalms lxix. cxvi. cxviii. in which he declares his sufferings, expresses his gratitude to God, and his assured confidence that he should ultimately triumph in the full and final salvation of his people.

The interest he took in his future glory appears in the frequent references he made to it when conversing with his disciples, and in his public discourses. We cannot read his history without seeing that eternity was ever before him ; that he longed for the time when the gospel should be preached to all nations ; when the way into the holiest of all should be laid open ; and when he, in his high character as a Priest upon his throne, should unfold what “ eye had not seen, what ear had not heard, and what never could have entered the mind of man or of angel.” With these views he endeavoured to comfort his disciples on the night on which he was betrayed. Hence he dwelt on the blessed consequences of his entrance into heaven, as they respected the glory of God, his own glory, and the cause of truth and salvation among men.

Surely, then, it becomes us to take up all these views. If his resurrection declares him to be indeed the Son of God—if it proves the perfection of his sacrifice—if the glory of God is made manifest by it—it must be at once our duty and our privilege to place unsuspecting confidence in his finished work. If



these important truths are still farther demonstrated by his exaltation and glory in the heavenly sanctuary, then all that could be done to satisfy us *has* been done. I need not say that nothing can pacify conscience, upon solid grounds, but that which satisfied the justice of Heaven; and hence the preciousness of that Gospel which demonstrates that Divine justice is satisfied, perfectly and forever. How animating it is to see the Almighty illustrate by facts what he proclaimed from the excellent glory, when he said, "This is my Son, the beloved, in whom I am well pleased." Here he is revealed in the endearing character of "the God of Peace," and, from this view of his character, springs the hope of the guilty.

It is in connection with this revelation that he calls upon sinners to come to him through Christ, and promises pardon and eternal life to all who believe his testimony, and who (if I may be allowed the expression) take him at his word, and venture their eternity upon it. It is the knowledge of these spiritual things that quickens the dead in trespasses and sins. It brings them into a state of holy fellowship with the Saviour, with whom all who believe are raised and made partakers of a new life. Now, the sinner can allow his conscience to depict the true character of his heart and his sinful ways—he can admit, without palliation, all that it can say of the number and aggravations of his crimes; because, however heavy and odious its charges may be, the resurrection and glory of Christ, as by public adjudication, set before him a righteousness already perfectly finished, and honou-  
c 3

bly rewarded. In the Divine testimony concerning his work and elevation is concentrated the very essence of "the word of reconciliation." Here every perplexing question as to the ground of acceptance is answered in a way which at once gives rest to the trembling conscience, and produces godly sorrow and deep contrition.

The contemplation of the Divine character, as thus manifested in the glory of Christ, has the most powerful influence in sanctifying the soul. When we think of the principles, the qualities, and the deeds, which adorned the character of our Lord when suffering for sin, and view the Divine delight in them, displayed in his exaltation, we see what that character is, which calls forth the approbation of Heaven and conformity to which is essential to happiness. While we find peace in the blood of the cross, we are attracted towards God, and our affections captivated by the excellencies unfolded in the means of our deliverance. Thus the corruption of the heart receives a mortal stroke—we are delivered from worldly lusts—the mind is elevated above every grovelling and ensnaring attachment—and the character is made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.

Such is the influence of the gospel of peace. Having found mercy through faith in the blood of Christ, the love of God is implanted, a filial dread of his displeasure is felt, and an ardent desire of deliverance from sin, and of the Divine approbation, is produced. We are thus led to inquire, What shall I render to the Lord for his manifold blessings? how shall I ex-

press my gratitude, and give vent to my love, and become the object of the complacency of my God and Father? In answer to such inquiries we are directed to the wonderful excellencies of the character of *Christ*, and are taught that *such* are the principles, dispositions, and deportment in which God delights; and in proof of which we are referred to the exaltation and the grandeur of the Redeemer as the reward of his work \*. This leads our mind to heaven, and to the glory of the Saviour there; and excites us to study conformity to his spirit and behaviour, as the great pattern of all that is excellent. There is every thing in this high example to call forth our devoutest affection and constant imitation. *Who* is he whose character has thus been honoured of God, and in whom he rests with such delightful satisfaction? Is he not our *own* Friend, Deliverer, and Brother? *What* called forth the qualities and excellencies thus applauded of heaven? what exercised them? what brightened and increased their positive glory? Was it not his sufferings *for us*? What *are* the principles thus gloriously rewarded? Are they not the principles which moved him to undertake *our* cause, and to continue his career of free, generous, and disinterested love in *our behalf*, till he could say, "It is finished?" Must we not seek them in that union of mercy and truth, of righteousness and peace, which is displayed in his whole character, and which is the glory of his salvation? Yes, we see them in that love to

---

\* Phil ii. 5-13.

God and zeal for his glory, which moved him to the firm determination, that rather than our redemption should be at the expence of the Divine justice, he would bare his breast to the sword of Heaven, and encounter all its terrors. We see them in that love to men which moved him to veil his glory, to stoop to shame, wretchedness, and death, that he might redeem the guilty and unworthy from merited misery and wrath—We see them in his profound veneration for justice and integrity, united with the most tender compassion for sinners, and unbounded goodness towards them—We see them in his meek resignation to the will of God, his cheerful submission to his appointments, and his patient endurance of all that the Judge saw meet to inflict, united with unquenchable love and zeal, continually burning in the cause of the lost and the unworthy children of men—In a word, we see them in the collected and wonderful excellencies which shone in their highest glory, when, in his obedience unto death, he displayed the character of God as at once just and merciful in perfection. Surely, then, excellencies which were manifested in our *own behalf*, and for our eternal deliverance from evil, and our everlasting enjoyment of all good, must command our gratitude and admiration. The sight of that glory which marks the ineffable delight of the Father in *these* principles must convince us of the strength of his *own* love toward us, and of the exceeding riches of his grace.

The consideration of the design of the Redeemer's glory is calculated to produce the same result. Has



he been raised from the dead? It is as the first fruits of them that slept; so that his resurrection is the pledge of ours. If we think of his glorified body, we know that it is the pattern after which these vile bodies shall one day be fashioned. If we follow him in his ascent to heaven, and hear the call to admit him as "the Lord, mighty in battle," we see him as the Conqueror of *our* foes, and as the Captain of our salvation. If we view him as the High Priest entering within the veil, we know that he entered as our forerunner, and that he there offered himself, and completed his expiatory work in our behalf. If we look to him when seated as a priest upon his throne, we remember that he hath "made us kings and priests unto God even his Father;" that he is there as the builder of the temple of the Lord, and that as such he will bear the glory; that he still intercedes for us; and that he is ever employed in watching over *our* interests, and securing *our* safety and *our* bliss. If we look to him as Lord of all worlds, we know that all things are overruled for our good. If we dwell upon his blessedness, we see it arising from the enjoyment of the delightful complacency of Jehovah in his work for us; and from beholding the blessed fruits of it in our redemption and our blessedness. If we think of his second coming and his glory then to be revealed, we remember that he comes to complete our salvation, and to consummate our happiness.

What an attraction is there in the glory of our Head to draw the heart to heaven! How sweet and satisfying to look into the holiest of all, and there to

contemplate his majesty and his goodness—the grandeur of his presence, and the beauties of his character, together with his official ministrations, and the constant and rich communications of his grace! How soothing and animating to behold the countless hosts of the redeemed receiving the liberal diffusions of his unrestrained bounty, drinking at the fountain-head of all blessedness, and as so many mirrors reflecting the lustre of his glorious excellencies! To see his saints around him, sparkling forth their borrowed glory to his eternal praise, must inflame the heart with love the most ardent, and fill it with bliss the most sublime and transporting. The hope of this glory must purify the soul; for it is the hope of seeing the Redeemer as he is, and of being completely like to him. It is the hope of participating in those pure and spiritual pleasures which are at the right hand of God, and in that fulness of Divine joy which is in his high presence; and it is the hope of uniting with the heavenly High Priest, and all the heavenly family, in the exalted and hallowed exercises of the heavenly temple. This is not the hope of contemplating mere abstract excellence, but of beholding and enjoying glory most interesting to ourselves. Hence Christians are exhorted, as persons risen with Christ, to seek the things which are in heaven, and to set their affections on the glorious objects which are exhibited where he sitteth on the right hand of the Majesty on high. That superiority to the world which is essential to genuine religion springs from faith in the glory of Him who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and



incorruption to light by the gospel. Shall we have such a Head and Representative, seated on such a throne, and engaged in such ministrations for us; and shall we not set our affections on that world

“ Where our best friend and brethren dwell,  
Where God our Saviour reigns.”

This great object of hope is the source of consolation and support amidst the many and heavy afflictions of life. In the day of adversity the ancient worthies, and the apostles of Christ, comforted themselves by remembering, that he who raised up, and glorified the Saviour, would also raise up and glorify them. The resurrection of Christ hath begotten us to the lively hope of an inheritance beyond the grave; and this animates with joy unutterable and full of glory, even in the midst of manifold trials. When we look within the veil, how poor, insignificant, and unsatisfactory, do the enjoyments of time appear! how slight and inconsiderable do we feel our troubles when we look to the things which are unseen and eternal! Every successive view of these realities delights, elevates, and purifies the spirit. The heart, while it dwells on them, is overcome by a sense of their grandeur, and satisfied by the conviction of their unspeakable worth. The mind is thus calmed. Meek resignation, and patient submission to the chastening hand of the Father of mercies are cherished, in the full confidence that all is in love, and that the light and momentary afflictions of this state are working out a far more exceeding and an eternal weight of glory.

These considerations alleviate our grief when bereaved of Christian relatives and friends. In such circumstances we are reminded, that, as Jesus died and rose again, so they who sleep in him shall God bring with him—that the Lord shall come from heaven; shall redeem his people from the grave, and take them to be for ever with himself. The Christian is enabled to look forward to the day of Christ as that on which his re-union with his departed friends shall be completed, never more to be dissolved. He is thus enabled to anticipate his own dissolution with peace, and hope, and joy. Looking to him who hath died and risen again, he rejoices that he hath overcome death, and that thus it is now a messenger of peace. Jesus died and rose again that his people might be able to say, “All things are ours, whether life or death;” so that “neither death nor life, things present nor things to come, shall ever separate from the love of Christ, or from the love of God manifested through him.” Contemplating the Redeemer, we anticipate the resurrection-morn, when, standing on the brink of the grave, from which we have just been delivered, we shall exclaim with triumphant rapture, “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; the strength of sin is the law, but thanks be to God who hath given us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Then, my dear friend, our sun shall no more go down, neither shall our moon withdraw itself; for the Lord shall be our everlasting light, and the days of our mourning shall be ended.

I am, &c.

## LETTER III.

### ON THE INVITATIONS AND PROMISES OF THE GOSPEL.

The importance of understanding the invitations and promises of the Gospel—The former addressed to men considered as sinners, the latter respect them as believers. Self-examination not designed to find a warrant to go to Christ. This illustrated by a reference to the manna, the cities of refuge, and the brazen serpent. The happy effects of the knowledge of the truth. The study of the character of Christ necessary to our sanctification. The great object of faith should be steadily contemplated. General reflections.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

It is of great importance to understand the invitations and promises of the Gospel, in order to our perceiving that it is the only source of relief and comfort to a guilty creature. The message of reconciliation finds us in a state of condemnation and sin. In this state its blessed light rises upon us, and, shining forth in all its glory, reveals the righteousness and salvation of Christ as at hand. It invites the guilty to come to the Saviour, and promises the many and precious blessings of redemption to every sinner who believes the testimony of heaven respecting his atonement. Those who are invited are not a particular class of persons, distinguished by certain excellencies or qualifications, but all mankind. They are described only by those necessitous and wretched circumstances which are common to men. The "weary and the heavy laden," "the hungry and the thirsty," are sinners considered simply as miserable and as longing for happiness. They are addressed, not as sensible sinners, or as hungering and thirsting after Christ and

spiritual blessings, but as “ spending their money for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not.” To such, in all their guilt, are the invitations of the Gospel given, and the promises of mercy and eternal life are made to them, considered *as coming* to the Saviour.

The invitations of the Gospel are addressed to all—the promises respect believers only. There is a sense, indeed, in which the promises also are addressed to sinners. They are invited to come to Christ, and are promised rest if they comply with his gracious call. The feast of love is prepared, and all are intreated to partake of it. But it is only by coming to the Redeemer that the mercies of the everlasting covenant can be actually enjoyed, and it is on this supposition, or as believing the Gospel, and so turning to God, that they are promised them. When promises are made to the guilty, while “ far from righteousness,” the design is not to comfort them while continuing in unbelief and impenitence, but to exhibit the cause, or spring, of salvation, even the free love of God, and to encourage them to come instantly to the Saviour. Such passages of Scripture show, that no complicated process is to be gone through in order to our acceptance; that no holy preparation is requisite; and that no perplexing course of discipline is required, that we may be qualified for an interest in the righteousness and salvation of Christ. They show, that, on believing the Gospel, the sinner has access into a state of favour with God, and enjoys the blessing of peace with him through resting his hopes on the atonement of Jesus.



On the other hand, my dear friend, when promises are made to particular characters ; as when the vision of God is promised to " the pure in heart," and the inheritance of the heavenly land " to the meek," the design is to point out the state of mind necessary to the actual enjoyment of the blessings. This state of mind is not mentioned as the ground or meritorious cause why the blessings in question are bestowed, but as essential to our being meet for deriving happiness from them, and so to their being blessings to us. No sinner has a warrant to consider himself possessed of the blessings exhibited in any promise, which teaches either the cause of salvation or the character of the saved, unless he has believed the Gospel. The mercies of the new covenant are proposed to all, but only believers embrace them. Hence, promises that respect character are of the first moment even to the ungodly, as they teach them that a change of mind, as well as a change of state, is necessary to happiness—that the happiness which can satisfy the heart is to be had only in the favour and fellowship of God ; and that the Saviour alone can communicate that blessedness which meets their necessities, and can gratify the cravings of their restless and unhappy spirits.

While such promises are to be viewed in this light, they ought also to be taken in connection with the other promises of Scripture, in which is exhibited the spring of redemption. The latter have been called absolute promises. If by this is meant that, not for anything in us, but exclusively for the sake of Christ



we are blessed, then, all promises are in this sense absolute. When they are made to particular characters it is not on account of any goodness in them, but for the sake of him through whom all of them are "yea and amen." On viewing these two kinds of promises, along with the free invitations of the Gospel, it will be seen, that the first genuine comfort of a Christian is obtained by believing in the work of Christ, and not from any thing in himself. It will be found also, that all classes of sinners have the same warrant to go to the Redeemer *to receive* the blessings of redemption that Christians have *to enjoy* them. It will be no less evident, that it is by going as we are to the Saviour that we are changed in mind, and so become possessed of those holy principles and dispositions, which capacitate us for the actual enjoyment of the blessings of mercy; so, that while the necessity of a change of mind is taught, the way in which it is effected is clearly exhibited. I need not remind you, that there is a wide difference between a warrant to take and possess the blessings of salvation, and the actual enjoyment of them. The former rests upon the free invitations and promises of God addressed to the world at large, the latter is the result of embracing them.

The Gospel produces effects in all who believe it corresponding with its nature, and proportioned to the degree in which it is understood and believed. These effects, however, do not constitute our title to the blessings of redemption. If the question is put, "How shall I obtain rest to my guilty soul?" an answer is not to be

sought by self-examination ; as if we had no ground for resting on the work of Christ for pardon and acceptance, unless through the medium of some good thing in ourselves. We must seek an answer to this question in the Gospel itself, and by looking from ourselves to that which is without us, even to the perfect sacrifice of the Son of God.

The power of genuine religion consists in the Gospel dwelling in the heart, and moulding the whole man by its divine energy into a glorious conformity to its spirit. Scriptural evidences of faith are never properly employed, then, except when they are used to ascertain whether we are indeed living by faith in the work of Christ, and deriving our peace exclusively from it.

It is undoubtedly of the first importance to examine ourselves to ascertain whether we are advancing or declining in true religion, and to discover and correct what may be amiss in our spirit and conduct. The knowledge thus obtained of our character and wants, will be the means of exciting us to cleave more closely to the cross of Christ, and to look more fervently to him for the blessings of his grace. There is also an unspeakable pleasure in perceiving, from evident effects of a holy and spiritual kind, that the truth really dwells in us. This is a proof ever growing, that the Gospel is the medicine which cures of the disease of sin, and imparts the blessing of spiritual health. It will tend greatly to confirm our faith, while it will gratify the sacred desires of the heart, and excite much gratitude and thanksgiving to God. On seeing the advancement

of our cure we shall the more prize his goodness. But we ought not to examine ourselves to ascertain whether the Gospel is addressed to us, and whether we are warranted to expect the blessings of salvation on coming to the Saviour. These blessings are proclaimed as the free gift of God to all who believe, independently of the previous state of their mind, however ungodly and wicked it may have been.

The true evidence of an actual interest in these blessings is seen in our believing the full and free declarations of the Gospel to the chief of sinners. It is only, then, in so far as our spirit and actions flow from this faith that they prove our relation to God; so that our relief and comfort, under a sense of guilt and unworthiness, must ever spring from the message of mercy addressed to all indiscriminately\*.

---

\* In reference to this subject I shall quote a passage from the memoir of the excellent Mr Henry Martyn. Speaking of a particular affliction, the writer says, "His illness was of some continuance, and in it he was assaulted by a temptation more dangerous than uncommon—a temptation to look to himself for some qualification with which to approach the Saviour—for something to warrant his confidence in him, and hope of acceptance from him. Searching for evidences for the purpose of ascertaining *whether we are in Christ* widely differs from searching for them to warrant a *boldness of access through Christ*: for this we require no evidence, but need only the passport of faith and our own wretchedness, and, as it is the design of our great adversary (such is his subtilty) to lead us to deny the evidences of faith altogether, so it is his purpose to betray us into a mistaken use of them. We find Mr Martyn at this time expressing himself thus:—"I could derive no comfort from reflecting on my past life. Indeed, exactly in proportion as I looked for evidences of grace, I lost that brokenness of spirit I wished to retain, and could not lie with simplicity at the foot of the cross. I really thought that I was departing this life. I began to pray as on the verge of eternity, and the Lord was pleased to break my hard heart."—*Memoir of Mr Henry Martyn*, page 185.

Allow me to remind you, that, as we never can experience or see the effects of faith till we believe, it must be preposterous to look for them previously to believing. On the same principle it must be vain to look for them if we are not *continuing* in the faith of the Gospel, or to expect that they will go beyond the measure of our faith in it. Seek, then, a firm and an abiding persuasion of its truth and of its glory. It is not the certainty or the excellence of things considered in themselves, but our *persuasion* of their reality and value that affects us. Look up, then, for the Holy Spirit, that he may lead you into all the truth.

Forget not, my dear friend, that the effects of faith do not form the ground of access to God. I shall endeavour to illustrate this by a few examples. Every one, you know, in the camp of Israel had the same warrant to go out in the morning to gather the promised manna, and to bring it home for his own use. When he had gathered it and eaten, his hunger was satisfied. This was, no doubt, a greater degree of enjoyment than that which he experienced when he barely remembered the promise of the manna, and his consequent warrant to expect it on his going for it. But no one can for a moment imagine, that he could suppose that his appetite for the manna entitled him to go forth in the confidence of obtaining it, or that his enjoyment in partaking of it, and the vigour he acquired by it, constituted his right to it. He must have known that it was the gift of God to him, which was confirmed by the miraculous way in which it was provided. In other cases the means employed



by the God of Providence often lead the heart from himself: but in this case no visible means were used, so that the direct agency of God was set before the mind. The sensation of hunger led the Israelite to go for the manna, but was not his warrant to expect it; this consisted solely in the promise of God, and the accompanying call to go in search of it. In like manner, a sense of want and of danger leads a sinner to the Saviour, but is not his warrant for expecting relief. It excites him to go to Christ for deliverance and eternal life, but is not his title to any blessing. And as the enjoyment and the vigour which flowed from eating the manna did not form the title of an Israelite to it, so, in like manner, the spiritual health and vigour which are connected with the faith of the Gospel by no means constitute the title of Christians to the blessings of redemption. When a sinner believes in Christ he is more happy than when he barely heard that salvation was promised to all who come to him; but this does not arise from seeing, in the effects of his coming to him, a title to the blessings of the Gospel. He sees his title to these blessings in the declarations of God, founded on the work of his Son, and he draws his comfort from the character and the cross of Christ. He does not draw his consolation under a sense of guilt *from* his obedience, as if it were the source of his joy, but, taking it from the work of the Saviour, he finds happiness *in* his obedience as an expression of gratitude to his deliverer—of love to his excellencies as unfolded in the mode of his deliverance—of his desire to resemble that worth



which he loves and admires—and of his delight in all that is spiritual and holy. In his devotions he is blessed with the enjoyment of fellowship with him whose favour is life—in whose presence, and in conformity to whose character, there is pure and satisfying joy. Thus every act of obedience has some comfort attending it, and holiness and happiness are found to be inseparable.

I might illustrate the same truth by the case of the manslayer who fled to the city of refuge. Every such character had a warrant to flee to such a city in the confidence of there being safe, and this would be a comfort to him when he felt himself in danger. His sense of danger was necessary to induce him to flee, but was not a ground of confidence, nor was it a title to safety. Nor could the sense of security which he felt on entering the place of refuge, or his gratitude for the provision made for it, ever be viewed by him as entitling him to his preservation. Mere distress of mind, then, can be no ground of hope to a sinner any more than the sense of danger in the manslayer could secure him while without the place of refuge. Neither can the gratitude of a Christian, for his deliverance, be considered by him as the ground of his interest in the blessings of mercy.

Similar observations may be made on the history of the brazen serpent. Every one who had been bitten with the fiery serpents had the reason to expect a complete cure on his looking to the serpent of brass. The belief of this would comfort the mind, when pained, in consequence of being stung. The comfort, how-

ever, of the diseased Israelite would be exceedingly increased when, on looking to the brazen serpent, he found himself cured. But his cure could never be viewed by him as his title to look to the serpent *for* the cure, as it behoved him to look to it *before* he could be cured. His disorder could not otherwise be even lessened, and foolish and impious had it been to attempt a cure in some other way before looking as commanded. The health which followed his looking would be a cause of joy; would make him bless God for the provision made for his recovery, and would show that he had not mistaken the Divine order; but never would he suppose that the blessing was the title to itself.

In like manner, when a sinner, encouraged by the general invitations and declarations of the Gospel, first looks to the Saviour, he finds rest to his soul in that which is exhibited to all, and, at the same time, he finds a cure. The character of God, as revealed in the Gospel, deeply affects him. Contemplating his rich grace and mercy, as manifested in the cross of Christ, his heart is warmed toward the Father of all goodness, and is loosened from sin. That love, which is the health of the soul, is kindled and kept alive by intense and constant admiration of the Divine glory shining in the face of the Redeemer. Conscious that the one perfect sacrifice of Christ, and the Divine promise of eternal life through it, are his whole relief, he is captivated by the moral and spiritual glories discovered in his plan of salvation. His spiritual cure is thus begun, and it advances as he

lives by faith in the Saviour. This, however, he never can consider as constituting his title to the blessings of redemption. In fact, it is *itself* the great blessing of the everlasting covenant, and without it no one of them can be properly enjoyed. It is not a mere appendage to salvation—it is the very thing. The confidence inspired by it is like that of a man who has found, by experience, that a particular medicine has a salutary effect upon him, and so is led to confide the more in the physician who prescribed it, and the more confidently and assiduously to use it. On every return of his disorder such a man will have recourse to the remedy, the happy effects of which he had formerly experienced. A healed Israelite, when stung a second time, would again have recourse to the mode of cure prescribed by heaven, and, on looking afresh to the brazen serpent, would find health and relief. In like manner, when, by our departure from God, and from the word of his grace, we are involved in darkness and distress of mind—when, under a sense of guilt and folly, we are filled with shame and confusion—when sin has reared its head and our evil principles have gained the ascendancy, we ought instantly to go, as at first, to the cross of Christ, and there seek, not only forgiveness, but a cure for his sake. The neglect of the Scriptural doctrine, respecting the general invitations of the Gospel, has caused much perplexity to Christians, when roused from a state of declension to a sense of their guilt and their danger. Often has it kept them

from instantly employing the proper means of recovery. —

When the real foundation of the Christian's joy and confidence in the sight of God is examined, it will be found, that all who are the friends of the Saviour adopt the language of the apostle of the Gentiles, when he expressed himself with proper warmth on the subject: "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." It is by this cross that they are raised above the world and assimilated to the spirit of heaven. Our faith waxes stronger as we contemplate this wonderful and transforming object. Love is thus cherished, and we become more, and more, like to the God of all goodness. The habitual exercise of this principle casts out slavish and tormenting fear. When we love and delight in God as the God of salvation, through the honourable medium of the work of Christ—when we rejoice, not only in our relief from woe, but that it is obtained in a way so worthy of the exalted Jehovah—and when all that is like to him engages our complacency; we cannot but feel that this is the very temper of heaven itself, and are fully satisfied that we have not misapprehended the Divine testimony. Finding our minds to be conformed to the character and will of God, we rejoice in him as our Father. We seek not into the inscrutable secrets of eternity, but rest assured of his love by what we even here know of his goodness. We cannot suppose that we shall be kept in the other world from loving God, in whom we find all our happiness in this. On the contrary, experienc-



ing here, that our bliss arises from contemplating and enjoying God, and from holy intercourse with him and with his people; we rest assured that, as death will make no change in the habits of the spirit, the same must be our employment and our bliss in the world of light and of love. Heaven is more a state, and a certain character, than a place, though, no doubt, it is a place; and the same may be said of hell. Whoever, then, is possessed of a heavenly state and character of mind, has heaven begun already, and is meet for the full enjoyment of it in the other world.

Permit me, then, to recommend to you to study the work and character of the Saviour as a manifestation of the character of God. Look to his cross, and to the principles and aims which animated him there, that you may be induced to rest on him amidst all your cares, and thus possess that peace which passeth all understanding. In this way it is, that gratitude and love, esteem and admiration, are most effectually cherished, and that the purest and most exquisite delight is made to flow into the mind. In the contemplation of that commanding display of excellence which calls forth the high approbation of heaven, the heart is transformed into its likeness, and the sweetest tranquillity and comfort are abundantly enjoyed.

You will perceive, my dear friend, that my great design in this letter is, to show how free the promises and invitations of the Gospel are; and how fitted faith, in the atonement is, to yield peace and consolation to the soul, when distressed with a sense of guilt and the dread of the Divine displeasure. I dwell on this,



because I know, from experience, its importance, and that many difficulties are felt by an awakened mind in committing itself to the free mercy of God, as displayed in the Gospel. Here, in opposition to all self-righteous plans of seeking peace with God, it is declared, that the atonement of the Saviour is that for the sake of which he forgives the ungodly.—It is testified that, through faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ, the guilty sinner is accepted. This is the sum of the Gospel, and on this the Scriptures dwell as the great truth to be believed.

To the Saviour, as thus revealed, they call upon all to come. Do not then perplex yourself with questions about the manner of believing, but consider what it is you are called to believe. Instead of disquieting yourself about the *manner* of coming to Christ, think on him who invites you to come to him—think of his atonement and the love there displayed—think on the many proofs which have been given of his sacrifice, in his resurrection and glory, and in the many promises of salvation through faith in him. You know that you are no farther conscious of seeing an object than as it affects you; and, in like manner, you are not conscious of believing any declaration made to you any further than as what you believe impresses you. In the former case you are not, when looking at some interesting object, thinking of the manner of your seeing it, but of the thing seen; and, in the latter, you are not thinking of the manner of believing the declaration credited by you, but of the thing credited. In like manner, in believing the Gos-

pel the mind is occupied with the thing believed, and not with the manner of believing it. We cannot dwell on thoughts of the mode in which we see an object without forgetting, in a measure, the object itself; and so, if we are engrossed with questions respecting the right mode of believing, the great truth to be believed is lost sight of, and, being so, it cannot affect us. Of course there is no wonder that then we cease to derive peace, comfort, or purity from it. The mind is conscious of believing the Gospel just in proportion to the degree of its faith, or, in other words, in proportion to the measure in which it is affected by the truth. The great thing, then, is to keep the soul fixed upon the object of belief.

Study the Scriptures, my dear friend, and particularly such passages as state most clearly the way of acceptance with God in connection with the salutary influence of the truth upon the heart. Do this with a devout mind, looking up to him who can guide into all his truth in its genuine simplicity and glory. If, in examining yourself, you see much that is sinful, the remedy is not to be found in poring, with heartless despondency, upon your disorder, or in attempting, by resolutions formed in your own strength, to subdue your sins; but in an instant application to the great Physician. "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." The stream of godly sorrow may flow in union with peace and joy through believing. Nothing can so melt the heart and conquer sin as a view of the pardoning mercy of him who

loved us while in guilt and wretchedness, and who still bears with us and pities us. Having much forgiven, we love much; as did one of old, who washed the Redeemer's feet with her tears, while she thought of the magnitude of the debt which had been frankly forgiven her.

Suffer me to recommend to you these hints. I trust that, whatever difficulties may be felt in committing yourself to the promises of God, according to his gracious invitations in the Gospel, they will vanish before the word of him who is a meek and lowly teacher, and whose compassions never fail. May you enjoy the unspeakable happiness which the atonement and the character of the Saviour are calculated to impart. Few, even of Christians, enjoy what might be experienced. This should lead each to wait simply upon God—to commit all his concerns into his hands—and to cast upon him all that interests him, in the warranted confidence that he is willing and able to keep that which is committed to him. Proper attention to the invitations and promises of the Gospel, will be found of the utmost advantage here. In the hours of darkness and fear, look away from yourself to that which is without you; even the immutable and finished work of the exalted Redeemer. Dwell on the precious calls and entreaties addressed to the guilty and unworthy; and look to the faithful promises which secure the acceptance of every one who, fleeing for refuge to the blood of Christ, rests his hope of mercy entirely upon it. Such parts of Scripture are addressed to every individual as particularly as

though no one else were on earth; and they are designed to encourage every sinner to come to the Saviour, just as he is, in the full confidence of a welcome and gracious reception.

I have witnessed, with pleasure, the influence of these views on the bed of death. I have seen the mind of a Christian, amidst the weakness and the pain of a diseased frame, dwell with rapture, and speak with fluency, on the blissful freeness of the many invitations to sinners to come, as they now are, to the Redeemer. This has been uttered with an interest and an animation indescribable. The finished and unchangeable work of the Saviour has been constantly referred to; and, in speaking of it, the mind has risen above itself, the languid countenance has been brightened, and the whole appearance has expressed comfort and joy. Such a scene is truly edifying and refreshing. It affords a striking view of the true glory of the Gospel; and makes us witnesses of its power and of its suitableness to the nature, the wants, and the lot of man. Such reliance on the pure mercy and grace of God, where true religion had long dwelt, and had been manifested in no small degree, is fitted to show that, from first to last, the cross of Christ is that in which Christians glory, to the exclusion of every other ground of confidence, in the prospect of death, judgment, and eternity. I am, &c.



## LETTER IV.

## ON THE DESIGN OF OUR LORD'S MISSION.

"The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek ; he hath sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound :—To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God ; to comfort all that mourn.—To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness ; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified."—Isaiah lxi. 1—3.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

WITH a view to the illustration of the freeness of Divine grace and of the consolatory nature of the Gospel, I shall now direct your attention to the interesting passage in the book of Isaiah which was read and expounded by our Lord in the synagogue of Nazareth. He applied it to himself as the Great Prophet, and taught, that it contained the sum of what he was commissioned to announce as the Apostle of our profession. It consists, you will observe, of two great parts ; the first of which respects the blessings he was to publish to the world at large, and, the second, the consolation and the joy he was to impart to his people. The sorrow referred to in the first part is not to be understood of godly sorrow in particular, but of sorrow and misery in general, as the unhappy lot of mankind in consequence of guilt. The wretchedness he there describes is that of those who are in a state



of condemnation, and under the enslaving dominion of sin. In a word, the first part is a statement of the Gospel, as addressed to the guilty and depraved; the seconds refers to the sorrow which is characteristic of the children of God, and is designed to exhibit their happiness under all tribulations.

The Saviour declares, with evident satisfaction, that the spirit of God had been imparted to him to separate him to the prophetic office, and to qualify him for it. As a prophet he instructs men in the nature of his other offices, and hence, by what he announced in that capacity, we are led to the whole of his mediatorial character. In a formal discussion, his offices must be distinguished; but they are in many respects involved in each other. Suffice it to remark at present, that it is from his instructions, as the messenger of the new covenant, that we learn the nature and the glory of all his official functions.

He announces to us that he is sent to preach good tidings to the meek. This is a general statement of the design of his mission.—The particulars of the good tidings are afterwards mentioned. In the quotation of the passage by Luke the word poor is used for the word meek. The term often signifies, not only the disposition of meekness, but affliction, poverty, and distress, which try it, and give occasion for its exercise. In this sense it must be understood here; for surely the Gospel is not preached exclusively to the meek. The message of reconciliation is that which, by the blessing of God, implants this gracious principle, and, of course, it must be previously preach-

ed to those who are destitute of it. I speak not, you will observe, of constitutional gentleness, but of that meekness which springs from faith in the Gospel. The meaning here is, that the Messiah was sent to preach to the wretched, the afflicted, and the unhappy, of every class and character. Surveying all the complicated woes which abound in this sinful world; the Redeemer exclaims, with godlike benevolence, that he is sent with a message, which meets every case of distress, and is able to relieve in the most deplorable calamities.

The first mentioned blessing is a cure for the broken hearted. This broken heart is not that in particular which distinguishes the humble and contrite in spirit. He here speaks of the unhappy in general, of whatever kind their troubles may be, and from whatever quarter they may spring.

When we look around us, in how many ways do we see vexations and troubles assaulting and preying upon mankind? Some there are whose hearts are the seat of deep and painful distress, while there is hardly any visible cause of uneasiness. Others have found their circumstances, families, or friends to be inlets to sorrow of the most trying nature. Here, some are wretched beyond expression, in consequence of relations and connexions rashly formed; and there, others are deploring their bitter disappointment after much caution and care. On the one hand, you see neglect, contention, and cruelty; and, on the other, you behold chagrin, vexation, and settled melancholy. One deplores the loss of some darling object, or the

failure of some apparently well concerted plan; and another is overwhelmed by the dread, well or ill founded, of invincible obstacles in the way of his pursuits. The wishes of the heart are often thwarted, the hopes of the mind blasted, and vanity inscribed on the best concerted and promising of human speculations.

Multitudes who seem to possess all that the heart can wish, feel that there is no real enjoyment in the things of this world. Not knowing, however, of any better portion, they continue their vain pursuits. They are weary of life, and yet are afraid of death. Not seldom do they envy the irrational creation, and pine away in secret, under a load of the most unhappy reflections. Though unable altogether to conceal their emotions, they are kept by the circumstances in which they are placed, and by a regard to appearances, from publishing their internal wretchedness.

There are others who, unable to restrain themselves, become quite ungovernable, and give vent to their inward misery and restlessness in the worst of passions, of words, and outrages against all who come in their way, and particularly such as are under them. Often do the sufferings, which arise from the instrumentality of fellow creatures, lead the heart from God, and swell the mind against the immediate occasion of distress. Not seldom do those who suffer from the immediate hand of heaven give vent to their uneasiness in murmurings and repinings against Providence. It is painful in the extreme when such, on being told of the remedy provided in the Gospel, spurn it from

them, and seem determined to remain wretched rather than yield to its influence.

Allow me here to refer you to some other causes of distress. Not a few suffer under a fearful apprehension of the wrath of God against sin, and yet shut their eyes to the truth, and refuse that blessed relief which it proclaims. They sorrow, not because they have sinned against heaven, but because of the bitter consequences they have begun to reap, and the far greater evils which they dread to be in store for them. At times, however, some do feel the baseness of sin. It is strange that such should repel the gospel of peace. But many are the contradictions that meet in the mind of man when unsubdued by the grace of God. What struggles are often maintained between prevailing passions and unwelcome convictions!

Many are pining away under a sense of guilt and of danger who are altogether ignorant of the Gospel. They feel that they are wrong, but have never once heard a scriptural statement of the truth; of these there are not a few even in this land of light. Some, having been trained in seeking to establish their self-righteous methods of justification, and having found that sin, instead of being subdued, has gained vigour, are broken in heart, not because of the evil of their transgressions, but because their self-righteous hopes are buried in the dust. L

Time would fail me were I to attempt to count all the kinds of sorrow which obtain in this state. Suffice it to say, that every day manifests that "the sorrow of the world worketh death." Our own obser-



vation may satisfy us of this. Scarcely can we mingle in society, or look to a public print, without being informed, that this and the other one has died of a broken heart; or that some individual is pining away under one or other of the many disappointments and calamities which afflict this scene. Often do we hear the exclamation: "All is vanity and vexation of spirit." Little, however, can *we* know of the multiplied sorrows of the world. What a spectacle must they present to the Omniscient God!

But how delightful to know that, whatever it be, which has wounded the heart and threatens to break it, there is that in the Gospel which can completely heal it. Here there is a balm for every wound, a cure for every malady. The Redeemer hath come to bind up every broken heart. Should its sorrow proceed from the same source as did that of the proud and politic, but the mortified and disappointed, Ahithophel—Should it spring from the same haughty, yet mean, spirit that characterized Ahab; when, because he was denied the inheritance of Naboth, he fell sick, became sullen and dejected—Should it be the fruit of the same temper which reigned in the wretched Saul, when he endeavoured to thwart the Divine purposes as to the kingdom; when he said he was "exceedingly distressed;" when, in anguish of mind, he consulted with a familiar spirit; and when, in hopeless despondency, he rushed upon death—Should it be the wounded pride and mortified ambition of a Haman. In a word—Should it proceed, not only from the events of life, but from the very worst and most hateful prin-



ciples, still, even in such a case, is the Gospel of Christ sounded in the ears of the broken in heart; and still does it invite them freely to that which can completely cure them. How suited, then, is the message of reconciliation to the state of this sinful world, and how fitted to illustrate the loving kindness of the Saviour!

The next blessing which Christ announces to the world is that of liberty to captives. I need not inform you that men are considered as captives, because in a state of condemnation. The curse is denounced against every transgression of the law of God, and, from this sentence, no deliverance can be obtained by any work of the sinner, or by any unprincipled compromise. He who has him in his power is the Almighty and righteous God.—Dreadful must be the state of those who are under the curse of him, in whom they live, and move, and have their being. Must it not, then, be a blessing, great beyond conception, to be delivered from a condition so deplorable. When we were in this state Christ came into the world that he might obtain for us the forgiveness of our sins, and restoration to the favour of God.

But men are captives inasmuch as they are under the dominion of sin: “Whosoever committeth sin is the slave of sin.” Though they boast of liberty they are the slaves of corruption. How often are men impelled, by their evil inclinations, to follow courses which they themselves condemn. Frequently they do what they *know* they shall repent of. In their sober moments, they not seldom bewail their folly, and

resolve not to repeat it, but no sooner are they met by temptation than they fall its victims. You must have often seen that which was reprobated in others, done by the very parties themselves who were loudest in their condemnation. I speak not of mere pretenders, but of persons who really did, in a measure, see the evil in question. Even when reason remonstrates, and conscience reproves, do men eagerly gratify their sinful propensities. Say, then, are they not truly slaves?

In connection with this I would remind you, that they are also the captives of Satan. He works upon, and, by means of their evil principles, he instils into, their minds all kinds of ungodliness; and, through the medium of the imagination, gains, by means of sensible objects, access to their hearts. To him they are willingly subject. They are his dupes; for, by his influence, their understanding is blinded, and their evil propensities so called forth and excited, as to increase the misery of their bondage.

From this state of slavery Christ came to redeem us. He saw our wretchedness as sinners, and he appeared on earth that he might "turn us away from our iniquities." In no other way can we be made happy. To the man who feels his weakness, and is aware of the power of sin on his mind, and its utter incompatibility with happiness, it must be delightful to learn, that to free from this, and to conform us to the character of God, was the Saviour revealed.

Relief to the oppressed is the next blessing announced by the Saviour. In the Gospel of Luke this

is expressed by opening "the eyes of the blind, and setting at liberty those who are bruised;" which is explanatory of the language of the prophet,—that the Messiah is sent "to open the prison to them who are bound." The allusion, you know, is to the barbarous practice of confining prisoners in horrible dungeons, putting out their eyes, and bruising their limbs with heavy fetters; of which practice the case of Sampson is an illustration. The general idea is that of relief, from the debasement and wretchedness resulting from the power of sin, and of the God of this world. Men are naturally blind to the excellence of the Divine character; to the true nature of sin, of this world, of genuine happiness, and of real glory. They see not the relation in which they stand to their Maker and to eternity; and are ignorant, at once of the way of acceptance with God, and of the means of being conformed to him. Their ignorance, however, is not simple or invincible ignorance; but is a chosen and a beloved darkness. They "love darkness and hate the light, because their deeds are evil." Hostility to the true character of God, and aversion of heart from the holy and humbling truths of the Gospel, must be viewed as the real source of the blindness of man to sacred and eternal things. By means of this darkness the God of this world holds them in subjection. He takes advantage of it to instil error, to stir up their prejudices, and to divert them from the truth.

But, it is to the honour of the Saviour that he reigns over a willing, because an enlightened people. He scorns the blind service of a slave. He begins his

work in the mind by illuminating it. He opens the eyes of the understanding; and, by means of a sound state of mind, which enables to judge, and justly to discriminate, he subdues the prejudices of the heart. He fixes the attention on sacred things, and imparts a taste and relish for the truths of his word. The soul thus bows to his will, and the whole man is subjected to him. Say, then, is not his service reasonable and honourable? The knowledge he imparts gladdens the heart, and delivers from the wretchedness which the slavery of sin cannot fail to inflict; and of which the state of a captive, imprisoned in a dungeon, deprived of his eyes, and bruised with fetters, is but a faint emblem.

The object of the Saviour, then, is to impart happiness. This is the benevolent and gracious purpose of his mission; and, so intent was he on this work of mercy, that, to effect it, he became obedient unto death. Whatever may be the kind or degree of our distress, here is an adequate and suitable remedy. When taught by him, our reason is no more hoodwinked—the strength of the wayward passions is subdued—the clouds of prejudice are dispelled—and the world is stripped of that false and dazzling splendour which blinded and bewildered us by its glare. We learn to give every thing its proper place; and find in God that which nothing else can impart, and of which nothing can deprive us. When first led to the cross, and when the spell which bound us is first broken, we are exceedingly excited. A new world, as it were, opens to us. The light of the Gospel, when it



first beams upon the soul, is as the breaking of the day on the weary and bewildered traveller. In not a few instances, so powerfully has the individual been impressed with the glory of what Calvary discloses, and so satisfied of the vanity of the enchantment which has just been dissolved, that, forgetting for the moment the depravity of man, he has imagined that nothing more was necessary to convince others, than a faithful declaration of that truth, the glory of which now appears self-evident. Pleasant, indeed, it is for the eyes to behold the "sun of righteousness," and to contemplate in his light the glory of God.

Consider now, my dear friend, the gracious intimation that the Redeemer was sent "to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." This has been generally understood as an allusion to the year of Jubilee; when debts were remitted, slaves emancipated, and mortgaged inheritances restored. But, though there be truth in this, it does not comprehend the whole of what our Lord had in view. I need not tell you that, by the day of vengeance *of our God*, must be meant a day distinguished by many tokens of his vengeance; and, on the same principle, the acceptable year *of the Lord* must mean a period distinguished by his acceptance, or satisfaction. The period in question is that in which the Saviour finished his work, and laid the foundation of his kingdom. In this blessed work God rests well pleased. He delighted not in the sacrifices of the law—the fire of justice still burned upon the altar—and victim after victim bled at the sanctuary. But, in the sacrifice of Christ, he sees



that which hath vindicated and displayed his character, and completely secured the salvation of his people. On this, then, he dwells with ineffable complacency, and here, there rests the fulness of his delight. The Redeemer, in the midst of all the sufferings and the shame which he endured, could look up and say, "But in an acceptable time my prayer is unto thee O Lord." This was the period when God said to him "In an acceptable time have I heard thee." Such was the glory of the work then finishing, and such the delight of God in it, that, let him ask what he would, it should be granted.

That love to the world, which moved God to deliver up his Son for its redemption, must have been infinitely gratified in beholding the accomplishment of the Saviour's undertaking. He delighted in the glorious manner in which his sufferings united, and displayed, the excellencies that constitute the very perfection of spiritual loveliness and grandeur. He rejoiced also, in the light which was thus thrown on all his works and dispensations. Creation, providence, and redemption are here united. The two former are made subservient to the latter; being, as it were, the scaffolding to this astonishing structure. On this new creation heaven looked down with infinite satisfaction, and pronounced "all to be good." In this satisfaction the Saviour shared; and, with the most rapturous accents, he gives vent to his feelings, as he proclaims, with an uplifted voice, "this acceptable year of the Lord." The glory that accompanied the acceptance of his work must have eclipsed all that pre-

ceded it. This was, indeed, future, when he read these words in the synagogue; but he knew it was certain, and spoke as one to whom it was present.

Allow me *here* to refer to the Jubilee. It was proclaimed, you know, on the annual day of atonement. Sacrifices for sin and the communication of favours were thus solemnly united. But the proclamation of the Divine acceptance of the sacrifice of Christ, must have been the signal of a greater jubilee to the church and the world. What is it that ensures the remission of our spiritual debts, that causes our deliverance from thralldom and oppression, and obtains for us, not merely the inheritance lost by Adam, but an inheritance in the heavenly country? Is it not the atonement of Christ? What gives us confidence in looking to the Saviour for these blessings? Is it not the Divine delight in his sacrifice? What makes this year, or period, acceptable, or welcome, to the guilty and the wretched? Is it not that it is a period acceptable to God. It is this which gives the mind rest, pacifies the trembling conscience, and fills the heart with joy unutterable and full of glory. We, so to say, take our station at the throne of God and of the Lamb, and drink of the river of the water of life, which flows from this blessed source. Turn your eyes, then, to the heavenly holy place; and anticipate the day when you shall enter it in person, and, in seeing the Saviour, shall be like him at once in bliss and in character.

Many are the difficulties which you may expect in your course; but let me direct you to the declaration

of the Saviour, announcing the "day of vengeance of our God." This, at first sight, appears rather a curse than a blessing; but remember, that the first promise of mercy was couched under the threatening of vengeance on "the serpent and his seed." The cross of Christ was a manifestation at once of "mercy and of judgment." There the powers of darkness were foiled, and there vengeance fell upon *sin*. In every age, indeed, has the deliverance of the church been connected with the overthrow of her enemies. The overthrow of Egypt was the salvation of Israel, as was also the downfall of Babylon. In like manner, the final deliverance of the redeemed is included in the threatenings of the ruin of their enemies, and of all who oppose their Redeemer. The idea intended appears to be this: "However many or great may be the difficulties in the way of obtaining the blessings announced; however numerous and powerful the enemies who may seek to prevent the everlasting possession of them; still, let no one be discouraged; for he who is sent to proclaim them to the world, is sent to overcome all opposition to his gracious mission." He has appeared to overturn every system of error and superstition—to cause iniquity as ashamed to hide its face—to conquer sin, satan, and death; in a word, to make all his enemies his foot-stool. Be not afraid of any foe—Be not dismayed at any affliction, for "the eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath thee are the everlasting arms. He shall thrust out the enemy before thee, and give thee the victory."

This is well calculated to encourage confidence in

the Saviour. Like the pillar of cloud at the Red Sea, it has a bright and a dark side. Viewed, in relation to the obdurate enemies of the Gospel, it exhibits their impotence and their danger—It is fitted to rouse the careless, and to awaken the most hardened—It addresses the fears as well as the hopes of mankind; and is designed to impress them with a sense of their real situation, and to induce them to flee from the impending storm. Viewed, in relation to such as embrace the Gospel, it is a solemn assurance of their complete safety in the midst of all the hostility, and the opposition, which they may have to encounter. In the sight of calamities and dangers the most appalling, it says, “Lift up your heads, for the day of your redemption draweth nigh.”

The Saviour closes this part of his address by declaring that he is appointed “to comfort all that mourn.” This I consider as designed to meet every objection that might be alleged against the universality of the declarations which precede it. It is, as if he had said; “Does any one imagine that, though I have mentioned a variety of particulars, there are things in his case not included in them? Well; I now declare that I am come to comfort *all* that mourn, whatever may be the kind of their sorrow, and from whatever quarter or principle it may spring.” This forms a fit conclusion to that part of the address which relates to the world at large; and meets every objection which can be made to the interesting and consolatory message. The Saviour stood upon high vantage ground; he had a full view of the many and varied miseries of



this world of evil; with Divine benevolence he looked down upon the painful spectacle; and with rapture he exclaimed: I am sent to take away distress of every kind and form, to heal the disease of sin, under every modification, and to impart the riches of Divine grace and consolation, to the guilty and the wretched of every class, and of every character.

Such, my dear friend, is the consolatory nature of our Lord's message to the world. While it is adapted to mankind at large, it is fraught with the most precious consolation to Christians in particular. The latter, however, are exclusively referred to in the second part of the address. They are not called mourners merely, but "mourners in Zion;" that is, characters whose sorrows are of "a godly nature." Their grief is characteristic of those who are converted to God. They have been led to perceive, and cordially to admit, the holiness and equity of the Divine law; and are satisfied that, as sinners, they deserve condemnation. In the gospel of Christ they have found peace, but there also, they have obtained the clearest discoveries of their guilt and rebellion against God. Their brokenness of heart flows from the consideration, that they have sinned against the highest goodness—from the painful thought, that they should have acted so as to bring the Redeemer to what Calvary disclosed—and from the distressing reflection, that the God of love and of all excellence, cannot but view their character with abhorrence. They sorrow, not merely because of the bitter consequences to which sin has exposed them, but from a deep sense of its inherent



malignity. The degree and the kind of this sorrow for sin, and the sense of demerit and of baseness on account of it, ought not to be viewed as altogether dependent on the number or the flagrant nature of their transgressions. Even in such as have not gone into the more defiling and heinous modes of iniquity, there is, when the Gospel is believed, a deep and a humbling sense of the depravity of the heart, and of that constant tide of hostility to God which is ever flowing in the mind, and more or less manifested in the life. The conscience is now become tender and acutely sensible—the love of God is implanted—the temper is ingenuous—and the word of Christ so impresses the soul as to produce a due sense of the evil of all sin, and a sincere hatred of every transgression. Nor are these feelings confined to the period when they are first led to the cross. With this humble and contrite heart they wish habitually to walk with God. They feel that sin still lurks within them; and that they are ever prone to depart from their heavenly Father, notwithstanding of all that they have witnessed and tasted of his goodness. Often do they lament their ingratitude; and a sense of depravity is their daily load, and the cause of heartfelt sorrow.

The Saviour comforts such by giving them increasingly, clear, and impressive views of the love of God as his God and Father—by enlarging their discoveries of the glory and all-sufficiency of his precious blood—and by unfolding to them the richness and freedom of Divine mercy and grace. When the mind is thus filled with proper views of the grandeur and

suitableness of the Gospel, it is comforted under all its sorrows. The sinner no longer flees from God as an enemy; but, looking to the cross, as having made the exercise of mercy consistent with justice, he finds the agitations of the heart appeased, and the confidence of the soul commanded. The impressions of unbelief, and the forebodings of fear, give place to hope and to joy. Not that the evil of sin is lessened in his view, but that his conceptions of the Divine character are corrected and enlarged, and made to correspond with the gospel of Christ. The recollection that he, whose mercy is his glory, will subdue, as he has pardoned, our iniquities, and complete that deliverance which is expressed by his emancipating us from the tyranny of our sins, must impart consolation unspeakably animating.

The language of our Lord shows, that the Christian's comforts are of the richest and most animating nature. Instead of being covered with "ashes," as mourners then generally were, we shall have "a beautiful ornament or diadem on the head." Instead of the dejected looks of the afflicted, we shall be "anointed with oil," which causes "the countenance to shine;" and, instead of being the subjects of that settled melancholy which courts solitude, and refuses the words of consolation, we shall be adorned "with the garments worn on days of general festivity and thanksgiving." The whole of the imagery is expressive of a transition from the deepest distress to the highest joy; and is well fitted to illustrate the blissful and the gladdening influence of the gospel of peace.

I wish you, however, to apply this language and imagery, not only to the comfort imparted when under a deep sense of *sin*, but likewise to the consolation afforded to Christians amidst all the trials and afflictions of life. The proclamation implies, that they are exposed to heavy sorrows—as inhabitants of a world in rebellion against him whom they love and adore—as confessors of the truth in the midst of its enemies—and as children of God, afflicted by him for their present and future good. Many and various are their trials; but they are not “left comfortless.” If they have peculiar distresses, they have the promise of peculiar enjoyments and support. The Saviour himself will be with them; he will give them of his spirit, and will enrich them with his consolations. He comforts them under all their tribulations; by showing them the great design of their trials, and satisfying them of their gracious and benevolent nature—by leading them to the contemplation of his own sufferings, and of the glory in which they have issued—by employing their trials as means of enlarging their acquaintance with the word and the character of God—by enabling them to connect all of them with the heavenly glory—by imparting strength proportioned to their difficulties, and multiplying their spiritual enjoyments as troubles increase—by giving them the happiness of his presence, sympathy, and care.—In a word, by unfolding to them the many great and precious promises of the everlasting covenant; as including all their salvation and all their desire; as ratified by his blood; and as already fulfilled

to himself as their public head. "Truly God is good to Israel." Whatever be their sufferings they are more than compensated by the inward joy, the peace passing understanding, and the good hope through grace, which flow from the favour and the love of God. When thus blessed, the mind must even glory in tribulation, because of its salutary and blissful effects.

I wish you to remember, my dear friend, that the whole of the comforts in question are connected with the proclamation, announcing "the acceptable year of the Lord." This proclamation is made to the world at large, to induce them to return to God; but it is made also to Christians. The relief which is provided for the latter, when distressed by a sense of guilt, and the comforts administered to them under all their trials, proceed from the cross of Christ, and from the glory which hath followed. The victory of the Saviour, on which the proclamation rests, is that which supports the mind of a Christian amidst all his fears arising from the temptations of Satan and the world, the evils of life, and his own sinfulness and weakness. His joy is, that, through him that loved him and triumphed in his cause, the warfare shall terminate in his being made "more than a conqueror."

In connection with this, I beg leave to remind you, that the general blessings, in the second part of this address, include those in the first; but, in the first, they are exhibited with a view to the general guilt and wretchedness of mankind, and, in the way of in-



vation, to encourage them to come to the Redeemer ; while, in the second, they are promised to a select and particular class,—namely, to such as have embraced the invitations of mercy. There are blessings, also, which must first be received before others can be enjoyed. The former include pardon, acceptance, a title to eternal life, and a measure of meetness for it. The latter arise out of the growth of grace, the advancement of the Christian character, the confession of the truth, the afflictions of the Gospel, and our fellowship with heaven. Such must be the case in a salvation carried on by degrees. The true members of the church of God are accordingly addressed, as distinguished by the kind of their sorrow, and, in many respects, by the cause of it ; and also, by the character they sustain, and the blessings they enjoy.

This view of the passage will keep from that confusion into which some have been led, by treating it as referring throughout to one class of characters. At the same time, Christians can appropriate all that is consolatory in the proclamation addressed to the world at large, as well as in that which is specially addressed to themselves. This, indeed, they ought to do ; for the same gospel which is published to the world, is that from which they derive their peace, their hope, and their joy. The first part of the proclamation is designed to exhibit the original cause of salvation ; and the second to characterize those who have received it, both in regard to their lot and their state of mind. Pure mercy is described in the former ; but, in the latter, the sorrow and the distress referred



to are connected with the gracious dispositions and blessed privileges of the sufferers.

The blessedness of the people of God, as possessed of the consolations of the Gospel, is the means of furthering their sanctification. The design of the Saviour, in gladdening our hearts, is, "that we may be trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified." The improper views which many have of the comforts of religion arise from their not perceiving the glory and freeness of the Gospel. Some such receive the truth as far as they see it, and manifest great tenderness of conscience, and a spirit of submission to the will of heaven. Others are of a very different temper, and cling to their errors. Not seldom do such views flow from the natural desire of the sinful heart to enjoy peace while not living near to God. This is a vain attempt; for, if we indulge in sin, happy we cannot be. Such characters, feeling the pain which is occasioned by a struggle between conscience and inclination, and being yet unwilling to sacrifice all for the truth, endeavour to persuade themselves, that the joys of others are the fruit of delusion. They know not the constraining influence of the love of Christ, nor the sanctifying effect of a Christian's joy in God; so that, when alarmed by what they hear of the happiness of others, they very easily pacify conscience by condemning it as false or unwarranted.

It is to be expected, that those who "think they have received but little, will love little;" but they who, contrary to their felt demerit, "have received

much, will love much." What efforts have not men made to serve a much loved and venerated friend? Is not the influence of the affections proverbial? If so, it were strange if happiness, in the enjoyment of the love of God, which must be accompanied with a sense of his excellence, and the feeling of gratitude, should fail to produce obedience.

"The joy of the Lord must be our strength," because it animates us to every painful duty—it sustains us under every trial—it preserves us from an immoderate attachment to the innocent enjoyments of life—it renders the sinful pleasures of the world insipid and disgusting—and excites us to devote ourselves wholly to God, from a sense of the blessedness of his service. When the forms of religion are observed, without the enjoyment of its pleasures, there can be little of a filial spirit felt or manifested. The servile temper, which is thus cherished, will mar our obedience and our usefulness. We must be strangers to that liberal and generous spirit which, instead of presenting the scanty service of a slave, and seeking to enjoy as much as possible of the vanities of time, is bent on "abounding in the work of the Lord;" and anxious for opportunities of giving vent to its love. In the Macedonian churches we see the happy fruit of their abundant joy, amidst many and heavy trials, appearing in the noble sacrifices which they made for the interests of the truth and the disciples of Christ. The desire of the Saviour is that our joy may be full; that, as fruitful branches of the true vine, we may glorify the husbandman. We cannot but be desirous of happi-

ness; and it must be of the first importance that the heart be filled with spiritual and sacred joy.

It may be proper to remind you, my dear friend, that bodily disorders often cloud hope and lessen consolation even in the best. I mean not at present to enter particularly into the influence of disease, and shall only remark, that its dejecting effect is no disparagement to the Gospel, which was never meant for the cure of such maladies; and that it will be well for us to seek our happiness in God, not by indulging an excessive anxiety about consolation *as such*, but by growing in faith, and in love, in holiness, and singleness of heart. We shall find it best promoted by the progress of our general spiritual health. We shall thus be the more able also to stand the shock of bodily disease, and to refute the prejudices entertained against Christian enjoyment.

Such prejudices are founded on error. There is, it is true, a vain and an unfounded confidence; and there are some who can boast of possessing comfort while it is manifest that they know not the truth; but let not this cause jealousy of Christian joy. It ought not to be concealed, however, that, while there are vain and presumptuous pretenders to the joy of the Gospel, there are also those who make a righteousness of their gloom and their disquietude. Such look on their want of comfort as the fruit of humility, and consider their uneasiness as an evidence of true religion; and so nurse melancholy, and repel the grace of the Gospel. They view the consolations of the truth with a suspicious eye, and treat the peace

connected with them as if it flowed from arrogance, and were inconsistent with lowliness of mind. Beneath this there lurks a spirit of unsubdued pride. While they speak as if altogether vile in their own eyes, their very self-reproaches are often dictated by self-complacency. That a spirit, bordering on this, should meet with encouragement, is matter of deep regret.

What ought we, my dear friend, to learn from all this ; but to avoid errors on every hand, and seek to God as our portion and our “ exceeding joy ?” When happy in holy fellowship with him, we shall be fortified against temptation, and stimulated to abound in his blessed work. Finding that, in his service, there is a great present, as well as a future, reward, we shall be kept from departing from him. What is perseverance in grace but the continuance of the Christian in the faith and obedience of the Gospel, from a sense of the happiness connected with a life of fellowship with God ? Finding our blessedness in the truth, we hold it fast. Heaven comes to be contemplated as the perfection of bliss ; because there we shall be perfect in holiness. He who expects his happiness in heaven in perfect holiness, will naturally seek much of it here ; and will, by this means, be kept looking to the Saviour, that he may be assimilated to his character. The soul thus feels, that, to know the Redeemer, to love him, and to delight in him, is the highest enjoyment. No other portion is sought—no other object can satisfy the spirit—and nothing more is felt necessary to full and



permanent bliss. The emptiness and vanity of the creature, even in its highest glory, never can be forgotten; while, in the very gloomiest trials, the presence and fellowship of the friend of sinners were a source of solid and of durable felicity.

It is thus that we come to understand why Christian joy is represented, not only as a privilege, but as a duty. "Finally, my brethren," says Paul, "rejoice in the Lord." "Rejoice in the Lord alway; and, again, I say rejoice." "Rejoice evermore." Nothing is commanded for which there is not an adequate reason. In the Lord Jesus there is all that can gladden the heart; and hence, these reiterated calls to be happy in him. His people, then, are kept by him through the sweetest, and yet the most powerful, influence. They find that, in cleaving to him, they are cleaving to the only spring of holiness, vigour, and joy; and so feel encouraged to triumph over all opposition, and to go forward to complete victory. The life of the soul is found to consist in a sense of the Divine favour; and hence it is induced to abound in every good work.

Since the glory of the Saviour and the salvation of his people most fully harmonize, it must be delightful to resign the heart to him. In casting itself on Jesus, the soul finds peace. In reposing on him who is able to keep all committed to him against that day, his character is endeared to us, and he is felt to be our ultimate rest. In contemplating the glories of his character, we cleave to him as our all. If the little that is enjoyed of his goodness here is sufficient to



persuade us that there is no other real joy, we must be attracted to heaven. We turn to it as the seat of his glory, from a conviction that never, till the whole heart is filled with him, will it be completely satisfied. If, without him, all is felt to be dead; and, in communion with him, all is seen to smile, doubtless his favour will be prized as our chief joy. Though here we love him not as we ought, yet the desire of the heart will be, that we may love him with greater ardour. No higher happiness will be coveted than the perfect and everlasting enjoyment of his fellowship. The aim of the soul will be to have him ever before it. Never, with him in view, can it again be occupied with the phantoms of time. It will feel impelled forward to the full enjoyment of that glory, the earnest of which has been found so enriching and so refreshing.

Conscious of many deficiencies, the Christian looks to his Lord for pardon and for peace. While he yields himself up a living sacrifice, he is deeply sensible of his depravity, and asks at the throne of grace for that sacred fire which alone can purify his offering. To him who loved him, he looks for light, and life, and every blessing as matter of pure favour; but yet with confidence, founded on his character and work. The prospect of being where he is; of beholding his glory, and of being delighted with his fellowship, elevates his heart. The same spring that supplies the city of the living God, even in the heaven of heavens, is the source of his bliss on earth. He has imbibed that water which the Redeemer alone

can impart ; and he thirsts not afresh after the poor and unsatisfying pleasures of the world. In his heart it has become a well of living water, bursting up, in holy desires and affections, into everlasting life.

In proportion, my dear friend, as the Christian grows in grace, and so approaches the heavenly state in the temper of his mind as well as by the lapse of time, he seeks that the Saviour would write his laws upon his heart, teach him the work of heaven, and refresh him with the delights of the Sanctuary. Ought not, then, the desire of our souls to be, that, as we draw nearer to the celestial temple, we may imbibe more of its spirit, and anticipate more of its hallowed joys ; that so our latest thoughts, feelings, and exercises may be likest to those which shall be our first in the world of light and immortality. Such are the heavenly affections of an advancing Christian—such the fruits of Scriptural joy—and such the dispositions which glorify God. Delightful it must be, to contemplate the plan of redemption as thus terminating in the complete assimilation of the soul to the Redeemer.

In that day may you “be satisfied with his likeness.” I am, &c.

## LETTER V.

### THOUGHTS ON THE LAW AND THE GOSPEL.

**Remarks on the Scriptural mode of teaching—The law ought to be fully laid before men, and all false refuges exposed—The Gospel ought to be freely declared to them—Faith in Christ ought to be inculcated at the very first—The danger of stopping short of the Saviour—Every duty should be enforced in connection with faith in the Gospel—All true holiness the fruit of this principle.**

**MY DEAR FRIEND,**

**I AM happy to embrace the opportunity to write you a few observations on some of the subjects which are the occasion of difficulty to your relative. I am well aware, that some have acted too much in the way that was blamed, and that much evil has been the consequence. Without entering at large into this, I shall give a brief statement of what was the practice of our Lord and his approved servants; which will show what ought to be done by every instructor, whether in private or public.**

**Their labours are very compendiously recorded; yet, on a careful search, we shall find that they addressed men on subjects relating to their everlasting peace, as intelligent, accountable creatures, and in a manner calculated to engage their liveliest attention. They did not, by unguarded and unqualified assertions, depreciate obedience; but taught, that the whole law of God is binding on every child of Adam. They were the messengers of him from whom both the law and the Gospel proceed; and in their minis-**

try the two were exhibited as in perfect concord. The Gospel was announced as good news from heaven to the guilty and depraved; but this evidently implied the truth of heavy and alarming tidings of merited judgment and misery: for where there is no danger, there can be no need of deliverance; and, under the government of the righteous Lord, there can be no unmerited condemnation. Salvation by grace must necessarily suppose, that our danger is the consequence of guilt; for there is no more of grace in the Gospel, than there is of justice in the sentence of the law. Never can we admire the riches of the Divine mercy and goodness, without cordially acknowledging the greatness of our demerit! It must, then, be of the utmost importance, to state to sinners the extent, equity, and goodness of the law of God, that they may see what is the will of the Lawgiver, and what it is the want of which subjects them to the condemnation of Heaven. They ought to be told of their absolute ruin by sin: for, if not involved in the dismal consequences of guilt, they need not the mediation of Christ. Without any qualifying language, the sacred writers accordingly declared, that "all had sinned and come short of the glory of God." They struck at the root of all those delusive hopes which lulled the guilty asleep in carnal security, whether they arose from the abuse of religious advantages, or perverted views of the Divine law.

Scarcely any, indeed, are so ignorant, as to assert their perfect rectitude before their Judge; yet, while they allow that they are sinners, multitudes are not

in the least alarmed on that account, because they really have no proper conviction of sin, nor any just sense of their state as already condemned. Such characters are free from disquietude under the vague view they have of their sinfulness; because they confide in their knowledge, attendance on Divine worship, outward relation to the church of God, almsgiving, and abstinence from gross immoralities. Now, it is of the greatest consequence to expose such refuges, and to impress upon the minds of men what the law demands of them,—that they love God with all their heart—that they serve him perfectly in thought, word, and deed—that they devote themselves to him without the smallest reserve—and that, in all their conduct towards their neighbour, they be guided by genuine affection. Never do the Scriptures compromise things with sinners; they never require any thing short of full conformity to the law, under the notion that man is unable to yield perfect obedience, and is therefore excusable: for his very inability is his crime. It is not physical, but moral; consisting solely in the want of inclination, and in positive aversion to what is good. No abatement in the requirements of the law can ever be made in consequence of sinful inclinations. If such were the doctrine of Scripture, then, the more a man hates God and the ways of righteousness, the more is he free from blame. It is needless for me to say, that this is utterly absurd, and is the very *opposite* of the doctrine of Scripture. It is sufficient to render man responsible that he has natural faculties which fit him for receiving a revelation



of the will of God, so as to understand what he approves, and what he is opposed to; and that no invincible external impediment hinders him from conforming to the law of his Sovereign. If, in what he does, he acts voluntarily and cordially, without being compelled by another, he surely must be accountable. In Scripture, men are always represented as acting freely and of choice; and, in consequence, as guilty before God. Mankind are thus put on a level, and are all in equal need of salvation. There are differences among them as to degrees of transgression; but, as the law demands perfect obedience, that man "who has offended but in one point is guilty of all;" having failed in that love which is the principle and sum of obedience to all, and having despised that authority which enforces the whole. Even but one transgression shuts for ever the door of justification by deeds of law, and subjects the offender to the curse denounced against sin.

But, while men were thus told of their depravity and guilt, they were told at the same time of the pardoning mercy of God, as it flows to the rebellious through the atonement of Christ; and that, through faith in this revelation, the forgiveness of sin might be obtained, and eternal life freely enjoyed. They were also informed, that this method of pardoning sin had been adopted, in order that, by its influence on the mind, the power of sin might be broken, and the soul conformed to the pure and holy character of the Saviour.

Should a sinner be convinced of his sin, and sensi-

ble of his dangerous condition, he will naturally be filled with alarm, and will dread the awful consequences of his crimes. If, in this state of mind, the richness and freeness of Divine grace be perceived, and he be led to abandon all other grounds of confidence, and to fly for refuge to the work of the Redeemer as exhibited in the Gospel, he will find peace to his soul, and will rejoice in the sweet and reviving hope of everlasting life. But if, instead of this, he rest satisfied with giving up some gross immoralities, and observing the external forms of religion, without going, as a guilty and helpless creature, to the cross of Christ, his case is truly to be deplored. It is not enough that persons are distressed in mind—the question is, What does their distress lead them to? Some have very unscripturally told such, that their distress itself manifests a change of heart, and is an evidence that they have obtained forgiveness. Men have too often been believed, when they have said, that they felt quite willing to be saved in the way of the Gospel; yea, were longing most earnestly to be so saved, if it would but please the Almighty to save them; and they are frequently in such cases exhorted to some preparatory work instead of being at once directed to the Saviour. In conversing with such, we should beware of taking it for granted that they have no doubts as to the Gospel way of salvation, and no unwillingness to be saved according to it, provided God were willing to save them. We ought to labour to convince them that they know not the deceitfulness of the heart, and that, if they really understood the

Gospel, they would be persuaded that the atonement is all-sufficient to take away sin ; that God is willing to save every sinner who is willing to be saved through it ; and that, if they perish, it will be because they stumbled at the cross. Never ought it to be admitted, that the obstruction to believing in Christ consists in any thing distinct from disaffection to the Divine plan of salvation. Let this plan be fully stated, and care taken, that no resting place be furnished them short of the Saviour. At all times, and in all circumstances, the Gospel ought to be clearly and affectionately laid before sinners. We need not be scrupulous as to the order in which we state truth, for all its parts are connected with each other.

Instead, however, of being exhorted to go at once, and as they are, to the compassionate Redeemer, such persons as I now speak of, as well as those who are at ease, are sometimes advised to wait at the pool of ordinances ; and are assured that, in so doing, the Lord will meet them and bless them ; as if they were willing, but unable, to embrace the Gospel. This is far from imitating the Saviour, who represented the belief of the truth respecting himself, as the great thing to which sinners should at once be called. It proceeds on the principle, that they are not required immediately to believe and embrace the truth. The consequence is, they feel relieved from what is deemed "a hard saying," namely, that they ought instantly to return to God by Jesus Christ as perishing sinners, and are thus lulled asleep. In fact, they are led to imagine, that all required of them is to attend the means

of grace, and to wait the issue. Hence, they often get quite unconcerned, and indulge in the vain dream, that they are discharging their whole duty, while, in reality, they are gratifying their sinful and impenitent hearts. The only reason why they do not instantly turn to the Saviour, is the very reason why they ever disobeyed the Divine law. Aversion of heart from God is equally the cause of both; and what is this but the essence of sin? Is it not the very thing they are called to repent of? and how, then, can it justify or excuse them? Such characters are *not* willing to be saved in the way of the Gospel. They mistake that desire of deliverance natural to man, for a desire to be saved in the way in which God saves the guilty; while they are far from bowing to the humbling truths and spiritual discoveries of the Gospel. *Nothing* hinders them from coming at once to the cross, but the depraved principles of the heart, and an aversion to the Divine method of saving sinners. This view of the inability of men to bow to the truth is fitted to convince them of their utter depravity; for they are thus presented with a most affecting discovery of their "enmity against God."

It is of importance to observe, my dear friend, that the words *can* and *cannot* are used in Scripture, as in common life, to express willingness or unwillingness. The expression, "No man can come to me," means the very same thing with this other, "Ye will not come to me." In our ordinary intercourse we are accustomed to say, "I cannot listen to you;" or, "I cannot do what you wish," when all we mean is, that we are



strongly disinclined to do so. Thus our Lord said to the Jews, "Why do ye not understand my speech, even because ye cannot hear my word"—that is, they could not *hear* it. So natural is this language that even children use it. Every one knows that there is a radical difference between that kind of inability which is independent of the inclination, and that which is owing to nothing else. The former is not culpable; the latter is the very ground of culpability. The Scriptures proceed on these principles; and, instead of addressing any as willing, but *physically* unable, to follow the Divine will, they address all as only *morally* unable—that is, *unwilling* to do so, and, of course, as criminal in the sight of God. They never attempt to relieve sinners by lowering the claims of the law, or so modelling the Gospel as to meet their evil inclinations. They at once call upon them to repent and believe in Christ. Whatever may be their uneasiness of mind, nothing but faith in the atonement can properly remove it. So long as they feel excused from an immediate return to God, they will not despair of help from themselves. But, when fully convinced of the true nature of their character and state, they will be led to cast themselves on Sovereign mercy flowing through the Saviour. This is the prayer of faith, and it will be heard.

We are not warranted to comfort such in any other way than by setting before them the cloud of evidence which accompanies, and is contained in, the Gospel. The only good news we can inform them of is, that Christ "came into the world to save sin-



ners;" that he hath made complete atonement for sin; that, in his sacrifice, Jehovah is well pleased; and, that whosoever believes in him shall be saved. Let the invitations of the Gospel be clearly stated, as arising out of the character and work of Christ, and addressed to all indiscriminately, for the very purpose of removing every discouraging apprehension. Surely, if this revelation fails to give relief, it must be because it is not credited; and the reason why it is not is, that it is hated\*. It is at our peril to comfort the sinner by pointing to what he feels in himself, which, however painful it may be, if he does not embrace the truth as far as it is made known to him, and go to the cross of Christ, can be nothing more than impenitent distress. What the issue may be, we cannot tell; but it becomes us to direct him at once to the Saviour of sinners, and to beware of so instructing him as to lead him to rest satisfied in any refuge short of the work of Christ; which has often happened when men were led to imagine that services performed by them, while in unbelief, would be acceptable to God.

I am far from supposing, that distress of mind is in itself sinful. This it never can be. In itself it is neither good nor evil. It is but the instinctive feeling of every percipient being when in adverse circumstances. It is not, indeed, the object of complacency, but neither is it the object of blame. The sinner, when under it, is not on that account the object of approbation; but, as a sufferer, he is the object of pity. He cannot

---

\* John III. 19, viii. 43—47.

but desire deliverance from evil, and this desire the Gospel benevolently meets, by declaring, that "God so pitied the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." God, it is true, regarded men simply as exposed to misery, whether sensible of their state or not; but, surely, a sense of it does not lessen his compassion. In such circumstances concern about the state of the soul is often the means of leading to enquire after the Gospel, and to search the Scriptures for relief. The sinner in this acts rationally, and his conduct ought to be encouraged. But, when he begins to imagine that, in his distress, there is something good that will recommend him to mercy; and, when on being favoured with a scriptural statement of the truth, he does not immediately embrace it, but rests satisfied with exercises which are consistent with impenitence and unbelief, he has commenced a course of self-righteous labour. The consideration of his danger, his anxiety for relief, and his diligent examination of the Scriptures, to ascertain what they teach, ought never to be confounded with exercises in themselves sinful; but, the moment that he deems himself safe, because he is thus impressed; or aims at doing or feeling something from whence he may derive peace, instead of submitting to the Gospel of Christ; he then sets himself in opposition to the Divine plan of salvation. Through faith in the atonement, and in no other way, is he called to look for acceptance. In vain does he attempt to excuse his unbelief, by saying, I cannot comply with

this; my heart is too hard; ask of me any thing else, and I will do it. In vain does he comfort himself with the notion, that he is not so bad as those who neglect this and the other precept; and transgress this and the other prohibition of the Divine law. The question is not, is he as bad as others? but, has he sinned, or is he sinning at all? Passing the discussion of points such as this, it is readily granted him, that there are degrees of *positive* wickedness; but let him remember, that, while a man is under the power of an impenitent and unbelieving heart, there is not a particle of *positive* holiness in his services, however serious he may be. What, then, can be said to him but this: "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and so submit to mercy." The unbelief of his heart is not merely a misfortune—it is a crime. He is not in Scripture called merely to something that is to be done previous to faith, but to faith itself.

The Gospel of Christ is not meant for the mere external reformation of men \*. Its great object is, to change the mind, and so to correct the deportment. The duties enjoined by the Saviour and his apostles included the service of the heart †. Obedience to their instructions was inseparably connected with the enjoyment of eternal life. They exhorted men to repent, (*i. e.* to change their mind), and to believe the Gospel. In the course of their instructions they inculcated all kinds of duties, and reproved all manner of transgression; but all that they enjoined was to be

---

\* Matt. xxiii. 25—28.

† Luke xi. 39, 40.

done from the heart, and, if not, sin had been committed, instead of duty discharged. They know nothing of duties, the discharge of which would consist with the estrangement of the soul from God. Now, the inability of sinners to believe in Christ is not greater than their inability to obey any other precept: so that there can be no proper reason why they should be called instantly to other duties, and not instantly to believe the Gospel. In vain do any exhort them in the first instance to this or the other service of obedience, but not yet to faith in Christ: for they are no more unable to believe the Gospel, than they are to perform such services, and equally unable to do the latter as the former—why, then, this distinction? In both cases there is the *same* aversion of heart, and in this lies the cause of all disobedience, whether it respect the law or the Gospel. If disinclination be the sole cause of unbelief, shall we act as if it were excusable? If so, is not disobedience to the law as excusable? and where, then, could there be sin at all? I speak not, you will observe, of confining ourselves to a particular order, in stating Divine truths—I mean, that all should be connected with the cross.

In the instructions delivered by our Lord and his apostles, we find *every* duty enforced on their hearers. The precepts of the Divine law are employed for the purpose of vindicating the character and administration of God, to convince men of sin, to show them their need of a Saviour, the nature of salvation, and of the holy character, which it is the design of the Gospel to produce and cherish. Such a way of stat-



ing the precepts of the Divine law, is connected with the doctrines of the gospel of peace, either expressed or implied. Men are thus taught the nature and fearful magnitude of their guilt; their hopes and their fears are thus addressed in a way highly calculated to impress them; and they are shut up to the one way of deliverance revealed in the Gospel. As they cannot cease to exist, but must live while the Almighty and the Living God shall live, they are called, by every consideration, to embrace the cross of Christ, and to commit their eternity to his finished work and his gracious promise. It is at their peril to trifle with this message of mercy, to delay one moment, or to seek salvation in any other way.

Though the Scriptures, my dear friend, know nothing of duties acceptably or spiritually performed before the faith of the Gospel, or which do not include or imply it, they do not wait till a man believes in Christ before they exhort him to other exercises\*. Such exhortations are explained by the argument of Paul, when speaking of the promise, that, whosoever should call on the name of the Lord, should be saved, he says, "How can they call on him in whom they have not believed;" and by his conduct in reasoning with Felix concerning justice, temperance, and judgment to come, in connection with declaring the faith or the gospel of Christ. His doctrine and his practice show, that every duty is to be enforced on the conscience, but always along with a statement of

---

\* Isaiah lv. 6, 7. Luke iii. 19.



that truth which alone can produce obedience. The fact is, the *whole* of the law of God is binding on man as he stands, and every neglect of its requirements, and disregard of its prohibitions, exposes him to the wrath of God ; and therefore, all its demands may, and ought to be, pressed upon *every* man in *whatever* condition. Independently, then, of the Gospel, it is the duty of all men to obey the Divine law ; independently of their being believers, it is their duty to do so, and they sin in every instance in which they do not ; but, never till they believe the Gospel, will they indeed do their duty.

The message of reconciliation is the instrument employed to change the heart, to purge from sin, and to implant those principles through which, exclusively, acceptable obedience can be yielded \*. Hence, all exhortations to duty are connected with the doctrine of the cross. Faith, then, is not by any means the *ground of obligation* to obey, but is that which *inclines* us to obedience. Hence the Gospel, as a display of mercy in harmony with justice, is to be preached, in order that, being believed, men may be acquainted with the character of God, and come under the medicinal influence of this revelation. Till we believe it, whatever be our external decency, or our preparatory services in order to fit us for coming to Christ, we still remain hostile to God, and in love with sin. Good works are not required to prepare for faith, or to procure eternal life, as if redemption were in any

---

\* Rom. i. 16, 17.

way by deeds of law. The very root of a solid and universal change in the heart is faith in the Gospel. Reformation ought to be instantly begun by the sinner, not as preparatory to, but in and along with believing. All good works are the fruits and the tokens of faith, but cannot go before it. If by faith in the Gospel "the heart is purified," and if it be the truth that sets "free from sin," it follows, that they who have not really received the love of it, and who, of course, are not under its influence, must still be impure in heart and the slaves of unrighteousness. Such "cannot please God," because their principles, pursuits, and aims accord not with his.

The very design of the Almighty in calling on men to believe the Gospel is, that, by believing it, they may come under its transforming power, and be led to admire and imitate his character as revealed in it, and thus to seek their happiness in himself. If this end can be gained without faith in the cross, Christ died in vain. Such, however, is our state, that it cannot. To say, that, though it cannot be wholly gained without the reception of the Gospel, it may be so in a measure, is to confound that external correctness which is the effect of a partial view of the truth, with the change of heart which fits for the kingdom of heaven. This change is, indeed, but imperfect even in the most eminent Christians; but still there is a renovation of heart. Divine energy begins the work, and also completes it. This energy excites to obedience; but what it produces was antecedently our duty. It leads us "in the way that we should go."

The influences of the Holy Spirit are designed to open the mind to the glory of the Gospel, to overcome our natural hostility to it, and to bring us by faith into union with it. They are not matter of debt, then, but of favour. Hence, we are taught to pray for Divine teaching under a deep sense of our natural ignorance of Divine things, and our strong aversion to them. When taught of God, we are drawn to the Saviour, and so find rest. How precious that peace of conscience which arises from a view of the transcendent glory of the character and finished work of Christ, through faith in which, without one good quality in us, we are brought into the heavenly family, and into the closest fellowship with him who loved us and gave himself for us ! Blessed is the new spiritual character we thus acquire, in being brought to enjoy what God enjoys, to enter into all his views, to feel one with him in all that he does, to be happy in seeing his will done, and in doing it ourselves, and to be fully satisfied in the contemplation and the enjoyment of his glory. The faith of the Gospel inspires us with that love to Christ which is the health of our spirits, which raises above all difficulties, imparts holy courage and elevation of soul, makes duty to be esteemed a privilege, and causes obedience to flow as the spontaneous effusion of gratitude : thus uniting the glory of God with our highest happiness. Such are the noble, and, shall I say, generous principles of action produced by the truth.

The character thus formed is connected with eternity. The Gospel makes men better relatives and

more useful members of society ; but it is degraded when viewed chiefly as an instrument of promoting the temporal good of the community. Mistakes as to this have caused many corruptions of its doctrines. To gain the *latter* object, when they doubted of saving the soul, many have too much adapted their instructions to the propensity of man to rest in mere external deeds and observances. It were well for such to consider, that even the secondary object they have in view is best promoted by a full and just statement of the Gospel. Such is its nature, that it influences, not a little, many who do not embrace it. This influence must arise from its commending itself to the conscience ; and, if so, the more scripturally it is stated, the greater will be the effect. This will appear evident from an observation of the different degrees of external morality produced in different places according to the degree of simplicity with which the Gospel is taught. Compare the greater part of the European continent with this country, and countries similarly favoured, and mark how the restraining influence of the doctrine and practice of Christianity keeps pace with its purity. “ Christianity will inconceivably ameliorate the present condition of the world, but it is only when she is allowed to develop the energies by which she sanctifies and prepares its inhabitants for a better. Let her be urged to forget her celestial origin and destiny ; to forget that she came from God and returns to God ; and whether she be employed by the artful and designing to establish a spiritual empire and dominion over mankind,



or by the philanthropist, as the means of promoting their civilization and improvement, she feels equally injured, and takes her departure, leaving nothing but a base and sanctimonious hypocrisy in her room \*.” The beneficial principles exercised by a Christian as a member of society, are employed to cherish all that can make him meet for the heavenly world. He is sowing seed, which will produce life everlasting. In all that he does, his eye ought ever to be on the harvest; for the scenes of this world are but subordinate to the eternal destiny of the soul.

You will perceive, my dear friend, that faith in the work of Christ is but a means to an end. It is designed to produce true holiness. We are all sinners, and if pardoned and accepted, we must be so of pure unmerited favour, through the atonement and intercession of Christ. But while, through faith in him, we are put in possession of the blessings of pardon and admission into the family of God, we are by this very faith, in some measure, made meet for the exercises and the enjoyments of his temple. This is a method of justification which has the most transforming effect. Surely, when we contemplate the Saviour magnifying the law and making it honourable, we cannot but esteem it, and keep aloof from every thing that has but the appearance of disregarding it. When we think of his obedience, can we cease to be active in his service? Must not the study of his character assimilate us to him, and enable us to mortify every

---

\* Hall's address to Eustace Carey.



evil principle. It is natural for us, when conscious of guilt, and afraid of judgment, to be particularly struck with the goodness of God, as it appears in the exceeding riches of his grace in redeeming us from *wrath*; but, when we contemplate the *whole* scheme of redemption, we are no less, yea more, struck with the love of God as it appears in saving us from *sin* itself. The end is worthy of God, and the means are admirably suitable and glorious as well as illustrative of his manifold wisdom. Indeed it were vain to pardon a sinner, and receive him into favour, without changing his mind. Such a man could not enjoy the privileges of the Divine family, and even heaven itself would, to him, be as hell. He could not enjoy the society, engage in the exercises, nor relish the pleasures of the place. Even in the seat of happiness, where there is fulness of joy, such a character would be miserable. Holiness is thus placed in its proper situation, as the grand object of God in the plan of grace. This view of the design of the Gospel shews, that it has never been discerned in its true glory, nor felt in its genuine power, by such as take occasion from it to indulge in sin.

Never till our persons are accepted through Christ can our services be so; but, when we are ourselves accepted in the beloved, our services are accepted for his sake, and in this way God expresses his delight in the work and character of his Son, of which our obedience is the fruit and the likeness. Obedience, then, is yielded, not in order to *obtain* forgiveness, but to express gratitude for *having* obtained it—it is not

yielded to merit eternal life, but to express the gratitude of the heart to him who hath given it to us of pure favour through the atonement of his Son. It is an expression of delight in the character of him who justifieth the ungodly for the sake of the Redeemer—it is the fruit of conformity to God—it is, in short, happiness in God and in spiritual things, and it makes meet for the full enjoyment of him in the world of purity, holiness, and love. This spirit is promoted by glorying exclusively in the cross of Christ, and living by faith in him. In his cross we see mercy and truth, righteousness and peace, all united. Here sin is seen to be in itself most hateful, and revolting to every proper feeling. It is by this that the heart is broken and made contrite—that the transgressor sees at once his disease and the remedy—his danger and the way of escape—and is taught to put up from the heart the important petition, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” It is here that the heart receives the impression of the character of Christ, and becomes assimilated to the spirit of the heavenly world.

That the Lord may keep you and guide you into all truth, is the prayer of,

My dear friend,  
Yours, &c.

## LETTER VI.

## ON CHRISTIAN COMFORT.

The most eminent Christians feel imperfections—An error as to comfort and obedience noticed—The proper source of Christian holiness and joy—The evil of mistakes as to this—Two kinds of distress described—The Scriptural mode of comforting the dejected—The use of self-examination—Holiness connected with Christian consolation—Their reciprocal influence—The use of past enjoyments—Conclusion.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I PROPOSE, in this letter, to advert to what you wrote me respecting that lively feeling of the power of our Lord's character, and that comfort in the truth, the want of which is lamented by many. I begin with reminding you, that the very highest Christians are deeply sensible that they are not influenced by the Gospel as they ought to be; and this causes to them much pain and self-reproach. Nothing, however, can remedy this but a devout reliance on the work of the Redeemer, and the steady contemplation of his gracious character, accompanied with humble and fervent prayer to him who teaches, sanctifies, and animates the heart. In all cases the Saviour is the source of peace and consolation to his people. He communicates these blessings by enlightening their minds in the knowledge of the great truths of his word, and particularly those that respect his sacrifice and official administration. It is, then, by keeping the Gospel con-

stantly in view that the heart comes under its transforming energy.

There is an error often committed here on which I shall say a few words. I refer particularly to it, because the principle it includes has not seldom been at the bottom of unscriptural views of the nature and spring of Christian comfort and obedience. It is this: Many come to the Scriptures with the same views as those which actuated the young man who came to our Lord with the question, "What good thing shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" Now, the Bible was never intended to answer this question. It is, indeed, answered in Scripture; but for the purpose of showing, that, in order to be justified by law, a man must, throughout his life, have been perfectly conformed in principle, thought, word, and deed, to the whole of its demands; and that, whosoever has broken it but in one instance, is guilty of all. Of course, the answer to it is designed to "shut us up" to the plan of salvation revealed in the Gospel, and not by any means to inspire us with the hope of being justified by law. It tells us how man would have been justified had he continued obedient; but not how a sinner can be accepted. The great question which the Scripture was meant to answer is, "How can God justify a sinner in consistency with his holy character, the righteous claims of his law, and the general good?"

It is evident, that, when a person's great object is to have the first of these questions answered, his comfort and peace must be very unsteady,—When he puts

the question, "Am I a child of God?" his meaning is not, "have I believed the gospel of Christ;" or, in other words, is it indeed the truth; but "have I done enough to procure for me eternal life?" and, according to the view he takes of his attainments, must be his peace or his disquietude. In all his devotional services, and in all his obedience, his great concern is to establish his claim to the favour of God and to the happiness of heaven; and, in his exertions, he may be very earnest, while he has utterly mistaken the design of that book which he considers to be a revelation from God. Such a character cannot understand how a perishing prodigal can obtain forgiveness and be filled with peace, on his yielding to the call, "Repent and believe the Gospel." He treats the enjoyments of such converts as the fruit of error and enthusiasm. Conscious that he has himself no real happiness, he manifests the spirit, and virtually adopts the language of the elder brother in the parable, "Thou never gavest me a kid that I might make merry with my friends." He turns from the friend of sinners—refuses life from him as a matter of favour—and clings to his own self-righteous schemes. In some instances, impressed by what they hear of the happiness of others, and despairing of attaining the like, such characters sink into despondency.

In opposition to these most erroneous and destructive sentiments, the Scriptures address all as condemned in the sight of God; they bear witness to the dignity of the Redeemer's nature and the perfection of his atonement; and declare, that every one who



receives their testimony shall be saved. The faith of this is the root of all real liveliness in religion and of all genuine enjoyment. The sinner is thus freed from the distressing agitation caused by his fruitless efforts to make his peace with God ; and, finding rest in the work of the Saviour, he engages with life and animation in the course of obedience.

The Spirit bears witness in the Scriptures to the important truth, that every child of God becomes such by faith in Christ Jesus," and not by works of law \*. Now when, with a true heart, we can say that the Divine declaration concerning Christ and his work is really believed by us ; and that his atonement is indeed that on which we rest, as the sole foundation of our confidence before God ; we may take comfort from the promise of forgiveness and eternal life to all who believe. Then, do we enjoy the consolation of the Spirit's testimony in the Scriptures, that, to as many as believe in him, Jesus gives "the privilege of becoming the sons of God ;" and so can rejoice, that, "as children, we are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ." We must first of all derive our confidence from the general declarations of the Gospel, before any other part of Scripture can afford us relief. This enjoyment is always proportioned to our conviction of our need of mercy, and the degree of steadiness with which we cling to the cross of Christ. Every Christian finds that, in all circumstances of distress, and in all his difficulties, however

---

\* John i. 12. Gal. iii. 7—26.

long he may live, he must either lose his comfort and peace altogether, or receive these enjoyments in connection with confidence in the same truths which relieved him at first. The life of faith consists in continuing to count it "a true saying, and worthy of the most cordial reception, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners;" in building our hope of mercy on his sacrifice; and in drawing from it our peace and our happiness under a sense of guilt, and in the view of eternity.

In believing in the work of Christ we are induced to renounce every false hope, and to count all things but loss, that we may win him, and be found in him—that we may know more of his excellence—and that we may be more conformed to his character. In judging the God of the promises to be faithful, perplexity, as to the subject of acceptance with him, is banished from the mind. In contemplating the glory of the Redeemer's person, expiation, and kingdom—the offices he executes—the relations he bears to his people—his administration in providence—the riches of his grace—and the many truths and blessings connected with such subjects, we shall find constant enjoyment, and matter for everlasting triumph. It is extremely difficult, indeed, owing to the corruption of our hearts, to attain and to preserve this spiritual and happy state of mind; but let us ever look to the Father of mercies for his aid. Let us dwell upon his love and his rich grace, as displayed in exhibiting all the blessings of the Gospel to us while ungodly, without strength, and ready to sink into the

pit of misery. Hither let us return from all our wanderings for rest, and here let us abide as the seat of happiness.

It not seldom happens that, owing to the weakness of their faith, and from the want of clear, scriptural and simple views of the gospel of peace, Christians are deficient in vigour and usefulness. Now, though a person, whose views of Divine truth are very obscure, may be truly a Christian, his comfort must be small and very unsteady. It is at once his duty and his interest, to pray fervently to God for his illuminating Spirit, and to meditate upon that redemption which is the theme of the heavenly songs, and the great excitement to heavenly activity. In particular, he ought to dwell on the work and character of the Redeemer, and on the free invitations and promises of the Gospel. Thus he will find, that a Christian is one who is pardoned and received into the family of God for the sake of the atonement of Christ. He will find, too, that he is placed here in a state of training for immortal glory by means of faith in the Gospel, and by the various events of life, as made to bear upon his mind, so as to illustrate Divine truth, and impress it upon the heart. The nature and design of Christian obedience will thus be understood; the beautiful harmony of Scripture will commend itself to the heart; and rest will be found in its faithful testimony. This testimony declares that, whatever be the number or the nature of our transgressions, there is no necessity for us to attempt the expiation of sin—that it is vain, and even sinful to do so. Nothing as to the

*ground* of pardon and acceptance remains to be done. On the contrary, the Gospel affirms, that the only work through which the guilty can be saved is already finished ; and that, believing in this, the sins of the most unworthy are blotted out, and their persons accepted.

It often happens that, on hearing this, inquirers feel as if it were an act of presumption, in a state of guilt and unworthiness, to enter at once into the enjoyment of the blessings of salvation, by believing the testimony of God ; and hence a course of preparatory obedience is commenced. Now, the fact is, the presumption lies in the very opposite direction. It lies in supposing, that, in course of time, by their repentance and reformation, they shall become more worthy of receiving salvation through Christ ; and in waiting till they shall be so before they apply to him. This is going in the very face of the clear declaration of God, that all, from first to last, is the fruit of free favour, whether in respect of the price of redemption, or of obtaining an actual interest in its blessings. Nothing can be more presumptuous than to imagine, that the benefit of the work of Christ can be merited by those who are sunk in guilt and depravity ; and to call in question the truth of God, who has solemnly declared, that he is well pleased in the sacrifice of his Son, and that his blood is sufficient to take away sin. The truth of these declarations cannot be distinctly seen by those who seek, by some previous work, to prepare themselves for an actual interest in the righteousness of Christ.



Permit me here, my dear friend, to advert to another thing connected with proper views of Christian comfort, and the spring of Christian obedience. It frequently happens that persons, professing religion, are in great distress because of sins which they have committed after having derived peace, as they think, from the Gospel. Distressed they certainly ought to be, and he who is not, must be a stranger to genuine repentance. With regard to this, however, it is of importance to observe, that distress of mind may arise from two sources. In the one case, it is merely selfish, as it springs solely from a fear, that the evils committed are inconsistent with a state of acceptance with God. The blessing which the subjects of this fear connect with a state of salvation, is almost entirely confined to a change of state; though they think certain good feelings and dispositions necessary to entitle them to it. They have no true regard to the Divine glory, or to spiritual bliss. The question with them is not, "Have I confidence in nothing, as the ground of acceptance, but the work of Christ?" It is, "Have I done what is necessary to warrant me to look to his righteousness for deliverance from future misery?" It is doubtless a duty for Christians to examine themselves as to the effect which the Gospel has upon their hearts and deportment; and they must certainly be concerned about their own salvation. But what I refer to, is the practice of those who can never take comfort from what the Saviour has done, except when they have acted in a manner which they think right—when they have remarkable freedom in prayer—



or when they have found their affections lively and warm. In such cases they are quite elated; their hopes are high, and their confidence great, because they think themselves qualified for an interest in Christ. But, when they have fallen into some sins which burden their conscience, they are in the deepest agitation and alarm; not from the thought of having sinned against the God of all goodness, which is the true spring of genuine contrition, but principally because, by this, their hopes of heaven are darkened. They mourn, merely because they cannot look upon themselves as Christians; and this they, indeed, have good reason to question, when such is the sole cause of their pain. All that can be said to such, respecting the freeness and the richness of Divine grace, even to those who have hitherto deceived themselves, can yield them no peace. They cannot think of resting on the work of Christ, till their affections are again warmed; and till they can persuade themselves that they are reformed to such a degree, as to warrant them to think they are now Christians, or, at least, possessed of the prerequisites necessary to justify an application to the Saviour. They are, of course, rather angry with themselves, than truly sorry, that they have sinned against Heaven. Sin is thus viewed, not as opposed to the glory and the will of God, but as a hindrance to the enjoyment of pleasurable feelings, and the indulgence of the vague hope of happiness hereafter. Now, disquietude and fear of this kind are removed, not by looking, as guilty and ruined sinners, to the cross of Christ, but by the re-

turn of warm feelings, and a supposed reformation of conduct, attained by very different means than by faith in Christ. I beg you to observe, that, when I speak of their warmth and their reformation as attained by other means than the truth, I am far from meaning that, even when these are produced by the Gospel, they are the ground of peace to the conscience.—By no means. Our peace arises from that which is without us—the perfect work of the Saviour. It is the office of the Spirit to testify of this, and, by the truth concerning it, to warm and purify the heart. When the effect of his influence is put in the room of the sacrifice of Christ, the nature and design of his work are lost sight of, and the simplicity of the Gospel is marred. All I mean by such expressions is, that, even that on which such rest, cannot be acceptable to God, and, of course, is no recommendation to his favour. This is corroborated by the fact, that, when the fruit of the Spirit's energy, and not simply the atonement, is made the resting place of the conscience, the glory of the truth is obscured. Something of this tendency is, at times, found in Christians; but it is sinful. It evinces weakness of faith, and confused views of the Gospel; must be attended with great perplexity and embarrassment; and cannot but impede scriptural diligence and obedience.

The other case of distress to which I refer, arises from a Christian feeling keenly the guilt of having sinned against the Father of mercies, whose loving kindness is ever flowing, and is displayed in the for-

givenness of his many daily offences, and the constant advancement of his bliss. This is not felt merely when he dreads wrath. Even when the way of peace is most clearly seen, and the hope of eternal life is most lively, this sorrow is keenest. The Christian readily condemns himself. He mourns, and is in bitterness, especially when he thinks of the exceeding riches of that grace which hath provided for him an advocate who ever liveth, and hath thus made provision for his salvation, notwithstanding his many wanderings from God. This is as a fire within him, kindling every holy affection. While he again has recourse to the great High Priest in the house of God, and so finds peace to his soul, instead of indulging in sloth, he becomes more active and fervent. The overwhelming goodness and mercy of his Father produces shame and self-loathing in union with strong consolation, and good hope through grace.

Do you, my dear friend, ask, What, then, is to be said to those who are bowed down, and daily distressed in spirit by guilt and anxiety? It must be granted to such, that their distress is in itself well founded—that, deep as may be their views of their sins and demerit, they are not equal to the real state of their heart. But, granting this, let the Gospel of Christ be considered as it is exhibited in Scripture\*. Let them put the question to themselves, “Do not the words of eternal life preach salvation even to the chief of sinners?” “Do they not declare that he, who was

---

\* John iii. 14—18. Rom. iii. 20—31. 1 Tim. i. 12—16.

lifted up on the cross, can at once pardon and cleanse from all sin?—Do they not proclaim peace through the propitiatory work of Christ, even to them who are far off?—Why, then, do I not relinquish every false refuge, and cast myself, as a perishing sinner, on Christ for salvation?

Should a person be persuaded that hitherto he has been an unbeliever; be it so. *Deeply*, as in this case, he ought to feel, and *must* do, if at all properly impressed, let him *now* believe. He ought not to stand demurring, as if something must be brought with him to recommend him to the Saviour; but should, as a helpless sinner, come to him as he is, willing to receive, as a gift, all that He has to bestow. Many, who have long been distressed, and striving for relief, have found peace by the discovery that they were seeking it, “not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law.” They have been taught of God, that, whatever may have been their guilt, the blessings of the Gospel are exhibited as his free gift to all who believe, and so have been led to the Saviour “for life.”

If any, who have appeared to know the truth, are disquieted in mind, let the same Gospel be declared to them, which preaches peace to the chief of sinners, on believing in Jesus. Let each ask himself, “Do I believe the Scriptures to be the word of God? If they are, indeed, the true sayings of heaven, and if all my confidence is placed on the one perfect work of the Redeemer, then, let me rejoice in that blessed truth which I believe.—Let me commit myself to the Saviour, who invites me to come to him.—Let me,



with confidence, make all my wants known to my Father, and look, through the blood of Christ, for the faithful accomplishment of his promises." To the Saviour all are assuredly called, and even entreated to go, with the firmest persuasion, that to them, guilty as they may be, the blessings of mercy shall be given.

Self-examination, I wish you to remember, is enforced, not for the purpose of originating hope and peace under convictions of guilt, or of restoring them, when lost, through declension into sin. It is designed to ascertain what it is on which we are resting our hope before God—to detect false confidence and peace—to confirm that trust which has its foundation in the blood of Christ—to increase Christian joy by the discovery of the sanctifying influence of the Gospel—to ascertain the progress we are making—and to discover and correct what is wrong. It will be found useful, also, when we are falsely accused. It was so to Job and to Paul, who, under the reproaches of men, were happy in the testimony of a good conscience. It is an infirmity of our nature, too, that, under particular kinds of afflictions, we feel a strong propensity to contemplate rather the dark than the bright side of things, and so sink into dejection and despondency. In such circumstances, self-examination, if we are, indeed, influenced by the truth, may prove at once a cause of correction and of comfort; because it may make manifest the healing efficacy of the doctrine of the cross on our diseased souls, and so establish our faith in it, and cause us to cling to it with greater interest.



There are kinds of dejection, however, arising from the propensity I refer to, and from constitutional disorder in body and mind, which unfit for self-examination. The body requires the physician, and the mind would be unhinged by intense thought in this condition of morbid feeling. Let the Gospel itself be stated in the simplest manner, and let the afflicted be taught to dwell on it, that the truth may, by the Divine blessing, effect what the case will allow. This is the more necessary, in consequence of the propensity such have to dwell on the more profound and difficult parts of Scripture. It never can be unsuitable to state the first principles of the Gospel; for, whatever may be the character of the individual, it is fitted to do good. Physical disorders, indeed, it cannot remove. It never was designed to do so; and it derogates not from its joyful nature, that it cannot counteract their painful effects. But, where the principle of piety is really in the mind, it will call it forth, and, where it is not, it is the only thing which can implant it.

But, passing this, if at any time we find, on self-examination, that the truth is healing our souls, we become increasingly satisfied that we are not deceiving ourselves; that it is, indeed, the truth which we have believed; and that it is the grace of God on which our confidence is fixed. If we are living by the faith of the Son of God, we shall see, in some measure, of the effects of the truth; though, on examining ourselves, we shall see much, also, that is calculated to humble us. This is fitted, however, to

lead us to cleave, with renewed eagerness, to that truth, the healing power of which we, in some degree, feel. The views obtained of our evils and deficiencies may prove of the highest advantage; while the proofs we have of the sanctifying influence of the wholesome truths of the Gospel will afford us joy.

Such joy is far from being inconsistent with the deepest humility. Christian lowliness of mind by no means implies that we are unconscious of what the grace of God hath effected in us. The Scriptures suppose, that Christians are aware that they differ from others; and the addresses there made to them proceed upon the principle, that they are distinguished by the Divine goodness \*. Humility, then, is not founded on ignorance of what God hath wrought in us.—It springs from proper views of the grace which hath made us to differ †. Feeling that flesh and blood hath not revealed the truth to us, and that we owe all we are to the same grace which gave the Saviour, we adore our Father who is in heaven; and, while we are abased in the dust before him, we are grateful for what he hath done in us, as well as for us. His character and his love appear in the former as well as in the latter. While joy arises, in the first instance, from believing the testimony of God, it is preserved by continuing in the faith, and is increased, in proportion as we act and suffer under its medicinal and sanctifying influence.

Self-examination, then, is of the utmost importance.

---

\* 1 Thes. v. 5—8.

† 1 Cor. iv. 7.

It serves to ascertain whether we are holding fast the truth, or letting it slip—whether we are growing in grace, or backsliding from God, which it must be of of the greatest moment to consider. It is an error, however, to have recourse to this, under the fear which hath torment, for the purpose of obtaining deliverance from despondency or dejection under a consciousness of guilt and declension. Should we do so, and seek relief by contemplating the features of our own character far more than the work of Christ; and, particularly, if we judge of our character by the estimation of our friends, who may have very mistaken views of us and of the truth; we are going from the great foundation, are putting the feelings of our minds, and the opinions of our friends, in the room of the great work finished by the Son of God, and of Gospel, which reveals it. As the effect cannot be before the cause, we cannot be possessed of the fruits and tokens of genuine religion till we have believed in Christ. Of what are they fruits and evidences, but of faith in his finished work, and of confidence in it, as the sole ground of acceptance with God. No effects in us, then, can be proofs of our relation to the Saviour, unless they be such as we know to be produced by faith in his cross. The degree, also, in which such effects are found, will be in proportion to the simplicity and steadiness of our trust in him. With this, too, will our comfort correspond. If his work is not the beginning, and fountain head, of our confidence, the exceeding great and precious promises of the everlasting covenant can yield us no

scriptural or permanent consolation. Nor is it enough that we once believed in him ; we must continue in the faith. Our duty and our privilege is to hold fellowship with our Lord now, and not merely to remember that we did so formerly. Israel daily gathered manna, but what they gathered yesterday would not serve them beyond it, for it would not keep. Yet the recollection of what they had gathered formerly would encourage them to go and look for more. And, in like manner, the recollection of the work of God on the soul formerly will not sanctify it to-day, any more than present hunger can be allayed by recollecting the idea of what we formerly feasted on ; but yet it will be found very useful in encouraging us to return to the food which once nourished us, and to the fountain where our former thirst was assuaged. It is only in so far as it is calculated to regain our former sensations, that the remembrance of them can be of service. In a time of declension, it will be deeply humbling to look back ; and, if it be the means of recovering our affection towards sacred things, it will be truly salutary. But, if we dream of gaining peace by a mere recollection of past affections, while, at present, we are cold and insensible, we shall be sorely disappointed ; or, which is worse, we shall become the victims of a delusive satisfaction. The Psalmist called to mind his song in the night ; he communed with his own heart ; his spirit made diligent search ; but all would not do ; he found no relief till he said, “ This is my infirmity : I will remember,” said he, “ the years of the right hand of the Most High ; I will re-



member the works of the Lord \*." So let us turn from unavailing inquiries, and fix our minds on that wonderful work and deliverance, of which the ancient works of the Lord in Israel, and the deliverances vouchsafed them, were but figures. It is thus that the mind is elevated and enlightened—that the affections are warmed and captivated—and that the whole soul is stirred up to bless and to magnify the character of the Saviour. Such is the way in which scriptural peace and comfort must originate.

Allow me to remind you, that Christian consolation is designed to promote Christian holiness. Having found rest to our souls where the Divine justice found rest, the mind is awakened to a sense of the abundant goodness and rich grace of God; and is impelled, by the delightful, and yet powerful, influence of love and gratitude, to serve him with all the heart, and cheerfully to suffer for his sake. It is of the first importance to remember, also, that this consolation is increased by obedience. When we keep the path of duty, and obey the commandments of our Lord, the truth, under the influence of which we obey, is the more fixed in the heart; and the service of him who loved us and gave himself for us is found to be itself happiness. Not only will Christian principles produce good acts, but those acts will increase the principles. These two have a reciprocal influence. In living by faith, we embrace a system of motives, which daily increase in power by their habitual ope-

---

\* Psalm lxxvii.



rations. Every event, and every action, is made the means of an accession of strength to the great sources of obedience.

On the other hand, if we let the truth slip out of our minds, we shall fall into sin; and the longer we continue in the path of disobedience the more will the truth be forgotten. Before we can recover our lost peace, sin, like the accursed thing in the camp of Israel, must be cast out. I refer not to sins of infirmity, nor to the imperfections which attach to the best services of the most spiritual Christian; I speak of an allowed habit of inconsistent and sinful conduct; of a cold and earthly state of mind; and of evils which are, not the effect of a sudden and powerful temptation, but the result of a course of secret declension from spirituality of mind, and devout intercourse with God. The man who can maintain his confidence, and boast of his happiness, while in such a condition, must be hardened indeed. It becomes God to frown upon us in this state, by withholding the light of his countenance. In the very nature of things, indeed, we cannot, in such circumstances, have spiritual happiness. The remedy is to retrace our steps, and return to God by renewed faith in Christ. We must seek rest as we sought it at first. In vain do we seek to recover liveliness and ardour in religion, if we keep not the cross of Christ constantly in view. It is a conviction of his grace and mercy which influences the heart with love to him; and binds it to him with the bonds of ardent attachment, and permanent gratitude. It is the believing contemplation of the

Gospel, which mortifies sin, and produces all the fruits of Christian obedience.

The recollection of past enjoyments, when, in living by faith, sin was more bitter to us than death, and the Saviour was felt to be a refuge from all evil, and the source of all happiness, will serve to show at once our folly and our guilt. Have we, indeed, left the God of our mercies, and returned to vanity? If so, how aggravated is our sin! Is this our kindness to our Friend? Surely, the remembrance of past joys, instead of relieving, must add torture to the heart. They remind us of the goodness of God, and of our base ingratitude. Yet, blessed be his name, he invites us to return to him. We are not straitened in him, but in our own bowels. Though, like lost sheep, we have gone astray, and are entangled in our own corruptions, let us look to "the good Shepherd, that he may restore our souls." Let Calvary again occupy our hearts.

Turn, then, my dear friend, to what the Saviour did, and to the Divine delight in his character, as expressed in his glory; and thus, I trust, your difficulties will vanish. What the magnet is to the steel, will the truths, the promises, and the character of God, as exhibited in the work and kingdom of the Saviour, be to genuine religion. They will call it forth; and, besides this, they will exercise and strengthen it. This appears a plan too simple, and we naturally aim at something more complex. Thus the very simplicity of the method is that which makes it so difficult for us to adopt, and keep by it; and hence,

much of the opposition of the heart to the truth. This is illustrated by the history of Naaman the Syrian, who, in order to his cure, expected to be called to do or witness something great in the eyes of the world, and not merely to go and wash in Jordan. The same principle still blinds the minds of "the wise and the prudent of this world" to the plain, but humbling, doctrines of the cross. It is thus that they are hid from the proud, and revealed unto babes.

It is delightful to be enabled to cast our all upon God, and submissively to live by faith in Christ. In order to this much prayer is necessary. I mean not merely stated devotion, but a spiritual and devotional state of mind. The hearts of the children of God need not be discouraged. The Redeemer knows their wants, and feels for them with the tenderest sympathy. On him, then, cast all your cares, and ask of him all that you need. He can comfort and strengthen you, and cause the spirit of bondage to give place to the spirit of adoption. Look to him that he may dissipate your darkness, still the inward disquietude of the soul, and pour his richest blessings into your heart; for he giveth liberally, and never upbraideth. His cross subdues the power of sin, and cherishes every holy principle. How sweet it is to take our place there, and to enjoy all which it so wondrously displays.

I am, &c.

## LETTER VII.

## ON THE PRACTICAL INFLUENCE OF THE TRUTH.

The Divine character displayed in the Gospel—Its fitness to impart peace—Mistakes regarding it—Its influence in promoting sanctification—The necessity of Christian watchfulness—Self-righteousness not the only evil of which men are in danger—The promise of Divine aid—Conclusion.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I SHALL now direct your attention to some general observations on the practical influence of the truth. I begin with remarking, that the character of our Lord is the genuine character of Jehovah. God is in himself invisible to us. The most correct description of him, unless illustrated by facts, could make but a feeble impression. The mind must be aided in its conceptions of his glory by a palpable manifestation of his attributes. Such a display is afforded of his character in the person and the work of the Saviour. It is given in the whole history of his life, but its full splendour appears in his atoning sacrifice. Indeed, the very name of the Redeemer was, in the minds of the sacred writers, inseparably linked with that illustrious act by which he poured out his soul unto death. Not that they confined their attention to the closing scene of his life; they connected with it all that preceded, and viewed him, throughout the whole of his humiliation, as gradually advancing towards the wondrous completion of his sacrifice. His character, at

all times, bore on it the impress of divinity, which gives the highest importance to his history. In reading the displays of his power—his deeds of high benevolence—his feelings of tenderness, sympathy, and compassion—his unwearied course of self-denied exertion—and his unparalleled and protracted sufferings, we have before us the history of God in our nature, and see his perfections in a light the most familiar and engaging. The brightness of the Divine glory is represented to us in our own nature, and through the medium of human feelings, affections, and passions; so that, instead of being dazzled with its lustre, we can contemplate it with the deepest interest, and the utmost steadiness. In his cross, the Almighty is seen combining all that is profound in wisdom and understanding—all that is awful in holiness, justice, and judgment—and all that is attractive in love, mercy, and grace. In the man of sorrows, we see wisdom clothed with the most engaging meekness and gentleness; and the grandeur of Almighty power softened by the most tender compassion, and the most generous love. While his sufferings attract our special interest, it is not pain or misery so much that commands our attention, as affliction and calamity, dignified by the most cheerful resignation, and the most enlightened and willing submission to the will of Heaven. In them is united, with the most distressing and complicated woes, all that is sublime and elevated—all that is pure and holy—and all that is amiable and attractive. Here is a mind infallible in judgment—to which the Almighty is fully known—



to which all beings and worlds stand clearly revealed—a mind occupying the highest vantage-ground—pouring contempt on all that the worms of the earth call glorious—and giving itself up to all that men count wretched and disgraceful. In his wondrous work, we see the curse of the law exhausted, and Divine wisdom employed in harmonizing the exercise of righteousness and mercy. While justice and holiness are displayed in their highest glories, they are transformed into sources of blessings to the most guilty of sinners.

Permit me, then, to lead your attention for a moment to the fitness of such an exhibition to impart peace to the trembling conscience. If guilt is the parent of fear, this view of the cross and character of Christ, exhibiting the God of truth and of purity as at once the just God and the Saviour, must be calculated to tranquillize the heart, when dreading the tremendous consequences of sin. Many, alas, seek peace by lowering the character of God and the demands of his law; so as to suit what they imagine to be their actual or possible attainment. And when, even after this, they cannot persuade themselves that they are what they ought to be, they trust to the Divine benevolence, as if it were allied to weakness. They forget that, as the moral Ruler of the world, it behoves God to maintain the honour of his law and government; so that, while sin is pardoned, it may not appear to be connived at; and that, while the sinner is forgiven, he may also be sanctified by the very means of his deliverance from wrath.

There are also numbers who err in a different way. When alarmed by deep convictions of guilt, the mind is apt to dwell on the most tremendous views of the Almighty. He is contemplated only as armed for vengeance, and as frowning in awful wrath from the tribunal of judgment. His character is considered as marked by all that is severe and unrelenting; unsoftened by any touches of mercy and loving kindness. Such a view of God must fill with the most tormenting fear and slavish dread. Now, the Gospel meets every such false notion, and declares that God, while he is light, is also love. It exhibits the most delightful harmony between mercy and justice, goodness and holiness, in the salvation of sinners. The self-righteousness of the heart opposes this method of salvation, not only by directly seeking eternal life by works of law, under the notion that we are not so low and helpless as to need salvation in a way so humbling, but also in other forms. Thus, sometimes when conscious of guilt, and alarmed by the dread of wrath, the mind feels as if it were an act of presumption to expect mercy in its present state. It refuses to admit the consolations of the Gospel till it can think better of itself. This is a spurious humility; as if, before we can receive the blessings of salvation, we must, at least, in some measure, be worthy of them. Now, what is this but the spirit of self-righteousness opposing the pure Gospel of Christ? It is needless to distinguish between seeking justification wholly and partially by merit. The latter is as inconsistent with a cordial submission to the Divine method of justifica-

tion as the former. On the same principle, it is vain to distinguish between seeking redemption, independently of the work of Christ, and seeking to qualify ourselves by previous good dispositions for obtaining the forgiveness of sin through that work. The latter is only a more refined way of opposing the humbling doctrines of the cross.

Permit me, my dear friend, here to refer to a particular class in whom the evil of such a system is exemplified. They are awakened to a sense of guilt—are, in a measure, sensible of the importance of religion—and feel the vanity of the world. They are far from being profane; yet they know not the genuine Gospel of Christ. They observe the forms of religion, and maintain a correct exterior deportment; but pursue a joyless and gloomy course, not seeing how a sinner can obtain the benefit of the work of the Saviour through believing the Gospel. They accordingly endeavour to obtain this benefit by exertions of their own. Through a want of knowledge, however, of the powerful influence of Gospel motives, they fail in their attempts at obedience; and, while they unavailingly struggle against the evil of their hearts, they are not seldom driven to a state bordering on distraction. Hard is the yoke, and overwhelming is the burden, to such. They feel that there is something wrong, and often inquire how relief may be found. Their counsellors frequently put them in an improper direction; and, what is still more to be lamented, they are startled or offended when the simplicity of Scripture truth, and the richness and freeness of Divine grace,

are clearly set before them. They have been led to associate a salvation by grace with licentiousness, and are therefore afraid to listen to it. They are deceived by false representations of the tendency of what is, in fact, the uncorrupted Gospel of Christ. In many instances, they mistake speculatists and unholy pretenders for real friends of such doctrines. In other instances, they confound the scriptural statements of the truth with statements which, by mistake in some cases, and with a bad design in others, are called by the same name; but which are, in fact, very different. It is not surprising that, to such persons, the blessings of the Gospel should appear unattainable, and its joys a forbidden paradise. The consequences to themselves, as well as to others, are most pernicious. The worst views are thus given of the nature and the fruits of genuine religion. The careless consider them as religious characters; and observing their dark and comfortless spirit, their joyless and heavy course, and mistaking all this for the fruit of piety, they are stumbled and hardened. How different from these are the fruits of genuine religion!

Good were it for the characters, circumstanced as I have mentioned, did they turn their undivided attention to the pure testimony and promise of God, and venture their all on the word of him who cannot lie. In vain do they attempt to make their peace with heaven. Christ is our only peace-offering. With his expiring breath he declared that his work was finished; and the blessed truth is confirmed by his resurrection and his glory. Through this "he hath come



and preached peace." To whom is the proclamation of forgiveness made? Let the prayer of our Lord for his *murderers*, and his commandment to preach the Gospel first to them, answer. The design of his coming, which was not to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance; his conduct in associating with publicans and sinners, which drew down the reproaches of the self-righteous\*; his admirable parables of the lost sheep, the lost piece of money, and the prodigal son, all illustrate the direct and explicit declarations of his immediate ambassadors, that there are none excluded who do not exclude themselves. The ground of acceptance is the one propitiation of Christ; and, in order to an actual interest in that propitiation, no previous work, no preparatory process, is necessary. All are called, without delay, to believe the testimony of God concerning his Son; and, in believing it, the blessings of redemption are received. This is language which we understand. We know what it is to receive a testimony in other cases, and that the effect produced by it always corresponds with its nature; there can therefore be nothing incomprehensible in the mode of receiving the testimony of heaven.

I shall now direct your attention to another class of characters. There are some that, upon the whole, rest for acceptance on the work of Christ; but who, through indistinct and confined views of the Gospel, are yet very much perplexed. Owing to this, *they*

---

\* Luke xv. 2.



also suffer considerable distress of spirit, and, in some measure too, give an unlovely and injurious representation of religion. It is matter of deep regret when any, of whom we have reason to hope well, discover jealousy of more scriptural statements of the truth. It is painful to see them associating with such statements an encouragement to laxness in obedience, and mistaking them for doctrines of another description. Sometimes they are injured by an improper manner of stating the truth, into which mistaken and injudicious friends have occasionally fallen. At other times they are stumbled by the sinful spirit of some professed adherents to such views of the Gospel, who, while they have the word of God in their mouth, are strangers, at least in a great measure, to its sanctifying influence. It were well for such to consider, that stumbling blocks, of a similar nature, occur among those who, in words, are one with themselves. They do not deem this fact an objection against the truth of the Gospel, when urged by an enemy of revelation; and neither ought objections, from similar facts, to be held valid in the other case. Such is the corruption of the human heart, that the most sacred truths are frequently abused. They were so when the apostles preached, and the same evil may be expected now; but still, where the Gospel is really received, it will be the power of God to salvation. It doubtless becomes Christians to examine the scriptures with care, to bring every thing to this test, and to abide by the principle, that, as the spirit of God sanctifies the soul by the truth, so, the more fully its

true glory is known, the greater will be its influence. Did such but see the truth clearly ; did they cordially embrace it in its native simplicity, and cast themselves wholly on the grace and work of the Saviour, their disquietude would cease. When the mind thus reposes on him, he is found to be a " refuge from the storm, and a covert from the tempest ; as rivers of water in a dry place, and as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." Then is the suitableness of the Gospel found, and then do we experience how ample and free is the remedy which it provides. From slavish dread we pass into a state of peace, of confidence, and of hope—God is contemplated as an affectionate Father—the love of Christ is seen, and its constraining power is felt—the law of heaven, the sum of which is love, is written upon the heart—the soul is freed from the influence of this world, and is, in a measure, moulded into conformity to the will of its Lord.

In the same way in which the mind is at first changed, must its progressive sanctification be promoted. As in vain we struggle against the evils of our heart while keeping aloof from the Saviour, so, after we have come to Christ, we must continue to live by faith in him ; for otherwise there will be a poverty of motives, and our progress will be stopped. When we find, in consequence of this, our exertions fail, we are apt to be discouraged. But surely it is not difficult to see the cause of our failure. If aware of the claims of the Divine law, we must be convinced that it is not the mere knowledge of duty—the

mere dread of evil consequences—the vague hope of happiness—or the strength of our vows and resolutions—but more liberal and powerful principles, that can give us the victory over sin.

Painful means are often necessary to cure us of the strange propensity we feel to depart from the faith of the Gospel, even after we have been taught of God. The great remedy consists in keeping up the devout and steady contemplation of the Saviour. It is his cross that enables us to vanquish the world. There we have the confirmation of the fact, that we are by nature children of wrath, and can only be saved through his precious blood. There we are taught that we are but pilgrims and strangers—that tribulation will assuredly mark our course below—but that fellowship with Christ in his sufferings will be followed by fellowship with him in his glory. To a mind, fixed with intenseness and devotion on the cross and sufferings of the Redeemer, earthly things will be stripped of their attractions. By this means “the world is crucified to us, and we unto the world.” From the cross we turn to the crown, and the glories displayed on Calvary are connected with the bright glories of Mount Zion. It is here that a pure and spiritual taste is inspired and maintained. Here the false and bewildering glare of all earthly things is distinctly laid open. No longer do they intoxicate us with delusive joys, or fascinate us with their boasted glories. The heart is attracted to heaven, where the Saviour dwells. We feel the power of his resurrection in the confirmation of our faith and our hope;

in its imparting to us a heavenly temper ; in its supporting, animating, and purifying us under all our trials.

In contemplating Christ, we fix on a pattern of perfection : for in him we see how the Almighty himself would live ; nay, which is more, how he actually did live among men. We cannot equal his comprehensive views of all connected with this and the invisible world ; but we see his estimate of both ; and, in proportion to our faith in him, and our attachment to him, are we moulded in conformity to his word and character. Our wisdom lies in entering into all his views on every subject ; so as to esteem and to despise, to love and to hate, to pursue and to shun, in every case, precisely as he did. Every principle of generosity and of piety ought to influence us to follow him, and to take up his cross ; submitting, with cheerfulness, when necessary, to the loss of all that is dear to us. As we are saved by free and everlasting love, we must blush at the thought of our rebellion against such goodness, and feel ourselves drawn to walk humbly with our God. Did Jesus live a life of pain and sorrow, of affliction and toil, and can we decline to follow him ? Can we deem it too much that the servant should be as the Lord ?—Far be it. Let our all be given up to him who gave even himself for us. Never let us harbour the unworthy thought, that too much can be resigned for him who for us veiled his glory, and gave his life for our redemption. Small, indeed, must be our greatest returns of gratitude, when compared with the benefits and with the



sacrifices he made to procure them. Say, then, is there not every thing in him to engage the heart, and to fill it with all that can purify and satisfy it?

Allow me, my dear friend, in connection with this, to make a few remarks on the importance of vigilance and circumspection. Since the life of a Christian lies in the Divine favour, and in fellowship with heaven, surely every one who feels this must value the blessing, and will be afraid of whatever has a tendency to deprive him of it. This fear is quite different from distrust of the goodness or the promise of God. His goodness appears, not in giving us happiness independently of holiness, but by connecting it with fellowship with himself. Indeed in no other way, with reverence be it said, can he bless us with true enjoyment. The fear I speak of must be associated with love; for, in proportion as we love God, we must dread his frown, and, of course, avoid whatever would displease him. It is also connected with the enjoyment of happiness in spiritual things; for, the more happy we are in holy pursuits, the more shall we be afraid of whatever would produce carnality of mind. It springs from a deep conviction of our own weakness and depravity. Experience deepens this conviction; for often have we found ourselves broken down at what we deemed our strongest point. The feeblest and most trifling temptations have foiled us. Frequently do we find that, from a state of comparative activity and enjoyment in the service of God, we imperceptibly sink into a state of coldness and sloth. Here the recorded failures of the ancient worthies are highly instructive.



Such views of our danger will induce us to trust in the Saviour, to lay firm hold of his promises, and to hold fast the truth as our only hope; and thus shall we be saved from the fear which hath torment, and be enabled to endure unto the end. Of distrustful fear we have an awful example in the Israelites, who, through unbelief, fell short of the promised inheritance. We fall into the same error when we refuse to take refuge in the favour of God, and in his faithful promise—when we are afraid to place unsuspecting confidence in the sacrifice of Christ—and when we so fear, that we shall not obtain the victory over sin, as to sink into despondency and consequent inactivity. In this case we must be deeply sinning against God; and, to our own incalculable injury, rejecting the merciful invitations of the Saviour. Such a state of mind will lead, either to a course of self-righteous labour to make our peace with God, or to abandon, in despair, all concern about salvation. From this state of wretchedness the Redeemer came to deliver us. He imparts to us a filial spirit, and, under its influence, we are enabled to “cleanse ourselves from all kinds of iniquity, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God.”

It is an error to suppose that self-righteousness is the only evil of which we are in danger; for depravity operates in a vast variety of ways. From sin of every kind the Lord delivers us by putting his fear in our hearts. We greatly need this; for, the moment we get self-confident, and our exertions languish, we naturally and rapidly decline into an earthly spirit.

Constant watchfulness, and a perpetual effort against sin, must be kept up. The world is around us and within us, and, to resist it, requires an incessant conflict; for the suspension of the struggle, even one day, will add vigour to our enemy, and weaken our strength. The recollection of our sinfulness, and liability to be influenced by objects of sense, together with our feeble principles of resistance, ought to convince us that we have no safety but in wakeful vigilance and constant exertion. Hence, we ought to confide in God, who alone is able to preserve us in all dangers. Confidence in him ought ever to be united with the utmost diligence in the use of the means of sanctification, and with the consideration of every motive that can influence the heart. The Saviour tells us to be of good cheer, for he hath overcome the world. He is our shepherd, and never shall we want. He never slumbers nor sleeps. Like the shepherds of Judea, he exercises a nightly, as well as a daily, vigilance over his flock. In him, then, let us put our trust, and never let self-confidence for one moment prevail. Thus did David sing of his love and of his care; when blending, with pious feelings of gratitude to the Redeemer, the fond recollections of his youth, he gave vent, in the 23d Psalm, to the delightful emotions of his heart.

Forget not that the Spirit of God is promised to all who ask him, and that, through him, the Saviour strengthens us for all things. In the day of trial and of conflict, when you feel your afflictions and evils, recollect that you have a high priest, of the most kind

and compassionate character. You are not left alone, so that a sense of weakness need not discourage you. He who hath called his people by his grace will bear with them, meekly and patiently, all the way. Even Moses failed in this; but our high priest and leader will no more cast us off than "a nursing father" would cast away a child for its crying or frowardness. To raise still higher our views of his fond affection, it is compared to the warmest attachment "of a mother." He was himself tried, and knows, from experience, what aid and care we need. Much, indeed, there is in us that is fitted to provoke him to cast us off. Our frequent transgressions—the coldness and instability of our hearts—the heavy aggravations of our sins—all tend to illustrate that long suffering which bears with us notwithstanding. There is not a day but we sin against him; yet he freely forgives, and richly blesses us. What a mercy to have such an advocate with the Father! In looking afresh to his propitiatory blood, that same mercy, which at first relieved us, again flows to us; and, in going to the throne of grace for all blessings, as the reward of his work, and the fruit of his intercession, we obtain the desire of our hearts.

I conclude with reminding you, that one great encouragement in the Christian course is the prospect of sharing in the bliss and the glory of the Saviour. Was his spirit cheered amidst all his distress by the bright prospect before him, and shall not the prize set before us animate our hearts? A hope so exalted should induce us to yield ourselves entirely to him,

and to purify ourselves because he is pure. Have we already the earnest of this blessedness; and shall we grieve the Holy Spirit by indulging in sin, and thus deprive ourselves of all true enjoyment? Living in the daily and devout contemplation of the things of God, we shall enjoy a happiness which will cure us of attachment to the momentary and delusive pleasures of time, and increase our desire for the pure and the unchanging joys of the world of light. Let that love, and holiness, and peace be sought which satisfy the redeemed above; and even now we shall progressively increase in that bliss which shall be enjoyed in perfection in the temple of God.

I am, &c.

## LETTER VIII.

### HINTS ON THE MEANS AND HAPPY EFFECTS OF SANCTIFICATION.

The Gospel addresses men as sinners as well as sufferers—Its great object is to save from sin—Is not an exhibition of benevolence only, but of the whole character of God—This essential to the happiness of man—Holiness and happiness inseparably connected—The importance of the example of believers—The influence of the example of Christ—Christian joy connected with repentance—Conclusion.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

IN my last letter I called your attention to a general view of the practical influence of the truth, and in this I shall suggest to you some additional hints on



the means and happy effects of sanctification. We ought never to forget that we are, not only sufferers, but also criminals. We need not merely consolation, but deliverance from the power of sin. This should be seriously pondered. There is a way of speaking and acting in relation to the Gospel, which converts it into little more than a proclamation of forgiveness, and throws into the shade its principal glory. It is, indeed, a glorious provision for the happiness of man ; but this object it effects by delivering us not merely from the curse of the law, but from our spiritual maladies, and conforming us, in principle and deportment, to the pure and holy character of God. Christian comfort is frequently represented as if it consisted wholly in the peace and the enjoyment which flow from the hope of escaping hell, and obtaining heaven. Such comfort arises merely from the natural satisfaction which must be felt in deliverance from pain, as such, and the hope of some kind of enjoyment when obliged to quit this world. But the fact is, true religion is happiness in God.—Holiness is itself happiness, and not merely an accompaniment of it. It is as absurd to say, that we can be truly happy without it, as to say, we can be well without health, or, that we can be saved without salvation. Christian sanctity, in spirit and in manners, is not merely an evidence of salvation ; it is the very blessing itself.

We ought to remember, that the same thing which exhibits the pardoning mercy of God, and delivers from the fear of woe, is that which purifies the heart. Precious is the recollection, that the cross, which is



the foundation of our hope, is the means of humbling us; and, that the same truth which imparts to us the joy of deliverance, fills with that genuine sorrow and heartfelt contrition which lie at the root of all true piety. Faith in the Gospel, and holiness of character, are not merely two things tied together, so to say; for the latter emanates from the former. The seed in the ground and the plant above it are not united by a mere external bond, but are connected by nature; and so it is with the seed of Divine truth and Christian excellence.

What is our passage through this life, but a state of moral and spiritual discipline, by which the God of all grace is training us up for the blessedness of heaven, by the gradual acquisition of that holiness of character which is essential to our happiness there? The heavenly temple is the seat of perfect bliss; because there the principles, the tastes, and the pursuits of the heart are all pure and spiritual. There the whole of the society are one in judgment, affection, and pursuit with their God and Father, and with their elder brother. In their social intercourse, there is, in consequence, the utmost harmony, and the purest affection. There the genius of the Gospel is clearly seen—its spirit is felt; and the most sacred and endearing union with God, and with one another, is experienced to be its natural result, in all in whom it dwells. Happiness is found to be proportioned to the degree in which the mind is positively conformed to Jehovah, who is seen to be the perfection of beauty, the source and the centre of all excellence and blessedness.

Were the redeemed in heaven to be told that, by transgressing the Divine law, their happiness would be increased; and that, in being freed from its yoke, their pleasures would be multiplied; they would be struck with the ignorance which could dictate the suggestion—would, from the heart, pity it—and would at once repel it, with holy indignation, as impious in the extreme. With the utmost energy, they would exclaim, that sin was in itself wretchedness, as well as the just cause of the Divine indignation. With holy rapture, they would declare, that obedience and devotion formed the very element of genuine bliss; and, that conformity to the will of God was the very spring of all their exalted and unutterable joys. It were in vain to address to them the language which has sometimes been virtually used on earth, namely, that the love of God, being the love of one who is unchangeable, is, of course, immutable; and that, therefore, it does not depend on obedience, but may be enjoyed independently of it. In this way have many reasoned, and so abused and distorted the gospel of peace. The grace of God, however, is very different from capricious fondness. There was nothing, indeed, in us to attract the Divine complacency; but, on the contrary, every thing fitted to excite the Divine abhorrence. Mere wretchedness called forth the pity and the generous compassion of God; and, influenced by pure commiseration, he gave his Son to be a sin-offering for us.—On him we had no claim; he loved us “because he loved us;” and in all he was self-moved. But, still, to say that there was no goodness in us to excite the Divine sympathy, and to say it was alto-

gether without reason, only so it was, and so it must be, are very different indeed. The grace of God ought not be viewed as a mere declaration of the Divine goodness, on the ground of which we are warranted to say, "God has revealed his love to me—I am the special charge of his Providence—nothing can hurt me—and, of course, I may live as I please, for, do what I may, all shall be well with me at last." Should such a principle govern the mind; instead of being conformed to the Divine character, and walking humbly with God, the soul would be the seat of all that is proud and rebellious.

It is not a simple declaration of the Divine love that changes and gladdens the heart. That which renovates and blesses it, is the exhibition of the Divine love, in connexion with all and each of the Divine excellencies, which is given in the Gospel.—In the plan of redemption through Christ, there is a manifestation of the Divine character, which exalts the whole of the Divine perfections, so as to produce in our minds the most full and delightful complacency in the united glories of Jehovah. His love appears in the most dignified form, infinitely removed from every thing like weakness, and associated with all that is venerable. Here purity, as well as love; justice, as well as mercy; holiness, as well as grace; and truth, as well as goodness, are displayed in all their unsullied glory. This manifestation of love is quite different from that vague view of it to which I have just referred; and which, whatever flashes of selfish gladness, and spurious gratitude, it

may call forth, can never excite the love of the Divine holiness and rectitude, nor command the high esteem and profound veneration of the heart.—Never can such a false view of the Divine love produce the union of the utmost confidence, and the deepest humility—of the warmest gratitude, and godly fear.

The mere declaration of the Divine benevolence, then, cannot impart genuine happiness—there must, in order to this, be a display of the whole character of God. His grace is not to be viewed as an end to which every thing else is to be made subservient; but, on the contrary, as a means to an end. It must be viewed as it is united in the Gospel, with all of the Divine excellencies; and as united with them for the very purpose of bringing the soul back to God, and producing in us corresponding principles. When this stupendous manifestation of the Divine glories is perceived and felt, our spirits come to be in union with the will of God—our souls re-echo the language of his heart—and we sound the praises of his matchless excellencies. We thus know, from experience, that his service is perfect freedom; and that he is the happiest and most honoured worshipper who is most like to the God of salvation. Sin comes to be associated in our minds with the murder of the Son of God—with the compassion of him who did not spare him—and with the love of Christ which passeth knowledge. We are led to seek, not an undefined happiness, but blessedness, resulting from the exercise of those hallowed principles which adorned the character of our best and tried benefactor. We already find it to be our



highest bliss below to enjoy a foretaste of this exalted joy. In proportion as we participate in the feelings and the exercises of the man of sorrows, do we grow in meetness for the company of those pure and exalted spirits who encircle the Divine throne. Even now we are citizens of the heavenly city; we are members of the great family named of the God and Father of Christ, and have an interest in all their enjoyments. The Gospel hath drawn aside the veil which covers the world of glory, and calls upon us, as characters whose citizenship is in heaven, to unite with the heavenly angels, the ancient worthies, and with all the company of heaven, in praising him who sitteth upon the throne, and in adoring the Lamb. Is this, indeed, our high privilege; and shall we be indifferent to such bliss, and to the pleasures,—the unspeakable pleasures,—connected with access into the holiest of all?

It is in this way that the love of God is revealed in the happiness of man. It is thus that we, who at first were but the objects of pity and compassion, come, by a renovation of mind, to be the objects of complacency. When first we found mercy, we admired the free and tender compassion of God,—the generous and disinterested love of the Redeemer; and, while we adored the Divine goodness, it was the grief of our hearts that he, who had thus pitied and compassionately relieved us, could not view us with complacency as characters amiable in his sight. The desire of our hearts was, to resemble him who loved us, and gave himself for us. Gratitude excited this desire—admi-



ration and esteem excited it. The question was put, "How shall I express the feelings of my heart for mercies so great, and still flowing towards me?" In reply, we were directed to the precepts of the Saviour: These enjoin nothing but what he himself exemplified. Obedience to them is the same as conformity to his character. The grateful and holy desires of the heart are thus met and satisfied. In proportion as these sacred principles are cherished, is the service of Christ found to be its own reward. The mind is not satisfied with the forgiveness of sin and the hope of heaven, but pants after bliss, in conformity to the will and character of the Saviour: Indeed, no mind that is not fixed on spiritual things as its nourishment can be happy. How delightfully does David, in the 119th Psalm, sing of his blessedness in studying and keeping the law of his God. In his eyes, not all the boasted wealth and grandeur of the world was once to be compared with this. Never let the sophistry of a foolish heart and a vain world, beguile us out of this happiness. Let every faculty be roused into exertion; and let our desire and our aim be, that every revolving day of this fleeting scene may exhibit our growing conformity to the will of our Lord. Let his transforming character engage our hearts; and, in each successive period here, let it inscribe on us a new feature of the heavenly worshippers, who see his glory, and are assimilated to him. It is thus that we shall attain the great object of our ambition, which is full conformity to the Redeemer; and that we shall attract the full complacency of his heart.

Delight in being the objects of his approbation and complacency, is far from being a self-righteous satisfaction: It is the delight of one who, having had much forgiven, loves much: It is the happiness of a heart anxious to express gratitude and esteem, and transported in having had an opportunity of giving vent to its emotions, in ways which meet the wishes and the taste of the much loved and respected benefactor: It is the bliss of a mind, fired by love for excellence, and happy, in being in some measure assimilated to its glory: It is the transport of one who, while he rests his all for eternity on the cross of Christ, listens to the precious promise of the everlasting covenant, "I will put my laws in their minds, and write them in their hearts;" and trusts not in his own strength, but in the grace of God. Such a character sees and rejoices that the great design of God, in redeeming the guilty from the curse, is to conform them to himself; and so to bless them with that exalted and hallowed enjoyment which results from fellowship with him.

The justification of Abraham was an instance of free mercy, and of pure compassion; but his blessedness advanced as he became "the friend of God;" It was in that likeness to God—that union of heart with him—that sweet fellowship with him—that entire confidence in him—and that complacency and delightful approbation with which Jehovah himself regarded him, that his blessedness was completed. The Divine love to Christians is still, in the first instance, pure compassion; but the great object of the Divine pity is, that they may be brought to happiness in the enjoy-

ment of holy fellowship with God. The stupendous display of the Divine perfections in the cross of Christ has all the force of a pattern to guide, and a motive to inspire. With this in our eye, obedience becomes easy. We do not dread merely the consequences of sin; we hate it, and revolt from it, as combining all that is base—all that is opposed to worth—and all that is incompatible with the feelings of gratitude and affection. This raises us above the fear of man; endears to us the love of the Saviour; cherishes the love of him in the heart; and assimilates us to the glorious character of God. When illuminated by the brightness of this glory, a spiritual taste is acquired—divine things are relished—they are experienced to be in themselves truly good and satisfying: they are felt to be the source of delightful rest; and all of them being traced to God, fellowship with him is ardently sought, and carefully kept up. The revelation of the Divine glory is the medicine, the virtue of which is made manifest, in its conquest of the corrupt inclinations of the heart; in its curing the disorders in the affections; subduing the hostility of the mind to God; and bringing our whole nature into subjection to his will. When this influence predominates (alas! that it so little does so), it attracts the heart of the sinner to the Saviour—it charms his soul—it wins his affections—and becomes a bond of union the most endearing, and the most firm. The mind becomes assimilated to its Lord, who fills every heart in which he dwells, with the very spirit and disposition of heaven. This work, indeed, is very imperfect

here ; but it will be perfected hereafter. Even now, it is proportioned to the measure of our faith.

We accordingly see a very high degree of it in the ancient worthies, and in the primitive Christians.—Time would fail, were I to attempt to point to you the many passages of Scripture, in which we are furnished with examples of the power of the Gospel. Now, the Divine word is the same to us that it was to those, who through faith and patience are inheriting the promises. We have the same Saviour ; his love is as warm now as when he suffered on the tree ; his promises are immutable ; his grace cannot fail ; and his mercy endureth for ever. We have the same free access to the throne of grace that was granted to them ; and we are assured, that whatsoever we ask in the name of Christ we shall receive.

With these privileges before us, let us, my Dear Friend, think of the multitudes already before the throne, who have been brought “out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” Let us contemplate the faith and patience of the approved servants of God, of whom a great cloud is exhibited to us in Scripture. This is not inconsistent with the constant contemplation of the Saviour, for the Scriptures have united the consideration of his character with that of his people. Their example will serve to encourage us to form our character on his, for their success manifests the practicability of a considerable degree of likeness to it, and is fitted to excite us to emulate those who derived all their excellence from that



very grace which is freely exhibited to ourselves. There are but few that attain the height at which they aim, and hence men, in every case, ought to take a high standard. It will be well for us to study the characters of those who have been most distinguished lights in the church of Christ. Let us also study the excellencies of the most eminent of our departed Christian friends, and the most consistent living characters.—There are numbers who, though upon the whole truly religious, can hardly be taken as examples: There are others who seem as if they lived on the borders of the two kingdoms—the kingdom of Christ, and that of Satan. They seek to unite the service of God with that of Mammon—an attempt at once vain and criminal. There are not a few of sweet dispositions, amiable tempers, and benevolent deportment, who are strangers to the power of religion. Its forms they observe; they are willing to converse on it; they do so with a degree of seriousness, and cannot be said to have violent prejudices against it; while yet they have not, in truth, been imbued with its spirit. Such we ought to treat with the greatest kindness and affection, manifesting towards them the meekness and gentleness of Christ. They are not, however, patterns for our imitation. In certain respects, indeed, they may,—for not seldom do such act a part which may put some who are genuine Christians, but possessed of what is termed a bad natural temper, very much to the blush. Besides, whatever in any person is in itself good and praise-worthy, ought to be imitat-



ed\*. But I speak of the duty of taking for our pattern, those who are, or were, the most distinguished for excellence—the brightest examples of piety—persons by whom we may be elevated to a more devotional spirit—a more heavenly state of mind—and a more holy conversation.† We stand in need of every excitement which can be had in the stimulating influence of fervent piety, and active exertion—in the instructive and edifying example of a spiritual mind—and in the consoling and animating display of patient and happy suffering. Such characters shed a light on our path to glory.

It is our happiness to have many such set before us in Scripture; and in following them we cannot be misled, because their character stands approved of heaven. But in as far as others now resemble them, and in as far as our departed friends and relatives were like to them, we are called to imitate them also. The emulations to be cultivated among Christians are altogether different from the unlovely rivalries which obtain in the world. It is for us to aim at being like in real excellence to those who have finished their course, and to strive who shall be most like those whose characters now most exemplify the character of Christ. The men of the world dwell upon great earthly characters, to resemble whom they propose as their highest ambition. Christians ought to learn from this, and so hallow the principles which others abuse or carry not to their proper objects. If the

---

\* Phil. iv. 8.

† Heb. xii. 1.

irreligious avail themselves of the numbers who wage war with God, to harden their hearts and stifle the voice of conscience; shall not we be animated by the example of the many who have been the warm and the devoted servants of the Saviour? Let their zeal and their activity put us to the blush, cause us to shake off sloth, and with renewed ardour to follow the Redeemer. When we think of the departed, shall we not bless God on their behalf? While we recollect their death, and stand by their grave, let us seek to participate in their triumph, and to unite in their song. They served God here, and now they are with him. They and we are not parted for ever. When we bade them farewell, and they replied in the same accents, it was not bidding each other an eternal adieu—it was in the delightful hope of meeting again where no farewells are known—where the pang of separation shall never be felt. Now, it is by following them “in faith and in patience,” that this hope is realized.

This spirit of imitation accords with the tenor of revelation; in which we are taught, not by words only, but in a particular manner by actions and events. There is not a temper, disposition, or action required in Scripture that is not realized before us in the history of the saints. The whole is seen in one view in the wondrous character of Christ. Here there is no flaw—no danger of mistaking a failing for an excellence, or evil for good. It is only so far as others resemble him that they are to be imitated. Such is human nature, that we need, and are greatly profited by

the example of fellow creatures; but the Saviour claims our special attention, and with him all others should be compared. Indeed, one great benefit derived from the example of fellow Christians arises from the opportunity and means it affords us of comparing the Saviour with them, and so bringing him more directly before us, and impressing his character more upon our hearts. He is himself, then, the great pattern of all excellence; and he it is whom we ought steadily and constantly to follow. To him obedience, at once implicit and enlightened, may be yielded. In him we see every excellence, both in doing and in suffering—every holy temper and disposition—every deed of piety and benevolence,—all flowing from the most sacred and exalted love to God, and the warmest love to man. His mind ever rises above the present scene: There is a constant abstraction and elevation of soul marking the most heavenly temper of heart. In a word, from first to last—throughout the whole of his trying course of sorrow and exertion, and eminently at the final consummation of his woes—he was all that he taught.

This is our model: To this character it is the wise and gracious appointment of our Father that we should be conformed\*. It is not mere freedom from flagrant sin, nor even a life irreproachable in the eyes of mankind, that constitutes conformity to the Saviour: Even should this be accompanied by many amiable and beneficial qualities, and much that is in itself good

---

\* Rom. viii. 29. Phil. ii. 5. 1 John iii. 5.

and praiseworthy; still, if we have nothing more, we shall fall short of exemplifying the character of him in whom God delighteth. To be like to him, it behoves us to copy his whole character—to imbibe his principles and views—to judge as he did of God, of the Divine law, of sin and holiness, of this world and that which is to come, of the true dignity and happiness of man, and of the whole plan of redemption: To be like him is to feel that God is in the right, and that we are in the wrong; and that, had he left us to our desert, we had righteously perished in our sins: It is to imitate him in his love to God, his zeal for his glory, his attachment to his cause, his readiness to do and to suffer whatever he required, and to feel with him that the loss of the Divine favour is the ruin of happiness: It is to imitate him in his love to his bitterest enemies, and in his patient and meek resignation in the midst of the heaviest pains, injuries, and reproaches: It is to copy his generous disregard of personal ease and enjoyment, and his constant kindness to others, even while he himself was in a paroxysm of distress. It is like him to be determined and firm in adhering to truth, and persevering in the path of duty, however great and many the difficulties which we may have to encounter: It appears in humbly and gratefully acquiescing in the plan of redemption through his blood; and in glorying in it as an exhibition of the Divine character, which reflects the highest honour on God, while it provides for the salvation of sinners: In a word, it is like him to be of one mind with God; and so to drink at the fountain-head of enjoyment—to



participate in the blessedness of the Almighty himself, and to have every power of the soul transformed into his likeness. Say then, are not conformity to the Redeemer and genuine happiness inseparably connected? Are they not in many respects the very same thing?

I shall refer you, my dear friend, once more to the important consideration, that it is not the mere declaration of the Divine benevolence that is the cause of happiness. Happiness is imparted not merely by securing the sinner from danger, but by renovating his mind, and imbuing it with the sacred principles of the Saviour's character. The joy of a Christian is not that of a rebel, who, through the weakness, the partiality, or the mistaken affection of his king, has obtained a pardon and escaped punishment; and who, having got beyond the reach of his prince, can in security add, without fear, one act of continued rebellion to another. Far be it. It is the happiness of a rebel, who not only has been freely pardoned, but is cordially reconciled to his kind and righteous sovereign; who is brought to see the enormity of his crimes—is deeply humbled and filled with heartfelt contrition because of them; and who, while he bitterly repents of his folly and is ashamed of his baseness and ingratitude, possesses peace which passeth understanding; and so is overcome by the wondrous and free favour of his much-injured prince. Such a character admires that medium through which he can confide in his sovereign as a father, and approach him with freedom. Though forgiven of his King, he cannot forgive himself: His mind is in unison with the will of his Lord;



and his heart is melted and subdued by that unmerited kindness and grace, which, in the work of propitiation, are joined with the most sacred regard to principle and excellence: His heart is anxious to be found in the path of duty and obedience, that he may at once express his love, gratitude, and esteem; and enjoy that happiness, which he now sees to be inseparably connected with conscientiously keeping his place as a subject.

Such is the medicinal effect of that display of the Divine character which is made in the Gospel. For the very purpose of thus curing our spiritual maladies was the love of Heaven thus wondrously manifested. The doctrine of justification by faith is the moral means of effecting our conformity to the holy and spiritual character of God,—or, in other words, our sanctification. The man who abuses the doctrine of Divine grace, by making it an encouragement to sin, is totally a stranger to its true nature. What he calls the grace of God is quite a different thing from what the Scriptures mean by it. But though the truth be thus perverted and abused, never let us become suspicious of it. Still it is the power of God to salvation, because it exhibits the only effectual motives to holiness, and the only efficient means of implanting and cherishing all spiritual tempers and dispositions. That which it aims at, is not the mere exterior decency and correctness of deportment which is often put for the whole of morality, and is the summit of mere human attainments: Its object is to subject the whole man to God, and to assimilate his nature to the Divine.

Surely, when we contemplate the character of the Friend of sinners—when we listen to him as, from his cross, he beseeches us to abandon sin, as the ruin of our happiness—when we hear him entreating us to consider his many and complicated woes, and learn from them the evil and the tremendous consequences of transgression—when we turn to his glory, and see the source of his present blessedness—when we hear the applauding voice of his Father, and then hearken to his gracious invitations and earnest entreaties to come and freely partake of the blessings of salvation; we must feel impelled by an influence, at once sweet and commanding, to forsake all and follow him.

May your mind ever be imbued with the high and hallowed principles of the Saviour, and ever feel their elevating and purifying influence.

I remain, &c.

## LETTER IX.

## ON THE PERSEVERANCE OF CHRISTIANS.

The perseverance of believers, a doctrine of Scripture—The abuse of the doctrine noticed—The design, and the proper use of it—Unscriptural views that have been taken of it—Is illustrated by what happened on Paul's voyage to Rome—The nature of filial fear, as connected with it—The danger of presumption—The use of Scripture examples of declension—The connection in which the doctrine is taught in Scripture—Perseverance, not simply the connection of two distinct things, but a continuance in a particular course—The necessity of connecting the means, and the end exemplified by the Apostles—Conclusion.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I RECEIVED your letter; and shall now, agreeably to your request, write you some remarks on the subject of the final perseverance of Christians. This is a doctrine of great importance; and mistakes regarding it have occasioned no small perplexity to many. Without farther preamble, I beg your attention to the express promise of the Saviour, that such as believe in him shall never finally perish. "My sheep," says he, "know my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand." Now, faith in Christ, considered in a general view, includes faith in his promises, as well as in his sacrifice. You will perceive that this promise is one of the first importance; and that confidence in it, as well as in his atonement, is the duty and the privilege

of his people. The Apostle Paul accordingly comforts the Christians at Corinth by the consideration, that "God would confirm them to the end, that they might be blameless in the day of Christ;" or, in other words, would preserve them in the faith and obedience of the truth. He expressed his confidence in the Philippians, on the evidence of their patience and Christian diligence, as believers of the Gospel; and his happiness that he, who, of his sovereign love and for his own glory, "had begun in them the good work, would perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ." Peter likewise addresses Christians as children, "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation\*." These, and such like passages of Scripture, declare that what God has of his free favour begun in believers, he will preserve and finish: They include a promise, that he will richly impart to them the gracious influence of his Spirit, to subdue the evils of the heart, to keep them from falling, and to secure their everlasting bliss.

The intercession of Christ, on the night in which he was betrayed, includes a prayer, that "all who believe the word of the Apostles" may become partakers of that blessed union, in judgment, affection, and pursuit, which subsists between the Father and the Son,—a prayer, that his people may be kept in the name of his Father, or in the faith of the Divine character, as revealed in the Gospel,—a prayer for their complete sanctification through the truth,—and a prayer for their final glorification in the heavenly

---

\* John ix. 27, 28. 2 Cor. i. 8. Phil. i. 6. 1 Peter i. 5.

temple. Now, his intercession is always prevalent; and, if so, Christians must participate in all for which he prays in their behalf. Precious is the privilege of such an advocate.

I am aware that this doctrine has been abused; but there is a wide difference between a doctrine which in itself, and from its very nature, is calculated to do harm, and one which is only the occasion of injury in consequence of being abused by the depraved principles of man. When misunderstood, or perverted, it is in fact made a new doctrine, essentially differing from what it is in reality. You will perceive that, in such a case, it is not the doctrine in its true nature that does harm, but as distorted and completely changed. There is not a doctrine in Scripture which has not been abused by the hypocrite, or the licentious: But are we on this to give them up? Far be it. Let us rather study more closely their native glory, and great design, as exhibited in the Gospel; and hold them fast, as of practical and salutary use.

I wish you, my dear friend, particularly to consider that the doctrine in question is designed to animate and encourage the heart to cleave to the Redeemer; to continue in the faith and hope of the truth\*; to endure afflictions and persecution with patience†; and to wait, in the exercise of Christian obedience, for the coming of our Lord‡. In our journey heavenward we have to encounter many enemies and difficulties; but we are assured that our Lord will be with us to watch

---

\* Jude, 20, 21, 24, 25.

† 2 Tim. i. 12.

‡ Heb. vi. 11—20.



over, to guide, and to defend us,—that he will provide for us all that we need,—and that he will secure our admission to the heavenly temple at the end of our course. What so animating to the Christian soldier as the promise of a final and decisive victory? Such a promise, you will easily see, can only be designed to encourage the hearts of the faithful; and what, then, can a traitor have to do with it? The persuasion that the aid of Heaven will be abundantly and seasonably afforded, is well fitted to raise us above the fear of man, and of all opposition; because it leads us to repose in the power, the wisdom, and the goodness of him who hath said, that he will “never leave us nor forsake us.” - The promises, threatenings, and exhortations of the word of God are intended to be powerful means of guarding against apostacy, and stimulating to that perseverance to which they relate. We are not, and cannot be compelled to persevere; but, under the influence of the Divine Spirit, the word of God excites us to continue to the end, in the hope of eternal life. In the midst of all your fears, then, look to him who hath promised to be with you; and take encouragement from the grace and the faithfulness of his character. Be animated by his word to be diligent in obedience, and to meet with humble boldness the difficulties of your course. Remember that, when the Israelites heard of walled cities and of giants in the land of promise, they sinned in not looking simply to the promise of their God, and so giving way to the most distrustful and desponding fears. It was for them to turn from all the difficulties of which they heard (even

granting all of them to exist) to the contemplation of the power, the truth, and the goodness of the God of Abraham, who had pledged his word, yea his oath, that his seed should inherit Canaan. Caleb and Joshua were men of another spirit: Their language was expressive of that confidence in God which destroys all tormenting fear of opposition, and stimulates to exertion. Whatever leads us to simplicity of reliance on the Saviour, has indeed been blessed to us. It becomes us to learn from all events; and to seek that every thing may cause us to cling with greater earnestness to him who loved us, and gave himself for us.

However much you may feel afraid in consequence of the frequent risings of corruption within, and from afflictions and temptations from without, ever commit yourself to the power, the faithfulness, and the abundant grace of the Redeemer. Whatever awe may strike you as you think of death, judgment, and eternity, cleave with greater firmness to the finished work of Christ; and rest upon it your all. In living by faith in his atonement, you will find that the delightful persuasion of his ability and willingness to keep that committed to him against that day, and the conviction that your labour in his work "shall not be in vain," instead of leading you to indulge in sloth, will stimulate you to abound in all holy and self-denying exertions. In contemplating the immutability of the love of God, and reflecting on the delightful fact that he hath pledged his being and perfections for our safety and our bliss, you will find your love to him powerfully excited, and your heart bound by every tie

to be his wholly and for ever. Never forget that salvation must be traced to the free grace of God, and must be carried on, and perfected by it. Were it either begun or maintained by the unaided efforts of man, it were indeed a hopeless and a heartless work. Despair in that case were certainly the natural effect of a proper view of our character and danger. But blessed be God that the work is his own. Would it not be to the dishonour of his name, were he to fail in the performance of his promise, or in the execution of his plan? The salvation of his people is an object ever before him: On the accomplishment of it he is ever intent; and never can he cease to carry it forward to perfection.

I have adverted to the abuse of this doctrine; and shall now beg your attention to some very unscriptural views which have been given of it. Men have virtually been taught, that such as have at any time had reason to think themselves Christians, will continue to enjoy all the blessings of redemption, independently of their continuing in the faith and the obedience of the Gospel. Hence numbers have been led to say, that they "shall have peace though they walk after the imagination of their own hearts." Among professors of religion, there lurks much of this unhallowed spirit. It proceeds upon the principle, that pardon is the great thing in salvation; and that deliverance from hell is the sum of redemption. Such sentiments are most unwarrantable and dangerous. Eternal life is never represented in Scripture, as merely a future blessing. It is enjoyed even in the present state; and

in the discourses of Christ, the promise of it precedes that of a blessed resurrection. "This is," says he, "the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son and believeth on him, may *have everlasting life*; and I will raise him up at the last day." And again, "Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood *hath eternal life*; and I will raise him up at the last day." The great thing meant by salvation, in Scripture, is deliverance from sin itself, and restoration to the image of God. Instead of occupying but a subordinate place, this forms the very highest part of redemption. It is the ultimate end; and the doctrine of justification by grace forms the moral means towards the attainment of this consummation.

The error I now refer to is most flattering to the human mind. From a natural unwillingness to give up the hope of happiness in heaven, men are easily induced, even when there is nothing in their present dispositions or deportment in accordance with the will of God, to look for relief to what they have formerly felt. They endeavour to persuade themselves that they were then in a state of acceptance with God; and that, therefore, according to their views of the doctrine of perseverance, they never can perish,—even should they at present be slothful and indulging in sin. Now, this is manifestly absurd in itself, as well as at variance with Scripture. What is salvation but the deliverance of the soul from sin? and how then can a person be a partaker of it while under the government of iniquity? The thing is utterly impossi-



ble. It is like saying that a man is in health who is at the very moment the subject of a mortal malady.

The error of which I now speak, is the very evil against which we are warned in the solemn admonitions contained in the tenth chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians. We are there admonished not to trust in past attainments and enjoyments, even granting them to be genuine; and are taught that any use made of the doctrine in question, besides that of an encouragement to continued and self-denying obedience, is not faith in God, but unfounded presumption. The Saviour hath said, that his people shall not perish; but they are preserved by his power *through*, and not independently of faith. They persevere by his not permitting "their faith to fail." The promise is not that such as believe once, or for a time only, shall be saved. On the contrary, while it is declared that "the just shall live by faith," it is also said, "but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him\*." Just here means justified, as is evident from the application of the passage to the doctrine of justification†, and the meaning is, that the justified are such only as believe; and, farther, that as they are justified by faith without works at first, so they continue to enjoy life, by continuing under the influence of faith as the ruling principle of their hearts. The life which they live is "by the faith of the Son of God," or in other words they "believe," that is they continue to believe, "to the salvation of the

---

\* Heb. x. 38.

† Rom. i. 17. Gal. iii. 11, 12.



soul." This accordingly is set in opposition to drawing "back unto perdition." If Christians were to cease to believe and to be influenced by the gospel, they certainly would perish; and when they do in a measure leave the truth and depart from God, they are in the way which, in itself, leads to destruction; for the object and the tendency of sin, in them as well as in others, is to drown them in perdition. This arises not from the mere will of God, but from the nature of things. The very essence of spiritual life lies in the love of God, and from this all true happiness springs; so that, if the mind is estranged from God, the blessings of salvation cannot be enjoyed. To be carnally minded is, in itself, death; for under the power of sin there can be no bliss here; and it is the cause of that misery which shall afflict the finally condemned. The reason why sin does not terminate in destruction in the case of Christians, is not that it is different in its nature or tendency in them from what it is in others, but that a timely stop is put to its progress by repentance. Hence the exhortation, "Destroy not him with thy meat for whom Christ died;" and the declaration, "Through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish." The conduct blamed will cause our brother to stumble, or in other words, to do what his conscience condemns. This, on reflection, will be the cause of grief to him,—and perhaps to such a degree, that in the language of Solomon respecting heaviness of heart, he may be "ready to perish." This conduct to him is calculated also to destroy the principle of piety in his heart; for the tendency of sin

is towards apostacy. That it does not issue in this, is not owing to the nature of what our brother through us has been induced to do, but to the grace of God. It follows, that we are as criminal in endangering his soul, by leading him to do what has a tendency to destroy him, as though he actually perished. Our conduct must be judged of by its natural effect, and not by the preventing energy of Divine grace.

You will see from this, that the faith, or conviction, of their danger in letting the truth slip, and in declining from God, is conducive to the safety of Christians, as much as is their persuasion, of their security in abiding in Christ. God fulfils his promises by "putting his fear in our hearts, that so we may not turn away from him." The means and the end are thus connected.

I shall endeavour to illustrate this by a reference to what happened to Paul on his voyage to Rome. He had the express promise of God that he and all in the ship should be preserved; and yet, when the seamen were about to leave the vessel, he said, that except the mariners remained on board "they could not be saved." Now, did this imply any doubt of the Divine promise? Far from it. He knew that the promise was to be fulfilled, not without, but by means of the seamen,—and believing this, he insisted on their being kept in the vessel. The persuasion that there was danger if they left the ship, was not inconsistent with faith in the promise; because it was not a promise that happen what might they should be preserved, but that through the exertions of the seamen they

should be saved. It may be said, "had Paul and the others perished, the promise had failed;" but it may on the same principle be affirmed that, had the Apostle and they been saved without the aid of the mariners, the purpose of God had failed, because it was just as much his purpose to save them by means of the seamen as it was his purpose to save them at all. If they had faith in this—that by the aid of the mariners they were to be preserved,—it is evident that this belief, instead of making them say, "We need not mind the use of means," must have had the very opposite effect. They would be encouraged on the one hand to use the means, because they had the assurance of success; and on the other, they would be kept from neglecting them, because they knew that without them they would not be saved.

Let me ask you, then, to apply this to the present subject. It is the promise of God that they who abide in Christ, by continuing in the faith of the Gospel, shall certainly be saved. If they were saved without continuing in the Saviour, the purpose of God were disannulled, exactly as in the case of the Apostle and the seamen. It is with them as it was with the generation of the Israelites that left Egypt. The promise to them of the land of Canaan, was connected with their believing God. This is evident from the reasons assigned for their coming short of it; which are thus summed up by the Apostle, "So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief." The promise then, had not failed, for God had not said that he should give them the land at any rate, but only in the way of

their believing in his power, faithfulness, and goodness. In like manner, the confidence of Christians is not a persuasion that they shall be saved *at all events*; but that they shall be so in the way of "continuing in the faith, and being unmoved from the hope of the Gospel." Hence the exhortation, "Take heed lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God." Confident trust in the promise of safety in abiding in Christ, and a conviction that we must perish if we depart from him, will lead us to take refuge in the grace of God, and to place our dependence on the finished work of the Redeemer,—even when we see most clearly, and feel most deeply, our guilt and our demerit.

While we thus believe the promise of safety in continuing in the truth, we shall feel jealous of ourselves, because conscious that there is much within us that is opposed to a life of faith in the Son of God, and that we are ever prone to depart from the very source of our mercies. When the fear arising from a sense of the deceitfulness of our hearts produces despondency and distrust, we have fallen into the sin of the Israelites when, from the dread of the inhabitants, they refused to go up to the conquest of Canaan: But when this fear causes us to cleave the more closely to the Saviour, and cling with the greater eagerness to that truth which saves the sinner, we derive much benefit from the humbling conviction of our depravity. Despair of success will keep us from the use of means, because the use of them is not expected to be of service; while, on the other hand, presumption will keep us



from the use of them, because we deem them unnecessary. Thus, though these two in many things differ, they in some respects perfectly accord. Hence the importance of blending a holy fear and jealousy of ourselves, with confidence and hope in God.

I need not say that the fear I speak of is not that which arises from distrusting the promises of Heaven: It is the fear of letting the Divine word slip out of our hearts; and proceeds from a deep sense of the evil principles which lurk in our breasts, and the consequent danger of our giving way to temptation. Connected with it is a spirit of watchfulness and caution, against all from without and from within, that would mar our enjoyment, and lead to transgression: It includes the fear of indulging in sin, as incompatible with fellowship with God here, and the hope of enjoying him hereafter; and springs from delight in his favour, and from a supreme desire of communion with him as the chief joy of the soul. This may be explained by the principle of self-preservation, which, in regard to natural life, is of the highest importance. The love of life impels us to avoid every thing that endangers it. Now, spiritual life lies in the Divine favour, and in holy likeness to God; and all who enjoy it are impressed with its importance, and jealous of every thing which would rob them of the comfortable sense of it now, and the full enjoyment of it hereafter. As when we see bodily danger, the instinct of self-preservation is at once called forth, and exerts itself in avoiding or averting it; so the fear of which I now speak operates instinctively in the hour of peril;



and is proportioned to the degree in which we abound in the love of God, in reverence for his will, and in attachment to heavenly things. This principle, in substance, was addressed to our innocent first parents in the threatening of death; and so ought not to be condemned as criminal, or as inconsistent with Christian confidence; but cherished as the means by which God keeps us from departing from him to sin and to vanity.

The grace of God appears, not in placing us where no enemy can assault us, but in making us, feeble as we are, "more than conquerors." In some respects he subdues our enemies by his immediate interposition; but in others, he does so by strengthening us to obtain the victory. The great adversary was bruised on Calvary, but he is destined to be so *under our feet* likewise. And this manner of effecting our deliverance is more strikingly illustrative of his power and goodness than if our agency were utterly excluded. The very captives of Satan, and the deluded votaries of sin and of the world, are, through Divine grace, made the means of utterly defeating them. Never, then, let us think of laying aside our armour, either from distrustful despondency or vain confidence; but, trusting in our Leader, let us keep the field. If the flock of Christ are in no danger, there is no need for the vigilance and the power which the Scriptures ascribe to him. As the Captain of Salvation he were in that case far from entitled to the praise of conducting his redeemed through manifold perils to the realms of bliss; and the union of confidence in him with un-

remitting activity, were no part of the Christian character. How unworthy of him, and injurious to us, are such notions !

When professors of religion begin to think that sin cannot hurt them—that their relation to God as his children, their experience of his love in time past, and their high privileges, render sin less dangerous to them than to others, there is much reason for alarm. When they imagine, that though they may suffer some degree of correction in this life, yet, as all their transgressions, past, present, and future, are forgiven, they need not feel as if they could expose them to the wrath to come,—they are in the utmost danger of losing proper views of sin, and of indulging in indifference and hardness of heart. Characters who reason thus, often abuse what is related of the falls of the people of God; as if, because individuals of eminence among them went far astray and were reclaimed, we were not under any great necessity of keeping strictly by the narrow way of life. Such narratives, it ought to be remembered, are designed to answer two salutary purposes: The first is to warn us that we are in constant danger of departing from God, whatever may be our attainments; and so to excite a spirit of self-diffidence, humility, and vigilance, to induce us to continue in close fellowship with God, and to keep us in the use of those means which are appointed for our preservation: The second is, that in case we should have backslidden from him, we may be kept from sinking into utter despair; that, if we have stumbled, we may not continue on the ground and spend our time in lamenting

our fall, without looking to him who can raise us up, restore our souls, and cause us to "walk in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake:" In a word, that "we may repent, and do our first works." We are told accordingly, not only of the falls of such as feared God, but also of their bitter grief and great alarm; of the Divine displeasure with them; and of their restoration through renewed faith and repentance.

When a person says "there is no telling how far people may go astray and yet be Christians," he takes a most ruinous view of the Divine word. The Scripture may be compared to a laboratory, containing a great variety of medicines, but the use of which requires great skill; as however useful some of them may be in certain cases, they might be hurtful in others. When a Christian is surrounded with temptations, and begins to fear that he shall be overcome, let him turn to the promises of aid and of preservation, and be encouraged by them, not to be idle, but to continue the conflict in the hope of victory. When, again, he loses his first love, and sinks into self-indulgence and sin, let him listen to the many solemn warnings against declension and apostacy, and be roused by the threatenings of the Divine word to "remember whence he has fallen, and to repent and do his first works." If in the latter case he shall look to the promises of preservation, and make them a pillow for his sloth, he is on ground the most dangerous, and has gone far, very far, from God. The salutary effect produced by the promises on a mind influenced by the truth, is impaired in a backslider by sinful indulgence.

His fears need to be alarmed, and his vigilance revived, by the solemn warnings and awful threatenings of Scripture. The Scriptures do not warrant him to say, that a person may go this and the other length, and yet be a Christian: They never answer such questions as this, "How far may I go in conformity to what is not right, and yet have the root of the matter within me?" They do not attempt, on the other hand, to mark out exactly how far men may go in religion, and yet come short of future glory. Such questions they do not particularly answer, that we may learn not to presume on past sensations and enjoyments, but may be led to "watch and pray, lest we enter into temptation."

Consider, in connection with this, the addresses of our Lord to his disciples,—in which even his particular friends are roused to a sense of personal danger. He called upon them, as well as the unenlightened multitudes around him, "not to be afraid of them that could kill only the body, but to fear him who could cast both soul and body into hell." He declared "that whosoever was ashamed of him, or of his words, should be disowned of him at his second coming." And he also taught them, that the unwatchful and unfaithful servant should be condemned by him at last. He knew the temptations which were before them, and the natural desires of the heart, by which they might be induced to deny him. Against this danger he not only exhibits to their view the prospect of being acknowledged by him at last, but the prospect also, that, by denying him, they should incur the misery of being



disowned by him. See also the language of the Apostles, who, while they exhibit the blessings of the Gospel to all in the way of invitation, in order to induce them to come to Christ, address believers on the necessity of continuing to come to him through life. They shew the importance of such admonitions to Christians, by mixing promises and threatenings here, as well as in their addresses to the world\*. Their exhortations and warnings are intended to teach us, that the present and future enjoyment of eternal life is connected with our continuing in the faith, and not with believing for once merely, when we first come to the Saviour.

This connection is not arbitrary, but natural. What is the blessing of salvation but the spiritual health of man? It cannot then in the nature of things exist where sin predominates. What will it signify to me that the saints shall persevere, if I am not persevering? No well-grounded confidence can be maintained by looking back to the past, and drawing encouragement from what we have formerly felt and done, if we are not continuing in the faith of the Gospel, and pressing forward in the Christian course. Past sensations can no otherwise be evidences to us of a change of mind, than as the recollection of them excites the same views and exercises afresh. This is what we are taught in the recorded example of Paul, and in the reasoning employed on the fate of the Israelites in the wilderness†. We see in the Apostle

---

\* Rom. xi. 19—12. 2 Tim. ii. 12. Heb. iii. iv. xii.

† Phil. iii. 8—15. Heb. iii. 6, 14.



himself the necessity of pressing forward to the prize, and of holding fast the truth; and are the more interested, that, from his own feelings of the importance of the subject, he speaks in a way much fitted to impress. He calls upon all to be like minded with himself, who, though persuaded that the Lord would preserve him to his heavenly kingdom, “kept under his body,” and “laboured that he might be approved of by his Master at his coming.”

The Hebrews accordingly are reminded of their fathers, who, on the banks of the Red Sea, sang the song of Moses, and confessed their faith in God,—who reached the very border of the promised land, and yet fell short of it. They loathed the manna, as we are apt to loathe spiritual blessings: They were discouraged because of the way, as we are ready to fail when assailed with trials and reproach: They “despised the pleasant land,” as we are prone to disregard the prize of eternal life: They did not believe in the God of Abraham as able to give them Canaan, as we are apt to say “it is in vain to serve God.” The duties and the conflicts of the Christian course often, alas! become irksome to us; and we seek around for a system more agreeable to flesh and blood, if we do not openly relapse.

By carefully examining the Scriptures I have referred to, and others of a similar nature, you will perceive that the sins even of believers naturally expose to death. The encouragement held out to them is, not that their present or future transgressions are already pardoned, but that there is a throne of grace

erected, and that on the ground of the perpetually efficacious sacrifice and prevalent intercession of Christ, they shall be forgiven, on their going again to his Father in his name. That mercy which we are called to seek, is deliverance from merited death; and our present and future peace before God must be sought by the same means by which we at first found forgiveness and enjoyment.

It is well to remember how we have felt, and acted, and suffered, when walking in the truth. This the Hebrews were exhorted to do when in a state of declension. Then the Saviour was found "a refuge from the storm, and as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land:" Then sin was hated and holiness cultivated; and if God were glorified and his favour possessed all was happiness. If we have gone aside from him, and have lost our firmness, it becomes us to take the alarm; to go afresh to the Redeemer; and again seek our happiness in fellowship with Heaven.

In reference to what you say of the threatenings of Scripture, I would remark, that there is no contrariety between them and the promises of God; and that the belief of the former must produce salutary fear, as the belief of the latter produces hope. Neither is there any contrariety between the fear I have mentioned and the firmest confidence in the Gospel; but both are opposed to confidence in ourselves, and in past attainments, while we are not persevering in the faith. What are the threatenings of God but expressions of love, by which we are affectionately warned of the inseparable connection which subsists between sin and

misery, and are kindly reminded of the connection which subsists between holiness and happiness? It is not correct, then, but very wrong, to look on the threatenings of Heaven as austere, and on the influence of them as opposed to the effect of the promises and the influence of love. Love is seen even in the threatenings of Scripture, as they do the work of mercy; and in fact imply the opposite promises. If we love fellowship with God, the fear of losing this happiness, arising from his threatenings, will serve to make us cleave to the truth and to walk more humbly with him. In this case, the very denunciations of God do the work of love; and manifest by their effect that they flow from kindness, and not from vindictive wrath.

When I speak of fear in this way, I am far from denying that there is such a thing in Christians as dread of danger, just *as danger*. Neither do I deny, that this feeling is of any service. In this state of imperfection, the Lord does not leave our obedience merely to the generosity and the gratitude of the heart. Excellent as are these principles, and naturally as they flow from the Gospel, even the most eminent of Christians are not always powerfully influenced by them; and, at best, their influence is not perfect.—Till that which is perfect is come, we shall need to have our fears, as well as our hopes, stimulated; and both are provided for in the plan of redemption, through the cross. It is, however, our duty, and will be found a privilege, to aim at that state of mind, in which the more excellent principles of obedience govern the heart and regulate the life.

I beg your attention to one point connected with this subject, which is of the first moment. Perseverance can never mean simply an arbitrary connection between two distant, or distinct, things. The very term signifies continuance in a particular course. The way which leads from any place to the capital of a kingdom will conduct the traveller to it, provided he persevere in his journey,—but not otherwise. It is not enough that he enter on the road, and for a little walk in it; he must continue in it, otherwise he can never reach the place of his destination. In like manner, Christian perseverance does not mark an arbitrary connection between faith on our first coming to Christ, and the prize of eternal life in heaven; it connects these two by means of the whole intermediate course. The Scriptures say, “The righteous shall hold on his way;” not that he shall get safe to his journey’s end, let him wander which way he pleases: False notions on this subject join together a beginning and an end, and leave the intervening space to be filled up as the sinful heart may incline. Perseverance is thus considered as a mere continuance in safety. How opposite is this to the truth! The very *word*, as I have said, is expressive of continued progress, with a view to a particular end. What is it, then, to persevere, but to continue to walk in the same course on which we have entered? And if so, no person can take comfort from the doctrine, properly understood, who is not himself at the time persevering in faith and obedience. In this way only can we enjoy the blessing of salvation.



On this principle go all the instructions of the Apostles. When men made a scriptural profession of the faith, and when, as far as man could judge, their spirit and deportment corresponded, they were received into the first churches as acknowledged Christians, and as such were addressed in the apostolic epistles. They were there taught, that real Christians should be preserved to eternal life; but never did the writers connect with this doctrine a supposition, that they could not be mistaken in the favourable opinion they had once formed of particular characters. The more that they grew in knowledge and in the fruits of obedience, the more did the Apostles rejoice,—and the greater was their confidence in them. But the servants of Christ had often many fears, because they were aware of the many temptations to which the disciples were exposed; and because they saw numbers who once appeared to walk in the truth, turn aside into sin. In some such cases, they for a time “stood in doubt,” and feared “that they had laboured in vain;” and when characters of this kind were not reclaimed, they disowned them. In other cases the character was at once proved to be bad, and then instant expulsion took place. In all instances of apostacy, they said—“they went out from us, because they were not of us.” These declensions did not prove that Christians had fallen away, but that they who had thus gone back had never been genuine disciples. Still the Apostles addressed men as they appeared to be at the time; never ceasing, however, to warn them of the necessity of continuing in the



faith. They taught them that it was no strange thing if some drew back; yet they expressed their full confidence respecting the final salvation of such as manifested their faith by standing fast in the truth. They did so on the ground of the promise, that the true flock of Christ shall never perish. Faith in this promise was perfectly consistent with fear, as to individuals; just as faith in the absolute promise that Israel as a *nation* should inherit Canaan was quite compatible with the fall of multitudes in the wilderness. The persuasion that *true* Christians shall be preserved, is quite different from a persuasion that all who *profess* to be such shall finally be saved. Hence the care that was taken to guard against declension.

When Paul warns, even such as he most affectionately esteemed for the truth's sake, it cannot have been from any particular jealousy of them, but from jealousy of human nature. He has by his solemn admonitions, even to characters of the highest eminence, taught us, in the most impressive manner, that the means and the end ought never to be separated. He had full confidence in Timothy; yet how solemnly does he warn him of the danger of departing from God, and of the necessity of continuing in the faith, the love, and the obedience of the truth. In his doctrine we clearly see, that while our title to eternal life is independent of deeds of law, the actual enjoyment of the blessing is necessarily connected with obedience; for what is holiness but likeness to the law of heaven? and what is eternal life but happiness springing from

conformity to the character and will of God, as displayed in that Gospel which hath “magnified his law, and made it honourable?”

I have thus, my dear friend, given you my views of the subjects you mentioned. If these hints shall be of any use in furthering your edification, it will be gratifying to me, and will cause thanksgiving to God.

I am, &c.

---

## LETTER X.

### ON THE DEATH OF A RELATIVE.

The character of Christ, the great spring of consolation—The import of his address to John in the Isle of Patmos—The power of the Gospel in affliction and death—The death of friends ought to be improved—The contemplation of heaven, a means of support—Dark providences will yet be explained—Some causes of this darkness—The nature of Christian patience—This exemplified by Christ—The importance of confidence in God—The blessedness of departed saints, a source of comfort—The duty of cherishing faith, holy joy, and Christian hope—Conclusion.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I CANNOT but again express my sympathy with you under your recent bereavement, and shall now, as formerly, direct your attention to the character of our Lord as the best spring of consolation under the losses and the afflictions of life. It is our unspeakable comfort that the Saviour has risen from the dead, and has thus been manifested as “the first-born among

many brethren." In the redeemed family he is called "the first born," as a title of dignity and authority, because of the privileges which in ancient times, and by Divine direction, were the birthright of the elder brother. In this endearing relation does he stand to us amidst all our infirmities and trials. He is "bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh." He has a tender and an affectionate feeling, as our brother, for all our wants and infirmities, and is ready to relieve and assist us. He is, in particular, "the first born from the dead," and in this character he bears a relation to his people even when in the grave; and is engaged to watch over their dust, and to "raise them up at the last day." Yes—death is far from dissolving the relation between him and his brethren—their very dust is dear to him. His resurrection is at once the pledge and the pattern of that of his redeemed. In his exalted state he has "the keys of hell," that is, of the unseen state of departed spirits,—and "the keys also of death," that is, of the grave.

The Redeemer, then, is Ruler in the other world as well as in this. It was by exhibiting himself in this light to John in the Isle of Patmos, that he sought to comfort him when overwhelmed with terror at his august appearance. He appeared to the beloved disciple in a dress like to that of the Jewish high priest, and in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, to intimate that he officiated as a priest in the temple of God\*. He appeared at the same time in such glory, as clearly

---

\* Rev. i. 12—18.

exhibited his infinite dignity and grandeur as Emmanuel, the excellencies of his mediatorial character, and his inconceivable elevation as Lord of the church, and of all worlds. In a word, he appeared in the body of his glory, as he now sits "on the right hand of the Majesty on high." This was too much for John in his present state of frailty to bear. Though "he was the beloved disciple" who had often leaned on his breast at table, he was overwhelmed with fear, and fell at his feet as dead. This fear arose partly from a sense of guilt, and partly from human weakness. He was not altogether ignorant of the personage whom he saw; for we find from what took place on the mount of transfiguration, that the appearance of our Lord's body was changed without preventing his disciples from recognising him, and of this display of the glory of the Redeemer, John had been a witness. In his present state of astonishment he could not, however, think with composure on what he beheld. To settle all doubts, and to satisfy him that this was a real appearance of his Lord, and an appearance not in anger, but in love, the Saviour kindly laid his right hand upon him, and affectionately said, "Fear not; I am the first and the last, and the living one: and was dead, and behold I am alive forevermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death."

The various emotions of the Apostle's heart were thus tenderly met, and his fears graciously dispelled. Did a consciousness of guilt appal him and invest death with terrors, he was thus directed to that one perfect atonement which the Saviour has made for sin—to the dig-



nity of his person as the everlasting God in our nature, as the great cause of the infinite value of his death—to his love, as manifested in suffering and dying for sinners—to his victory over death in his resurrection, as the great proof of the Divine acceptance of his sacrifice—to the abolition of the power of death—to the incorruption which was brought to light by his triumph over the grave—to his eternal life in the heavenly temple—to his glorious government as Lord of all worlds—and to his priestly grandeur in the sanctuary. By all this does the Saviour calm the trembling conscience, dissipate the dread of death, and enlighten the gloom of the grave. These views, indeed, had long supported the mind of the Apostle; but at present the unexpected and glorious vision of his Lord had quite overwhelmed him, so that he required them to be again distinctly set before him.

Did John recoil at the thought of entering the world of spirits, and appearing in a new and untried state? Jesus exhibits himself as the forerunner of his people, who has gone to heaven as “the first fruits of them that slept,” and “to prepare a place” for his redeemed. He declares that he has the government of both worlds, so that in passing from this to the other, we are not leaving his dominions. He is there as well as here, and is ready to receive and welcome us on our arrival. Nor is this all; he will also be with us in the waters of death, to guide, comfort, and support us. Thus are the clouds dispelled which overspread the invisible world. The way into the holiest is laid open by our great high priest who hath enter-



ed "into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us."

Was John unable without supernatural aid to look upon the glory of his Master? Surely, when strengthened as he now was, to behold that which flesh and blood, as at present constituted, cannot inherit, he must have been elevated beyond conception. He contemplated in the Saviour what he should behold when "absent from the body," and "present with the Lord;" and what he himself should be, when death shall have been swallowed up in victory. He who now stood before him had the supreme dominion in all worlds, and so could open the gates of paradise to the souls of his sheep, after guiding and supporting them with his rod and staff in the dark vale of the king of terrors; and should at last open their graves, and call them in the embodied state to the heavenly glory.

We are thus directed by the Saviour to his God and Father, as our God and Father; and to his home, as our home. Though we are at a distance from our Father's house, we are not the less the children of his family. We are, indeed, in a foreign land; yet as the veil of the sanctuary is now removed, we by faith, see its glory and listen to its songs. The mercy-seat is no longer concealed, and the ministrations of the great high priest are disclosed to our view. This is admirably calculated to attract our hearts; and when contemplated, as exhibited in the revelation of peace, must excite us to unite in the hallowed services of the sacred temple. Well may our spirits be elevated on

the death of our brethren in Christ when, as they are removed from us, we by faith see them joining this glorious assembly. Sweet, in such circumstances, are the words of our Lord and his Apostles, entreating us not to let our "hearts be troubled," and "not to sorrow as those who have no hope," but are left to the darkness that naturally covers the grave, and overwhelms the heart with its gloom. Delightful is the encouraging call to indulge the hope of meeting our departed Christian friends in the world of light and of love, because, "as Jesus died and rose again, so all who sleep in him will God bring with him." Such discoveries are well calculated to soothe the mind in the hour of affliction.

The address of the Saviour to John is fraught with consolation to *us*, and may well fill us with peace and with joy in the nearest prospect of dissolution. Yes: When death prevails over nature, and all power of speech fails, even then the eyes often speak the gratitude and the gladness of the heart, arising from a view of the glory of the finished work of Christ, and of the Divine delight in it, as expressed in his resurrection and his heavenly elevation.—Enlightened and impressive views of these blessed objects tranquillize the heart of the Christian, and fill it with joy. Here, then, is that which, when distinctly seen, can sustain the mind under all its weaknesses, and support it under the heaviest pressure. Certain afflictions may, indeed, so affect the spirit as for a time to deprive it of the consolation of the truth, just as the mind of John was unhinged by the vision; but let

the cause of this be removed, and the truth clearly unfolded, and its influence will be felt.

Such manifestations of the power of the Gospel are confirming and animating. They are so many lights, illuminating even the darkest of the gloomy paths which occur in our progress to the heavenly glory. Natural feelings are not forbidden ; but let them not keep you from looking to him, who though “the first and the last, and the living one,” is full of the tenderest sympathy and compassion. Mysterious, indeed, are many of the dispensations of heaven ; but in the midst of the most intricate and complex movements of providence, look to him who “has the government upon his shoulders,” is guiding every event in infinite wisdom, and is making all his visitations “work together for good.” Think of the “rainbow that is around the throne,” and reflect on this token of the perpetuity of “the covenant of peace\*.” He who hath ratified this covenant, lives to accomplish its many and precious promises. He can, and will give you strength equal to your day, and preserve you to his heavenly kingdom,—where your every tear shall be wiped away, and death at last be swallowed up in victory.

Seek, then, that friends may not sicken and die in vain. Let every pleasing recollection, every sentiment of esteem, and every feeling of affection, which you fondly and warmly cherish ; and every hope and holy anticipation in which you indulge, unite in leading you

---

\* Rev. iv. 3.    Gen. ix. 16.    Isaiah liv. 9, 10.

to him whose grace made them what they were, that you may resemble their excellence, and participate in their joys. In all your mournful yet pleasing musings on their character, seek that, while you the more feel your loss, as you recount their many valuable qualities, you may find in the work and excellencies of the Redeemer all that can satisfy and purify the soul. In the enjoyment of fellowship with heaven, the sudden cry, that the Saviour cometh, will delight you as the blissful salutation of mercy, calling you to the banquet of heavenly and everlasting love.

In your present trial, seek to abound in the precious fruits of patience and devotion. Dwell on the words of eternal life, as the source of that ineffable consolation which raises the mind above the infirmities of the body, and yields unutterable bliss in the prospect of beholding the glory of the Lord, and participating in his hallowed joys. He can impart such views of the heavenly state, as the seat of all that is glorious and blissful, because the abode of the God and Father of the redeemed family, and of him who loved us and gave himself for us, as shall disarm death of its terrors, and change it into an object of desire. Let the Gospel of Christ "dwell richly" in your mind, and you will be freed from all painful anxiety about the result of your trials, by the confidence which it will inspire towards him who in wisdom and love is guiding every event. Let nothing keep you from that blessed word which cherishes peaceful resignation, and can subdue all that would disturb the repose of the heart, or unduly agitate the soul with sorrow. There is a placid



serenity, and an unrepining—yea, even a cheerful submission attainable through lively and steady faith in the cross, and in fellowship with him who there suffered and died. By these is the Gospel adorned, and our heavenly father glorified, while the heart is completely satisfied.

Forget not that the cup given you is filled and mingled by the hand of your Father. However bitter it may be, it is full of blessing, for “not a drop of the curse is there\*.” He who covereth his throne with darkness, and whose ways are to us often inscrutable, is he who hath tenderly and affectionately said, “No, I will not leave thee; no, no, I will not forsake thee†.” No fewer than five negatives are here employed to shut out fear and distrust, and to assure us of the presence and the care of our Father. You may, then, on the ground of these reiterated assurances, commit your life to him with the firmest confidence; happy in the thought, that in the world of light all will be made plain. Then you will, from the heart, bless him for all his goodness; and for this, as especially manifested in your heaviest afflictions. Let this consideration hush to silence all the agitations of your heart.

Cherish with these views, that submissive and patient spirit which flows from confidence and affection; and which is altogether different from the constrained submission of necessity, accompanied as it often is with the sullenness of obstinacy. Christian resigna-

---

\* Rom. viii. 28, 35—39. 1 Cor. iii. 21—23. † Heb. xiii. 5.



tion is not extorted. It is the cordial acquiescence of an enlightened and affectionate child, who loves and confides in his Father, even when he thwarts the fondest wishes of his heart. It is the same with that holy disposition and cheerful resignation displayed by the Redeemer, when he bowed to the will of heaven, and drank of his bitter cup, with a full submission to him who had mingled its whole afflictive ingredients. His heart, though bleeding with tortures the most agonizing, and overwhelmed with anguish inconceivable, ever felt a perfect and cheerful acquiescence in the will of God.

Pause for a moment, and think how great must have been the warmth of the love of Christ, when he assumed our nature—bore our sorrows—and for us, under agonies unutterable, yielded up his life. Here we see at once the foundation of our hope, and the high and holy pattern we are called to imitate. Never cease to dwell upon this, for even in the midst of heaven, where we shall see him in his glory, we must look back to Calvary that we may behold in their brightest lustre, the wonders of his character. Yes: It is in “the hour and power of darkness,” when he was encompassed with grief, and overwhelmed with restless agitation of heart, that the true glories of the Saviour appear. Then, in a special manner, did he endure the curse, that we might “inherit a blessing.” Here you will learn how it is, that we are destined to be made meet for the inheritance of his kingdom; and how it is, that the Lord manifests his love to his children. The first-born of the family went from the cross

to the crown; and as he humbled himself to become in all things like to us here, so it is his will that we should in all things be made like to him hereafter.— Well can he enter into all your feelings in the day of your distress. Think of this, and turn to that temple where he now reigns and officiates as our Priest; where, from the tenderest love, he still watches over his people,—and from whence he continues to display to them, the greatest of blessings in the richest profusion.

You may, in the midst of all the darkness of the heaviest affliction, look to him as “your light and your salvation,” and so shall all gloom be dispelled, and a pleasing and glorious brightness be shed upon your path. This will teach you what the bliss of the Christian is, when he waits upon God, and views him with unpresumptuous confidence as his Friend, his Father, and his all-sufficient portion, amidst the devastations of the most bereaving trials. Soothing indeed will you find it, to rest on the promises of the covenant of peace,—to wait with calm serenity for “the crown of life,”—and to repose your heart on him “who is able to keep all committed to him against that day.” Though at present his ways are obscure, remember that he has said, “What thou knowest not now thou shalt know hereafter.” Blessed are they who are freed from that excessive sorrow which unnerves and weakens the mind, and delivered also from that insensibility which fosters presumption and carnality of heart. From both the Saviour can deliver us. He can and will give you, in answer to fervent and importunate

prayer, his Holy Spirit,—through whom the mind is enabled to exercise that patience, which is the medium between despising the chastening of the Lord and fainting under his rod.

Though bereaved of those who were in the height of their influence and usefulness, and ready to wonder at the mysterious ways of Providence, and to question their wisdom and their goodness, be not discouraged. Remember that much of the darkness of Providence arises from our incapacity to form an extensive judgment. We see but a very small part of the Divine operations; and judge rashly of the whole, by the portion which comes under our view. Much of this obscurity arises from the powerful excitement of our passions, which darkens our mind by the character of our desires and our aversions; and so unfits us for calm and deliberate reflection. Not a little of it arises from the seeming contrariety of Providence to our interests, and to the promises of Heaven. Such views of our lot must unfit us for forming an impartial judgment. It is for us, under a deep sense of our weakness and unworthiness, to wait upon God, and to leave it to him to act as his wisdom and his love shall direct.

Reflect on the blessedness of the departed in the heavenly temple. When in this world, they were happy in the enjoyment of the Divine favour. In circumstances of the deepest affliction, they found joy in the Gospel; and in the prospect of death, they had the sure and certain hope of being immediately with their Lord, and of a blessed resurrection at his second coming. These blessings and exalted hopes animated their

hearts with sacred and sanctifying delight. On this I need say no more; for at the death-bed of her who is gone you witnessed, in circumstances the most interesting, what in vain I should attempt to describe. But happy as she and others of your departed friends were on earth, unspeakably greater is their happiness in heaven. Now, they are perfectly freed from all sin, care, and temptation: Sorrow and sighing have forever fled away: They are satisfied in beholding and enjoying the presence of their Redeemer, and in contemplating the glory of their God. Let us not grieve immoderately, since they are blessed beyond measure in that happy state of ineffable and durable joy; of constant and animated devotion; and of increasing progression in all that is great, and in all that is good.

Permit me to recommend to you the exercise of constant and strong faith in God. Leave futurity to him: To us it is wisely veiled. Our ignorance, however, respects the allotments of time more than the interests of eternity. We know that the end is everlasting life, though we know not the length nor the nature of the way: We know not the time or the manner of our death; but we know that he who passed this Jordan, when the waters overflowed and the storm raged, will be with us in the river—will divide the waters, and guide us along a smooth, a dry, and a safe path. We cannot tell what it is to die; but we know that one will be with us who has himself died, and that death will usher us in to the house of our Father. Remember that this world is a state of pilgrimage. All that is granted here we should consider as but accommo-



dations on our way home ; and of all the troubles with which we meet we may say, these are but the inconveniencies of a journey in a land of strangers. When we view our troubles as only the inconveniencies incident to a state of pilgrimage, we are comforted and sustained by the thought that all of them will soon be over, and by the recollection that, in the meantime, they are hastening our progress homeward.

Cherish the spirit of that humble and holy joy in God, and in divine things, which strengthens the heart and recommends the Gospel. Let the words of your God be the theme of your songs as your pilgrimage advances. This "joy of the Lord" will renew your strength for the journey, and your path will become "like the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day." Set your heart on the treasures of bliss and of glory which are with the Saviour. You must have felt that the removal of a friend to a distance is followed by a feeling of loneliness: Much more will the death of a friend or beloved relative. You now feel that the world is not what it was. In such circumstances the mind follows the departed with the deepest interest: Heaven, so to say, becomes more attractive, and the world has not its wonted charms: The very dust of the dead is dear to us, and we go "to the grave to weep there." At the grave of a Christian, however, sorrow is mingled with hope; for while we weep we hear, with holy and animated pleasure, the voice which says, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord." It is our consolation that, while we think of the death of the Redeemer, we cannot go to



*his* grave to weep: He hath left it, and hath gone to glory in a spiritual body. In regard to *him*, our hearts are not divided between what is in the tomb and what is in heaven. He hath risen a triumphant conqueror, and is now on high in the embodied state. Shall we not follow him, then, in our thoughts, affections, and desires?

“Yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.” Let us, then, stir up all our courage and all our energies; for, after a night of darkness and of weariness, “the morning is spread upon the mountains”—“the day is at hand:” “Now is your salvation nearer than when you believed.” Has the storm been heavy and tedious? be not on this account discouraged, for the land is in sight, and a few struggles more will conduct you to a safe harbour. Lift up, then, the hands which hang down; in faith and patience fight the good fight; and, with the steadiest eye on your leader, run the race which is set before you. If your path is rugged, and your heart ready to fail you, as you follow those who have gone before you; and recal to memory the scenes of other days, and the images of friends and relatives gone to return no more; let this excite you to cling with deeper interest to that Gospel which assures you that “the Captain of Salvation” will be with you to the end, and that you shall yet see those who have departed where the Saviour himself is. There he will be your and their chief joy, “and exceeding great reward.” In this pensive, but yet pleasing, retrospect, and in this blissful anticipation of being ever with the Lord,

and with the endeared objects of your natural and Christian affection, let all your sorrows be lost; and be animated to proceed, with growing zeal and activity, in the honourable and the heavenly race of faith.

I am, &c.

---

## LETTER XI.

### ON THE BENEFIT OF AFFLICTION.

Afflictions the common lot of mankind—Ought to be improved—Designed to sanctify the soul—The means of preventing sin—Serve to try the character—Strengthen religious principle—Fit for extensive usefulness—Are blessed for the purpose of awakening to a sense of sin and of misery—Lead to acknowledge the hand of God—Make us sensible of our proper place—Lead to the Scriptures and the Throne of Grace—Teach the uncertainty of earthly things—The happiness of confidence in God when under them—Christians need to have fear as well as love kept alive—The danger of despising the rod, and of fainting under it—Conclusion.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I FEEL for you under your trials; and with a view to your comfort, I mean in this letter to suggest to you some reflections on the benefits that may be derived from affliction. In this world we are ever exposed to tribulation, and yet it often comes upon us unexpectedly. We speak indeed of the instability of all earthly things, but are not sufficiently aware of our constant jeopardy. We indulge the flatteries of hope in regard to ourselves, even when we witness the sudden and the heavy calamities of others. Much discipline

in the school of affliction is necessary to cure us of this propensity to dream of security, in the face of so many proofs of the uncertainty of every thing below. Often have the brightest prospects been unexpectedly darkened, and hopes apparently the most warranted have been sadly disappointed. This has been done to shake our confidence in the present scene, and to prepare the mind for the will of God. Trials, the bare idea of which is sufficient to make us shrink, may yet be found necessary to the healing of our souls.

When visited with affliction, we ought fervently to seek that it may be blessed to us. He who chastens us, does it in love: He has graciously invited us to call upon him in the day of trouble; and has promised to hear our prayers, and to grant us what his wisdom and his goodness shall dictate. Deeply we ought to feel the hand of our God,—with profound humility we ought to bear it,—and with meek resignation we ought to bow to his will. Instead of sinking into despondency because our earthly lot is distressing, it becomes us to bless the Lord that he will not leave us to ourselves, nor suffer us to make present enjoyments our rest; but, by withering our earthly joys, points us to a better happiness. If our path is dark, let this cheer us—there is a bright morning on its way: If change after change come in sad succession, the covenant of peace is an everlasting covenant, and of its blessings nothing can bereave us.

The great design of affliction is to sanctify us. God chastens us “that we may be made partakers of his holiness:” He effects this by correcting us for our trans-

gressions. In this way he restrains our impetuous passions, purges away our pollutions, and embitters to us the ways of sin. He wounds that he may heal: "He prunes the branches of the true vine, that they may become more fruitful." When his people "break his laws, and keep not his commandments, he visits their iniquities with the rod, and their sins with chastisement." When we are running from the fountain of living waters, and seeking cistern after cistern, he in mercy destroys them one after another, to cure us of our folly. When any earthly object steals our heart from himself, he breaks our idol before us, and makes its vanity manifest. We then feel that this is indeed "a dry and a thirsty land;" a land of death and of darkness. But he who caused the wreck of our earthly joys, did it that he might lead us to take our stand on the sure foundation of his word: He who broke our cisterns and withered our gourds, designed thus to lead us to fountains of living water, and to the refreshing shade of the paradise of God. Not that he stands in need of our services, but because that without him we must be miserable. His love to us, and his desire that we may be happy, will not allow him to suffer us to be deceived and destroyed. He cannot think of leaving us to make the world our portion; but, even at the expence of the most painful afflictions, will call us from that which is not, to substantial and permanent blessedness. Often do we seek rest in that which cannot yield it—often do we leave the only refuge from the storm, and betake ourselves to the sands; and so may expect to be visited with tempests and inunda-



tions. We need checks and disappointments to our pursuits and our hopes, that we may learn by experience that we have no true happiness but in God—no home but heaven. Even in these storms his love is made manifest. A voice is heard saying “It is I, be not afraid.” Thus the heart is at once humbled and tranquillized. Sharp afflictions refine the soul. Should our inordinate desires be gratified, our earthly hopes and imaginations fed, and our sinister ends secured, we should die of this indulgence. But he who loves us will not suffer this. He frames his dispensations according to our real wants, and not according to our foolish wishes. Were his love cold, or were it but foolish fondness, he would act otherwise; but in that case we should be ruined.

Afflictions are designed to prevent, as well as to recover from sin. Should we in the day of trouble be unable to discover any particular transgression in which we have indulged, we ought not to question the goodness of God; for he sees the future in the present. We may not have formed and worshipped any particular idol, but he saw that we were about to do it—He saw a train of circumstances commencing, which, owing to our habits, tempers, and dispositions, would be a snare to us; and he determined to prevent the evil. Prevention surely is better than cure; and merciful indeed must it be to render the pursuit of sin bitter and difficult. Hezekiah was suffered to fall into pride; but Paul was prevented from doing so by “a thorn in the flesh.” Which of these two cases then is the most desirable, and which of them affords the highest de-



monstration of love? The second, surely. If we are about to go astray, is it well that God “hedges up our way with thorns,” and “builds a wall” that he may make our wanderings from him perplexing, embarrassing, and painful? In his providence he removes us from this or the other situation, where we might have been corrupted: He breaks ensnaring friendships—keeps from forming improper connections—removes or embitters worldly comforts; and sends disappointments and trials, to keep us humble, holy, and watchful. In reviewing the course of a gracious providence, we may see many salutary instances of this nature; and the retrospect ought to excite a spirit of confidence and of gratitude towards him, who preserved us from what would at once have dishonoured his name, and deeply injured ourselves.

Afflictions are designed to be trials likewise: They are so with a special view to the discovery of our disorders, in order to their cure; and the exercise of our holy principles, in order to their growth. Tribulation often calls forth the latent corruptions of the heart: The mind feels the workings of impatience; the heart frets, murmurs, and repines against the painful Providence of heaven; earthly attachments are found to be strong, and the spirit of rebellion seems to gain vigour. We startle, as if our trials had caused those evils; whereas they have only brought to light what had always been within, but in a state of concealment. Our faith and confidence are thus brought to the test, and we find, to our shame, how apt we are to distrust the God of our mercies. We are led, like Ezekiel,

from one evil to another; and hear the voice which said to him, "Son of man, I will show thee yet more and greater abominations than these."

Afflictions serve to discover our natural wretchedness and our utter helplessness. In the time of overwhelming distress and deep agitation, we often feel unable even to address the hearer of prayer, and are ready to write bitter things against ourselves, and to look on this as a token of the heavy displeasure of heaven. The design of our heavenly Father, however, is to convince us of our ignorance, depravity, and weakness—to make us feel our utter wretchedness in ourselves, and our entire dependence on him. We need to be cured of self-confidence, to have our idols broken before us, and to be led to implicit reliance on God. There are times in which we feel so happy in the enjoyment of fellowship with him, that we think the loss of any earthly comfort would be borne with comparative ease. But when the delight of our eyes is removed, we feel that our life was much bound up in the creature, and are surprised at the discontent of our hearts. We pray, that the Lord would humble and sanctify us; and he answers us, not merely by the soft and gradual influence of his truth, but by employing afflictions to illustrate it to us, and to impress it on our minds. We are thus made to feel more of the evils of our spirit, and the more to prize the remedy. We may have wondered at the conduct of others when in certain circumstances; but when beset with the same temptations ourselves, we may have acted a much worse part. This, though it ought not

to lessen our impressions of the evil of sin, ought to teach us candour and humility.

Thus is the Lord "proving us" for our good. If, indeed, we sink into despair; if we continue to pore upon the evils which affliction has discovered, without going at once to the physician; if we struggle against them in our own strength; or if we begin to make our sense of vileness, and our supposed humility, a sort of foundation for hope and confidence—of course we have not profited by the discovery, but have become worse than before. But if the discovery of our evils has deepened our sense of the depravity of our nature; if it has endeared to us the rich and the free pardoning mercy of God; if it has led us afresh to the blood of the cross for the remission of our sins; if it has endeared to us the character of Jesus, as a Saviour from sin; and if it has led us to him for a complete cure—then has it been truly salutary. Being thus made sensible of our many wants, and led to see the entire suitableness of the Gospel to our condition in all its extent, we learn to live more simply by the faith of Christ; and to cherish an humble and devotional spirit, in the exercise of every Christian principle, and the practice of every Christian duty. We are taught by this means to unite confidence in our leader, with the utmost vigilance against temptation and snares, and with unremitting activity in the service of him who loved us and gave himself for us.

But afflictions do not only discover our evils: they try our religious principles, and so make them mani-

fest. They serve to show the reality and the measure of our piety. When Abraham was called to offer up his Son, his faith in God, and his sacred regard to his will, were made manifest. But the design was not simply to make them manifest, but to exercise them; and so to increase their vigour, and add to his joy. In the day of prosperity, there is not the same scope for the manifestation of those principles which constitute the soul of genuine religion as there is in the day of adversity. In the season of trial our earthly props are shaken, or removed; and it is seen how far we have learned to seek our all in God, and our God in all.

I am led to remark in connection with this, that afflictions enlarge our views; increase our desire of spiritual things; and capacitate us for more ample measures of divine grace, and degrees of sacred joys. Paul was called to uncommon trials; but he had corresponding support and consolation. Strong as was his faith, and ardent as was his piety, they admitted of farther degrees; and the increase of the hallowed principles of genuine religion was far more than an equivalent for all the extremities he endured. This is one great thing taught us in his beautiful description of the benefit of affliction, in Romans v. 3, 4, 5.

In relation to this I would remind you that when afflictions thus strengthen piety, and are connected with more than proportionate joy, they fit for kinds and degrees of usefulness for which we could not otherwise be qualified. This consideration animated Paul under all his distresses. It was his joy that he



was afflicted, not merely for his own sake, but that he might be taught by experience how "to comfort others with the same comfort with which he had been comforted of God." The consolation he received was endeared to him, by the thought that the benefit of it might be reflected on others. But, besides the particular case of comfort in trouble, there is a general principle here stated—namely, that afflictions are not always directly intended for the correction of evil, or for the prevention of it; but are meant to qualify for more extensive and varied usefulness, whether in comforting those that are cast down, or in otherwise profiting our brethren. We of course ought to be concerned, not only that ourselves, but that others also, may be blessed by our trials. Throughout the Scriptures this generous spirit is inculcated and cherished.

One way in which the afflictions of Christians are of general utility, is the display which they afford of the power of Divine grace, and the happy influence of the Gospel in sustaining, and animating, the mind under the heaviest trials. That this manifestation may be made of the nature and tendency of genuine religion, the Lord calls his people to manifold trials; and deeply ought we to feel our responsibility in the hour of tribulation. On us observation is fixed, and the Gospel is judged of by our deportment. Facts impress more than mere statements. We profess to have special resources under the afflictions of life. We declare also, that it is at once our duty and our privilege to bow with cheerfulness to the will of God. We have, then, a post of honour to maintain,



and it becomes us to prove that though sorrowful we are always rejoicing. The spirit and the behaviour of heavily afflicted Christians have awakened attention to the truth—have reclaimed the irreligious—have strengthened the weak, and encouraged the timid. Is not then an afflictive event to be prized as a means of usefulness by the illustration it may afford of the nature and the blessedness of genuine piety, and the consequent recommendation of the Gospel to the attention of others? But as time is connected with eternity, the afflictions of this state are also designed to fit us for the world of light and of blessedness, and for high degrees of glory and happiness there.

Such are some of the views in which affliction is represented in Scripture. Keeping them in eye, suffer me to suggest to you a few general observations connected with the subject. The trials of time are often blessed, for the purpose of awakening us to a sense of sin and of wretchedness. The evils of the heart and of the life, the temptations incident to particular circumstances, and the many dangers which attend this state of vanity, are all made to rise before the mind, and deeply to impress it. Thus were the brethren of Joseph profited by the embarrassing circumstances in which they were placed in Egypt. In the same way was Manasseh humbled, and brought to repentance. Instead of seeking to evade the charges of conscience, we then admit them to be just. We murmur not at the stroke of heaven, but confess that we are punished less than our iniquities deserve. The mind is opened to perceive, and the heart to embrace, that resting place

and that full provision which the Gospel hath provided. It is truly a blessing to have the spell broken, and the enchantment dissolved, which have so long enslaved us,—and so blinded us, that the real state of things has been hid. When the soul is led to the Saviour, is made to wait upon him, and to cast itself upon his mercy; however painful the means, the end compensates for all. When the heart is made to cling to the cross of the Redeemer, and to build its whole hope upon his finished work, there is much cause for thankfulness to God, who, rather than suffer us to sleep in sin and in false security, awakened us by trouble, and gave us rest in himself,—rest which abides in the midst of trials the most acute and the most protracted, and which shall issue in life everlasting.

The way in which affliction operates upon the mind of a sinner when first led to the truth is, in many respects, similar to that in which it sanctifies the soul of a Christian. In neither case can the evils of life, of themselves, change the heart; but in both, the mind is led to that which, when believed, works effectually in renovating the whole man. Permit me, then, to call your attention to some of the ways in which affliction becomes profitable.

Trials are of use in leading us to consider and to acknowledge the hand of our God. Job, in the day of his affliction, rose above second causes; and said that he who had taken away, was he who had given, and blessed his name. The recollection of the hand of God made the Psalmist keep silent, and bowed his mind to the will of heaven. David, when reproached by Shimei,

looked up to him who had permitted him to do so; and this calmed his heart, and cherished a spirit of forgiveness. Nothing happens to us by chance—we are not left fatherless; for the providence of God is concerned in our trials. We are apt, in our journey, to stop at second causes, whether the occurrences of the way are what we call prosperous or adverse. It is humbling that we so often walk on without meeting God, and that the very instruments he employs come between us and himself. This must be highly dishonourable to him; and must deprive us of the benefit of affliction, while it converts prosperity into the means of cherishing the most unhallowed principles. Against this we ought vigilantly to guard, under the firm conviction that his glory and our happiness are inseparably connected. If he remove from us our earthly comforts, it is that we may see their nature, and be led to aspire after that which is certain—that better part, which shall never be taken from us. Sweet is the privilege of being able to look to God as a Father, and to every event as coming from him who loved us and gave himself for us!

The afflictions of life have profited us when they have made us sensible of our proper place before God—when they have enlarged our views of his holy character and his righteous law, and have led us to humble ourselves under his mighty hand. It is essential to our real happiness to be in our proper station, and to take pleasure in being so. Whatever tends to humble us, and to prove us, tends to do us good in our latter end. When reduced to situations in which hu-

man aid is felt to be powerless, and so obliged to cast ourselves on God, we feel our weakness and dependence. Under the loss of our earthly comforts we feel our littleness and that we are not worthy of the least of his mercies; and we bow to his will, in the confidence that in his own way, and at the proper time, he will lift us up. We are taught to think more soberly, and to bless the Lord that we are not wholly consumed: We acknowledge the righteousness of God, and become more watchful against sin and the many temptations incident to this state of vanity.

The troubles of this state are blessed as means of leading us to the word of God. They throw much light on Scripture; while it at the same time throws much light on them. In the hour of trial it is found to be a guide, a preservative from sin, and the source of great consolation. The promises of God are found to be truly precious; and he himself is proved to be an all-sufficient portion in the absence of all earthly good. The Scriptures appear in a new light, and we search them with a new spirit. Our experience of their complete adaptation to the state and the wants of the soul increases our knowledge of their worth and their import. In circumstances the most trying to nature, the heart is delighted with the bright light thrown on the character and the ways of God; and is made to rejoice in the glory, and to feel the power of his truth. The soul is particularly occupied with the work and administration of the Saviour; and is gratified in surveying a plan of redemption, so honourable to God, and so suited to the state of man.



When we are led by our affliction to the throne of grace, in the name of the Redeemer, we find at once relief, comfort, and purity. We go, not merely from a cold sense of duty, but from a sense of want and of danger; and because we find all our happiness in God. In the hour of trial we feel our weakness, and our devotions are quickened by the death of our earthly joys. Are we afflicted? let us pray. He who invites us to him will satisfy the longing soul, and fill the hungry soul with goodness. In the day of prosperity we are ready to forget God; but the storms of adversity shake off our sloth, languor, and indifference, and awaken the flame that was ready to be extinguished. So it was with David, whose devotion was most ardent in the deserts and in the deep waters of tribulation. None of his Psalms breathe a more elevated and spiritual strain of piety than those which he wrote in the wilderness. In prosperity, while at the fountain-head of public means, he is far from appearing to the same advantage. Blessed, then, must that trial be which has led us to the hearer of prayer.

I speak not merely of prayer for deliverance from trouble. We ought not to seek relief simply, but relief in connection with the honour of God. It was in this way that the suffering Redeemer implored aid and deliverance in the days of his affliction. We cannot, and ought not to be insensible to pain; and we may desire and use means for relief, provided that we do so in submission to the will of God. We may be heard, though not released from trouble, by being granted a much higher blessing,—namely, grace to support us



under our trials, and to make them salutary to our souls. The very compassion of our Father may keep him from removing the bitter draught. It becomes us to remember that creatures entice the heart, and steal it away, as if they could impart happiness; and that afflictions are sent to stop us in our wanderings from genuine enjoyment, and to bring us back to God, the only spring of all true blessedness. Painful as may be our distresses, they are not sent to bereave us of happiness; but to fill us with that bliss which is real and permanent. Hence our prayers for deliverance ought to be accompanied with complete resignation to the providence of God.

We need to be taught the uncertainty of our most valued enjoyments, that we may be enabled to enjoy them with a Christian spirit. We are taught this, not by reading and hearing only, but by means of afflictive providences. They serve to bring us into a proper state of mind for receiving instruction, and they make us feel what the Scriptures so strikingly describe. We are made to see that all our earthly enjoyments hang upon a breath—that this scene of vanity is poor indeed—that the Saviour is our only portion and resting place—and that the heavenly temple is our true and everlasting home. Our Father will not indulge us to our ruin; but, loving us more than we do ourselves, he defeats our plans, destroys our fairest and firmest fabrics, wins our affections away from vanity, and gains them to himself.

We derive benefit from affliction when we maintain our confidence in God under its heaviest pressure. In

cases the most critical, and, in our view, hopeless, he has the best opportunity for the demonstration of his power, his wisdom, and faithfulness; and for laying a solid foundation for the faith and the hope of his people. He takes pleasure in those who hope in his mercy; and he so arranges his dispensations as best to put our confidence to the test: Hence he led Israel by a circuitous way to Canaan, and exercised their faith in "a land of deserts and of pits—of scorpions and fiery flying serpents." There they were made to feel their dependence on God, and had an opportunity of entirely trusting him. In such circumstances we ought to rely upon him; and, in the confidence of faith, to consult him. It ought to be enough to us that he has promised to be with us, and to do us good. On his word all may be ventured. Abraham acted thus, when he hoped against hope,—when he turned from all that friends could say—from all that the common course of events indicated; and left the whole in the hand of God, in the firm persuasion that the promise should be fulfilled.

Though the language of Scripture be general, it is applicable to all the varied and ever-varying circumstances of the whole family of God. We need not a personal revelation: To look for any thing of this kind is quite enthusiastic. Christians doubtless have often their attention directed to particular passages of Scripture, and have the happiness of drawing from them what they were meant to impart; but it is the truth contained in them, and not a presumption of their being an immediate revelation to the individual, that

produces the effect. The Scriptures speak only of characters; and if we answer to these characters, we may and ought to consider all that is addressed to them as addressed to ourselves. The people of God form one great family, and the promises made to one are made to all, as far as their circumstances are similar. There are many general assurances in Scripture of the Divine favour and kindness, on which our minds ought ever to rest, and which we ought ever to plead at the throne of mercy. Never let us limit the Holy One of Israel; but, amidst seeming impossibilities, follow the father of the faithful when he offered up Isaac, reasoning thus—“The Lord who hath promised to bless the nations in the seed of this my son, is able to raise him from the dead, though consumed to ashes.” When all our props are removed, and we are called to walk in darkness, then is the time for discovering our confidence in God, by committing every thing to him. When the drying up of the streams of earthly comfort has had the effect of inducing us to seek our all in him, we have reason to say, that in love he hath afflicted us. Earthly joys are transient, and often leave a sting behind them; but the joys of a Christian are pure and progressive.

I would here remind you, that there are cases in which the most eminent of the children of God need to have fear as well as love kept alive. We have examples of this in Jacob, David, and Hezekiah, with many more. The afflictions of life serve to keep up a holy fear of our Father: He will not suffer us to wander without being recalled by tribulation: He

treats us as children in training for heaven. The discipline of his family includes correction for our faults, and the frowns of a Father are truly hard to bear. The fear of them serves to keep us steadfast in his way. His corrections are adapted to the place we are destined to occupy, and to our particular tempers, habits, and dispositions, as connected with it. Now we know not all that our Father has in reserve for us in heaven, and so cannot be competent judges of the education he gives us on earth. It is for us, then, to bow to his will with cordial confidence and resignation.

We are warned, you know, against two evils—that of despising the chastening of the Lord, and that of fainting under it. We are chargeable with the former when we do not acknowledge the hand of God in our trials—when we deem them too contemptible to be feared—when thinking lightly of them we ask not that aid, without which they cannot be endured with a proper spirit—when we do not look to them as flowing from love to our souls, from displeasure against sin, and from an earnest desire to deliver us from it,—when we look only to creatures for the aid which we need—when we refuse to abandon the evils we are pursuing—and when we stubbornly refuse to feel and to bow to the will of God. When the heart thus wanders from God, affliction, instead of being salutary, becomes deeply injurious.

On the other hand, we ought not to faint under the rod. We are in danger of running into this error, when endeavouring to avoid the former. In our haste and impatience, we become incapable of calmly con-



sidering all circumstances. That we be preserved from fainting, it is necessary that we grow in faith; for it is unbelief that causes us to sink in the day of adversity. While Moses looked to him who is invisible, and had his eye on the recompence of reward, he cheerfully endured his many and heavy trials. When the attention of Peter was occupied with the waves only, he instantly began to sink; but had he kept his eye upon his Lord, and had he thought of his character, his mind would have remained in peace, and his security would not have been questioned.—We should beware of so thinking on our afflictions as to exclude the contemplation of our Lord. We err thus when we pore constantly on our trials, without looking to the bright side of the cloud. In this case we assuredly will put a wrong construction on the ways of God, and deprive ourselves of the great encouragement afforded us in Scripture, even in times the darkest and most distressing. The most eminent of the servants of God have erred in this way. Moses did so when “he spake unadvisedly.” Even the intrepid Elijah failed when obliged to wander an exile. Jeremiah fainted when he suffered under Pashur: Jacob did so when he said “all these things are against me;” and David, when he dreaded that “he should one day perish by the hand of Saul.” How closely do our feelings and steps often resemble these!

We faint under our troubles when we are overcome by surprise and overwhelmed by perplexity—when we give way to dejection and despondency—when we utter heartless complaints, to the discouragement of



the weak—when we refuse to be comforted—when we overlook our remaining comforts—when we become indifferent about the afflictions of others—when we become unfit for, or neglect the duties of our station—and when we indulge in improper views of the dispensations of God, as inconsistent with his love, character, and word. In this state of mind, we are in danger of acting as did Jonah when his gourd was withered. Instead of confiding in God, we become so engrossed with our trials, and so absorbed in meditation on our afflictions, that we overlook and forget the only thing that can relieve and gladden the heart.

Let me exhort you to rise above every thing of this kind, and imitate David when he “encouraged himself in the Lord his God.” Seek an increase of faith that your mind may dwell on things unseen and eternal; that spiritual things may ever impress your heart; and that, in beholding the way in which the Lord leads his redeemed, you may be led to give him your entire confidence. You have before you a great cloud of witnesses, who have left their testimony to the faithfulness and the goodness of God, amidst the many evils which they suffered here, but which they have overcome through the energy of faith. The men of this world look only at the things of time, and no wonder that they are overwhelmed by the troubles of this scene; but Christians look beyond them to that world where their Elder Brother already is, and where they hope soon to be. Miserable, indeed, are they whose views are bounded by time; in whom the sor-

row of the world is deeply seated; and in whose spirit it is working death! Think of Ahab, Haman, and Saul; and turn to the many daily instances of wasting constitutions and broken hearts which the face of society presents,—and then dwell on the blessedness of that spirit which bows to the will of God, and finds even in manifold trials, joy unspeakable and full of glory.

It is not the man who is exempted from tribulation, but the man that endures it, that is pronounced blessed. Take for your example your brethren and companions in tribulation. Trace the footsteps of the flock, and you will find that all of them have trodden the path of tribulation. In reading the Scriptures, you will find yourself most interested in the histories of those whose career was the most dark and distressing. In the school of affliction the principles of piety are called forth, tried, and strengthened; as were the excellencies of the Saviour himself. Look to the cloud of witnesses; but look particularly to him, and see in his example, the blissful result of heavy and manifold tribulations. Happy is he, you will then say, whom the Lord correcteth; who, by the losses and the crosses of time, is induced to take God for his portion; who is weaned from earthly hopes and worldly dependencies; and is determinately turned to God as the fountain of his happiness. Precious, indeed, is affliction when it cherishes that self-denying, subdued, and heavenly temper of mind, which is the very life of genuine religion; which insures both safety and blessedness in this valley of tears; which purifies and

strengthens the heart; and which assimilates to the character of the Saviour, and to the spirit of the celestial temple.

Should you be called to duties arduous and painful—according to your day shall be your strength. He who brought his people to the Red Sea, and allowed them to be hemmed in, did so to manifest his power and his goodness. His people were called to stand still and see his salvation. They were called at the moment, of all others the most critical, to go forward. They did so, with the sea before them, in the confidence of safety. It was “to them according to their faith;” for he who had called them to go forward spake and opened a way in the waters. This is written for our comfort and instruction. He is the same now that he was then. When called to difficult circumstances, let the Lord be our confidence. There is nothing in this bordering on thoughtlessness, insensibility, or enthusiasm. We have the word of our God before us, and there we see the work and the character of Christ; and believing in this we act under the influence of principles the most rational. The faith of this raises us to the hope of the second coming of the Saviour, and in the prospect of it we are patient and happy in all our tribulations. As the husbandman waits for the fruits of harvest, so do we wait for the fruits of our faith and our afflictions. With us the word of our God ought to be an end of all doubt; and confiding in it, we ought to establish and compose our hearts, in the expectation of that blessed day when the Redeemer “shall come to be glorified

in his saints, and admired in all them that believe."

The great thing is to have the Lord himself ever before us ; to feel and act under the constant conviction that he is ever present with us ; and to remember that soon, very soon, we shall be called to his bar. When through faith we maintain a resigned and devout spirit, success will follow us in all our ways. But when we fail to persevere in the course of faith and of patience we shall suffer, as did Moses and Aaron, when for their evils they were corrected of God. When the Saviour dwells in our hearts as the object of intense regard, and we continue in the contemplation of our future prospects through him, the mind is elevated above all the interests and the afflictions of time.—We acquire much of the spirit of the many who have travelled the same course before us, and in circumstances far more distressing than any in which we have been placed. That which supported them can also support us ; and, in the faith of that word in which they trusted, we shall, as they did, finish our course with joy.

May the God of all consolation bless to you the ways of his Providence, by making them all work together for your present and everlasting good. May you find comfort here in the heaviest trials ; and grow in meetness for that state in which sorrow and sighing are unknown, and where bliss unmingled ever flows.

I remain, &c.



## LETTER XII.

ON OUR LORD'S ANSWER TO THE SONS OF ZEBEDEE.

Then came to him the Mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him. And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand and the other on the left, in thy kingdom. But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able. And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with; but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give; but *it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father.*—MATTHEW, XX. 21—23.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

IN my last letter I endeavoured to illustrate the goodness of God, by showing you some of the benefits which may be derived from affliction. You would observe that I kept in view the important consideration, that they are designed to affect the character, so as to make meet for heaven. With a special eye to this, I shall now make some remarks on the reply of our Lord to the request of the sons of Zebedee.

The disciples James and John, through the medium of their mother, expressed a desire that they should be granted the honour of sitting, the one on the right and the other on the left hand of their Lord, in his kingdom. The request included not merely situations of rank or dignity in general, but the two chief official situations

in his kingdom—not merely a high degree of happiness, but the honour of being his principal ministers. This appears from the repetition made, in the 27th and 28th verses, of the rule of precedency which he formerly established, when the disciples were disputing which of them should be greatest; and from the reference which he makes, in verse 25th, to the Princes of the Gentiles. It appears also from a similar reference made on the night in which he was betrayed, connected with the promise then given them, that they should sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. It is evident that they had very mistaken notions of his character and glory: They thought of an earthly kingdom, while his kingdom is spiritual. But our Lord, without directly entering on the subject of their prejudices, took occasion from their request to exhibit his sufferings as the means of his initiation into office, and to state the principles on which the honours of his kingdom should be bestowed. Looking on them, he felt for their ignorance; and in a very gentle and affectionate manner told them, they were not aware of what they asked. His keen feelings on the occasion, arose from the inseparable connection which he well knew subsisted between his sufferings and his advancement to the throne of his kingdom. They had touched a subject, to him of the most tender interest. The principles in man which associate ideas had their influence on him as well as on us; and the thought of the right and the left hand of his throne, led his mind to the awful scenes which he had to encounter before he could ascend it. He had but lately

predicted his sufferings, and never were they absent from his thoughts; but, still, particular occurrences did at times make them press with more than ordinary power upon his mind. The present was a circumstance much calculated to do so. He thought of them as the direct appointment of God, in the character of an offended Lawgiver,—as a token of his sacred and mediatorial character,—as an essential part of his consecration to his hallowed office,—and as necessarily distinguished by unutterable severity. He at the same time thought of the resemblance which his people must bear to him as a patient and submissive sufferer, especially in tribulation for the sake of the Góspel, before they could be qualified for the honours, and particularly for the highest honours, of his kingdom. Feeling in this way, he asked his disciples if they could with a proper spirit go through the previous sufferings necessary to fit them for the places they desired: Could they drink of his bitter cup of affliction?—could they be baptized with his baptism of sufferings, as those must be who shall be exalted in his kingdom? They conceived that he spake only of such sufferings as they had already witnessed in him—they were engrossed with the hopes of grandeur and authority, and so did not enter into his meaning—they also confided too much in their own strength; and hence were led to reply, that they could.

Our Lord, without directly charging them with their ambitious spirit, and their utter unfitness, whilst they retained their present views, for such sufferings, or with their erroneous notions of the whole matter,

replied, that they should indeed participate in a measure in his sufferings; but that the honours of his kingdom were not to be conferred on the ground of personal or private friendship, so to say, but on public grounds. The places which they asked were prepared of his Father for those two of his disciples who, by means of the deepest participation with him in patient submissive suffering, in the cause of truth, and in obedience to the will of God, should be found best qualified for them. He did not mean to say, as the supplement indicates, that the places in question were not his to give: He meant that they were his to give, but that in giving them he should be guided, not, as they thought, by private reasons or mere human friendship, but by public reasons; not taken from an arbitrary appointment, but from the purpose of his Father, who had destined them for the two who should most resemble in character the beloved of his soul. This appointment, then, is grounded on the connection between character and blessedness. Accordingly he does not mention the two by name, but simply describes them by their lot, and by their resemblance in principle and spirit to himself. He tells us that they who shall fill the stations in question, shall be the two of his followers who, by being most afflicted here, have had their principles of piety and of benevolence severely tried, and by this means most called forth and invigorated; and have thus become most like in moral and spiritual excellence to him who is now a priest upon his throne. He refers particularly to sufferings borne in a course of labour for the truth of God; but



the principle upon which he proceeds is capable of a general application. The Corinthians had reason to rejoice in those common afflictions which were designed to prevent their being "condemned with the world." When even the ordinary calamities of life cherish and strengthen the principles that adorned the character of Christ, they of course increase our meetness for heavenly glory. It is the end and the effect we are to consider, and not barely the means. Such as are most distinguished by positive holiness shall be best qualified for the highest stations in that kingdom; the honours and rewards of which are invariably proportioned to the degree in which its subjects are conformed to him who, as the first-born of the family, is seated on the throne of his Father. Hence the Scriptures have connected our fellowship with him in suffering, with our fellowship with him in glory.

This was proposing to them a noble object of ambition, in the pursuit of which, instead of being corrupted, they should be purified. The Gospel does not aim at the extirpation of the sense of honour and the desire of glory; for man was originally formed for honour and dominion in a state of innocence; and the Scriptures set before us the hope of glory, honour, and immortality, as an incentive to duty. The promise of God is, "Them that honour me, I will honour;" and the Saviour says, "If any man serve me, him will my Father honour." Shame and disgrace are accordingly represented as among the most painful things in suffering. The sense of honour and the desire of glory, like every other principle in human

nature, have become corrupted. They are occupied with sinful and earthly things. Men glory in their shame, and are ashamed of that which constitutes true glory.

It is the law of Christ's kingdom, however, that he who will be the greatest must be the servant of all. He must imbibe the spirit, and act upon the principles of him who, though Emmanuel, came not to be ministered unto, but to minister—yea, to give his life a ransom for many. We see in the Saviour what true glory is. It is not in the least like to what men admire; but is indeed the very opposite to it. Glory is moral and spiritual excellence, in its exercise and display, and in the honour which it justly commands. In a perfect being, the degree of this moral and spiritual excellence corresponds with the degree of his natural faculties. Now, in the Saviour every uncreated and created excellence is to be found: In him all of them are displayed; and to him, in consequence, every knee shall bow. It is in his character, as the image of the invisible God, that genuine glory is seen; and hence he is termed the brightness, or the effulgence, of the Divine glory.

Jesus stands at the head of the new creation, as did Adam in the old. In the new heaven and the new earth of the second Adam, we see the lost dominion of man more than restored. In him the language of the eighth Psalm is verified, as we are fully taught in the epistle to the Hebrews. In us it will likewise be verified, when we are conformed to him in glory; and to this consummation the

Psalm obviously points. Our lost dominion is destined to be restored and extended through the wonderful medium of this humiliation, and by our conformity to the principles unfolded and glorified by its means. He "was manifested in the flesh" and "made under the law," in order that, in the character of a servant, he might be perfected for all that government with which he is now invested. In imitation of him, we are called to take up the cross, and, as convicted criminals, to admit the equity of the sentence which dooms us to death; and abandoning all hope founded on this passing world, cheerfully to follow him in the path of sorrow and humiliation to the heavenly kingdom. It is thus that we are to deny ourselves to all the false glory of the world, and to seek that which is heavenly and divine. In being conformed to the Man of Sorrows, who, amidst reproach and scorn, endured the cross, despising the shame, and in being thus conformed to the Divine character unfolded by him, we attain true glory; because we by this means attain genuine excellence, have the principles of the Saviour exercised in us, and are enabled to display them. With this is connected heavenly enjoyment; for, in beholding the various manifestations of the glory of God, and as so many mirrors reflecting his image, we find ourselves supremely and divinely blessed.

Our Lord, then, presented to his disciples the noblest object of ambition: He sought to cure them of that spirit which led them to look for an earthly kingdom and for earthly honours—which had led one of them to rebuke him when he spoke of his sufferings.

and death; and which led all of them at last to stumble at his reproach and crucifixion. The method he took was that of instructing them in the true nature of his character and kingdom. He illustrates this by directing them to the means by which he should ascend the throne; and by teaching them, that the way to their honours was the same as his—namely, that of humility, patient suffering, and deadness to this world. This was connected with the exhibition of a glory and a blessedness, infinitely exceeding the boasted, but delusive, honours and joys of which they were in quest. He afterwards drew a contrast between the kingdoms and rulers of this world, and the dignities, offices, and blessings of his kingdom. In it personal or independent dignity and privileges were to be unknown. The greatness of the greatest is connected by him with the duty of condescension and service to the least; and this rule of precedence is enforced by the strongest of all motives—the consideration of his own humiliation. The lesson was not fully received by them at the time; but when the Holy Spirit brought his words to their remembrance afterwards, they came to “glory exclusively in his cross,” and “to rejoice that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.” They taught their brethren, that the way to the kingdom of their Father lay “through manifold tribulations”—that the King, their elder brother, had gone that way—that the way was at once safe and honourable, since he had gone before them, and was still with them, to preserve and to guide them—and that as they now “had fellowship with him in suffering,” so they



should ultimately "participate in his glory." By these considerations did they excite their brethren, and stir up their own minds, to seek, "by patient continuance in well-doing, for glory, honour, and immortality."

You will perceive that our Lord does not say, that no such places as the two requested should be granted to any. On the contrary, his answer implies that some two of his disciples should certainly obtain them, though who they shall be the day of judgment only shall declare. I need not say, then, that the enjoyment of different degrees of glory, and of eminence in honour and dignity, shall certainly obtain in the heavenly world. It must be evident from the answer of our Lord, that such distinctions form a part of the arrangement of God, and are indeed the natural effect of existing character, in that world where bliss is the result of the very nature of things, inasmuch as there existing principles will be followed by corresponding effects and consequences. He teaches us that the trials of life are meant for our good; because they are designed to assimilate us to God, by cherishing, exercising, and so invigorating those sacred principles which include the elements of blessedness. They serve to conform us to the Saviour, in whom there is all in which Jehovah delights; and thus do they serve to augment our happiness in the world of light, holiness, and love.

I would here call your attention more particularly to the view which our Lord, in this passage of Scripture, gives of his glory. He has his eye on his official dignity as a Priest upon his throne, and on what

was necessary to his initiation into office. In order to his being qualified for the official glory in question, and in order to his subsequent investiture with it, it behoved him to submit to suffering and to death. Both qualification for and investiture with office are, in Scripture, included in consecration to it; and hence much of the importance which is attached to the solemn dedication of official characters. By the baptism of his own blood, as was prefigured by the purification of the priests at their consecration, was the Saviour fitted for, and set apart to the office of a priest, and that of a mediatory king. In him these two offices are united; and hence he connects his sufferings on earth with the whole of his mediatorial glory\*.

He refers also, when he calls his sufferings a baptism, to their uncommon and awful severity. When we consider that by consecration, is meant not only appointment to, but likewise qualification for office, there appears an obvious reason for adverting particularly to the heavy and severe nature of his many and complicated distresses. By means of them, he was to be fitted for the high official station which he now holds in heaven, and also for the exalted blessedness of which he is there possessed. From the very first of his life below he was as Emmanuel, and, as immaculately pure in character, qualified for the work he had undertaken; but as his sufferings called forth,

---

\* See Hebrews ii. 10. and v. 9. compared with chap. vii. 28. where the word rendered "perfect" in the former passages is rendered "consecrated," and with chap. ii. 6—9. where suffering is connected with his dominion.

and gave occasion for the display of every positive excellence, they perfected his consecration. In proportion, of course, to their weight, severity and complicated nature, was the measure in which the glorious principles of his character were tried; the brightness of the lustre with which they shone; and the degree in which they were invigorated. They were in a certain sense, like "fire to refine the gold;" for though they could not purge away dross or pollution, of which there was none in the immaculate Saviour, they served to increase the positive preciousness of his moral and spiritual glories. As he grew in stature and in intellectual endowments, so did he in every holy and benevolent principle. The hallowed excellencies of his character were, in particular, eminently increased, through the means of his sufferings; for in him, as in us, that law of nature by which the trial and exercise of a principle adds to its vigour, had its uniform influence. Viewing, then, the excruciating sorrows and inconceivable agonies which awaited him, he calls them a baptism,—to express at once their *sacred* and *overwhelming* nature. Even under the immediate hand of God, his love to his Father, his zeal for his glory, his veneration for his excellence, his abhorrence of sin as opposed to his will, and his love to righteousness as the ornament of his perfections, were all in full and highest exercise, and in the most vivid light exhibited the glory of his character. His love to God was not exercised merely in circumstances of ease and enjoyment, but burned with the warmest fervour and the brightest lustre under all the floods of tribulation.

that the mighty hand of heaven poured upon his soul. It glowed in his breast even under the heaviest sorrows, and the deepest depression which the Divine dereliction could produce in a mind, sustaining at the very time the attacks of earth and of hell. Never, surely, was love so tried : never was it so displayed.

Here shone also the kindred flame of love to men, even in all their guilt and pollution. His sufferings must have excited in his mind the most lively ideas of his people, and of the miseries to which they were liable. Their character also must have been viewed by him with the deepest concern. His love, however, did not decline when thus tried. On the contrary, the benevolent feelings of his heart were the more excited and invigorated. Hence the Scriptures dwell particularly on his cross and agonies, as affording the most advantageous station for taking a distinct view of his illustrious character. In this way was he fitted for the situation he now fills as a priest upon his throne.

He entered heaven as the first born among many brethren ; and there he exhibited the very lineaments of the invisible God, in fully unfolding the views, dispositions and principles, which governed himself in the days of his flesh. Here too he by the same means depicted the character of man ; the nature and issue of sin ; and the nature and object of the Divine law. In exhibiting his love to God and his love to sinners, as manifested in his sacrifice, he secured the confidence of all in his heavenly ministrations. By these principles, as developed and brightened in the furnace



of affliction, and by his relation to both parties, was he qualified for the great work of mediating between the Lawgiver and the guilty children of Adam. When in the invisible world of angels and departed spirits, he in effect declared, that not the smallest part of his unparalleled woes could have been spared ; that in all his pangs, and in all his agonies, he bowed to the will of God ; unquestionably his declaration must have come home to all hearts with irresistible energy ; must have enlarged their views of the Divine character ; and must have added to their joys. In this consummation of his expiatory work God delights, and has expressed his delight and approbation by calling him to the throne of his glory.

Connected with his advancement to honour, is his advancement to bliss. His soul now rests in the full and everlasting enjoyment of the Divine perfections manifested in his own work. He is capacitated for this joy as Mediator, by means of his unutterable suffering ; because they brought him into the nearest and most intimate union with the Divine character, and illustrated its glory. The principles exercised by him when afflicted by his God, contain the very elements of his present happiness. As Emmanuel, he exhibited the effulgence of the Divine glory in his obedience unto death ; in his official ministrations he still displays it ; and in that, which is thus manifested, his soul rests with ineffable delight. The praises of the celestial temple exhibit the foundation of his glory and the spring of his joys. The purport of the heavenly song of the redeemed is, " By how much he

humbled himself and suffered on earth for sinners, by so much let him be exalted and blessed in heaven." He who emptied himself of power, and assumed the form of a servant; who, though rich, for our sakes became poor; who stooped to become the object of scorn; who was crucified through apparent weakness; and who became a curse for us—is declared worthy to receive all power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. Such is the song of all holy creatures; and such is the judgment of God, the best judge of excellence, and the best acquainted with the Redeemer. All serves to shew, that his glory and his bliss arise from his humiliation and his woes on earth.

Allow me, my dear friend, to connect these views with the two important considerations, that there will be different degrees of glory among the redeemed in heaven; and that the way in which they shall be fitted for their several stations there, will be that of being in their measure conformed to the character of the man of sorrows. The two who shall sit on his right hand and on his left hand, shall be the two who shall have drunk most deeply of his cup of affliction, and shall have been most baptised with his baptism. On the same principle the redeemed in general, from the highest to the lowest in the kingdom of heaven, shall be fitted in their measure for the stations they shall respectively fill. The light afflictions of this present momentary scene, not only are *followed* by, but actually "*work out* a far more exceeding and an eternal weight of glory." They do so, by drawing the mind

from created objects to the cross of Christ and its transforming discoveries; and so inducing it to make "unseen and eternal things" its constant and delightful aim. If the afflictions of life work out for us far higher blessedness, I need not say that there must be a diversity of glory in heaven. It is evident that, if the Christian who is removed from earth almost as soon as he receives the truth, shall possess the same weight of glory with those who have suffered long and severely in the cause of God, it cannot be said that the trials of the latter have wrought out for them what they shall enjoy. In that case, their bliss were quite irrespective of their sufferings.

In proportion to the measure in which we are conformed to the hallowed principles which the sufferings of the Saviour called forth and exercised, is the measure in which we are capacitated for high degrees of conformity to him in glory. The same means which brightened his character are necessary to purify and sanctify ours. It is the battle that tries the courage of the soldier: It is adversity that proves the character, and shows what we are. Nor do the sufferings of life serve only for the display of our principles: They contribute also to their growth. Every principle in the mind is invigorated by frequent exercise. Resistance and opposition call forth the powers of the soul, and give birth to exertion. Every victory we obtain increases our strength and our courage, and prepares us to renew the conflict. When the character is perfected, we shall not need to be afflicted!

Then we shall dwell where there is no sorrow nor pain. There is indeed one great difference between the Redeemer's sufferings and ours: His afflictions not only perfected the display of his character, and are a pattern to us: they also made atonement for sin; whereas the sufferings of his people can never in the smallest degree expiate transgression. The only expiatory sacrifice is that of Christ: On it his redeemed rest their hope, and from it they derive their peace. But having believed the Gospel, and having found rest to their souls in the blood of the cross, the desire of conformity to their Lord is powerfully excited. This desire is gratified by making the afflictions, and indeed all the events of life, the means of trying and exercising the principles of piety and benevolence; and so of forming and finishing that holy character which it is the desire of Christians to possess, and with which happiness is inseparably connected. The blessedness of the redeemed is not the same with that enjoyed by man in paradise: It springs from the character of God as unfolded in the Gospel, and which could never have been fully developed but by such means as the cross of Christ exhibits. It is happiness resulting from a character formed in the school of affliction. Not that the mere endurance of pain will sanctify the soul: Far from it.—On the contrary, afflictions often harden the heart. But when, through the Divine blessing, they lead to the Gospel, and so cherish the hallowed principles which adorned the humiliation of Christ, they serve in us, as well as in him, to complete the character; and so to increase our capacity for that



bliss which fills the celestial temple, and is a participation in the happiness of God.

If, then, the most exalted in heaven shall be those of the family of God who have had most fellowship with the Saviour as a sufferer, we see at once how it is that "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and how he scourgeth that son most severely whom he intends most to honour and to bless." He does this with a view to eternity: and not merely with a general view to their future good, but with an eye to their individual character, and to the particular place he designs for them in the heavenly temple. He acts from love the most wise and ardent, and overlooks their present momentary feelings from a kind regard to their eternal glory. Surely this is well calculated to excite our love to him, to call forth patience and confidence, and to produce meek resignation and animating joy. His eye is ever upon us; and all the painful trials of life with which we are visited, will work together for our good both here and in the world to come.

You may perhaps suppose, my dear friend, that many have scarcely any afflictions, who yet appear to be eminent Christians. There is a mistake here. This is a world of evil and of pain; and many who appear to have but little to annoy them, have not a few unseen distresses. Tribulation is not confined to sickness, disease, losses, and the many visible disappointments of life. Could we look into the breasts of the most prosperous, we should see proofs of this. "The heart knoweth its own bitterness." I wish you to observe, however, that it is not merely the *quantum* of

affliction that regulates the measure of glory, but the *spirit* with which it is endured. Two men may have the same degree of affliction, while one of them bears it with but little of Christian principle, and the other with a high measure of the mind of Christ. One man may have a great burden of tribulation, and another may have comparatively but light trials to bear. The latter, however, may profit more by his afflictions than the former. The very weight of his trials may occasion in the one much of an improper spirit, while the humility, the diffidence, and the piety of the other may be called forth and exercised in "casting his lighter burden on the Lord." Afflictions do not of themselves sanctify: They are but means; and the effect depends on the Divine blessing. Of course, the kindness of God is seen, not in the measure of affliction only, but in what, through his blessing, it is made to produce.

It is delightful to follow the Saviour as he advances through his sufferings to that bliss and that glory into which he hath gone, as our forerunner. If for us he hath gone to heaven by the path of affliction, ought not we to follow him? Shall we seek for glory, and refuse or be unwilling to go to it in the way in which he went to it? Is there not a happiness in sharing his lot? Ought not every principle of generosity to induce us cheerfully to follow him in his course of tribulation? Nor is this all. In the day when his glory shall be revealed, how shall we rejoice in being called to communion with him in his exalted bliss! The disciple who bears the greatest resemblance to him

who is the first-born of the redeemed family, and the express image of the Divine character, is the child whom the King delighteth to honour. With this prospect in view, we may well be reconciled to our trials here; and rejoice in the demonstrations of the Divine goodness given in embracing our eternity in the events of time; and in afflicting us, that we may be made partakers of his holiness.

There is another view of the connection between present evils and future bliss, to which I beg your attention. We are in the habit, you know, of judging of the present by contrasting it with the past. On this principle the misery of the rich man in the parable is represented as aggravated by the remembrance of his former condition of ease and enjoyment; and the bliss of Lazarus as in some measure increased by the recollection of his afflictions on earth. Present bitters will make future sweets the sweeter: The difficulties of the way in which we have been led—the labours, conflicts, sufferings, and hardships to which we were called in this valley of tears—and the losses and disappointments incident to this fleeting scene, will heighten our happiness, and endear to us our peace, security, and triumph.

The redeemed are accordingly represented as blessing God for their redemption, “out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;” which implies a retrospective view of their several conditions on earth, and that each remembered the various circumstances of his lot. Indeed, if at the tribunal of Christ all our works shall undergo a scrutiny, those works must be

brought to our remembrance; and with them every thought, sensation, and word, with which, as motives and consequences, they were connected; so that in the nature of things the knowledge which we have acquired here can never be lost. If not lost, it must answer some useful purposes; among which the one I now refer to may not be the least.

This serves also to illustrate the subject of different degrees of glory. The innumerable multitude of the redeemed have not all experienced the same kinds and measures of affliction,—yea, perhaps, no two have in every respect sustained the same trials: It must be evident, then, that their recollections in heaven will be exceedingly diversified. The kind of enjoyment resulting from such recollections cannot be the same in all; for, surely, it will not be said, that in heaven there shall be any mistakes as to the past, any more than as to the present. Nothing merely ideal shall there enter into the causes of our happiness.

I shall now advert to another circumstance in the reply of our Lord, which throws light on the subject of diversities in future blessedness. He represents heaven as a social state, and the redeemed as forming an organized body, in which different members perform different functions. The two disciples asked, as I have said, not merely the highest degrees of enjoyment, but of official rank; and the answer of our Saviour certainly admits that something analogous to distinctions of the kind shall obtain in heaven. Indeed, the very nature of a social state requires this: I mean not the formal distinctions of office, strictly so



called, but distinctions sufficiently resembling these to justify the use of the language descriptive of the one in illustrating the nature of the other. In order to the enjoyment of the benefit of society, it is not enough that there is a multitude in the same place: There must besides this be an interchange of thought, sentiment, and feeling. If all have in every respect the same original and acquired endowments—if the talents of each have been exercised in precisely the same way—if each one has the same degree of knowledge, and the same measure of every positive excellence—if the same emotions are to the same extent in every breast—and if all have the very same recollections, it must be evident that, in such a body, every individual would see but himself in his brother; no new idea could be communicated by one to another; no new sensation could be excited, and of course no new enjoyment imparted. There would be a perfect monotony, and the friendship strengthened by companionship would be unknown. The happiness enjoyed would be independent of social intercourse. Such is not a state, surely, in which could be enjoyed the perfection of that which is necessary to gratify our natural and strong desire of society.

But in the other view of the subject, there is seen a foundation for the perpetual growth of each individual in every possible excellence, through the constant exercise of every faculty and of every principle of the mind. In heaven, as well as on earth, social intercourse will form a medium through which we shall be enabled to serve one another; for when other means of usefulness

shall fail, because no longer necessary, "love shall abide forever." Yes—In heaven that love which "abideth," will, in a social state, have wide and everlasting scope for unremitting exertion,—and so shall we share in the bliss of him whose love is unceasingly in action. There the body of Christ will be completely organized; and the different members in their respective places will, as guided by the great head, contribute to the good of the whole. Heaven is a state of *activity*; a place where happiness is communicated, as well as enjoyed,—and of course must include the delightful and everlasting union of obedience to the two great and inseparable commandments of the law.

Sweet is this view of heavenly bliss! It does not in the least interfere with the delightful prospect of having all in God, for each of his people will be a mirror in which he will be seen; and in contemplating the redeemed company, who, in reflecting the likeness of their Elder Brother, will reflect the image of their God, the Divine glory will be enjoyed, and will also have an increasingly transforming influence. There the enjoyment of God, and fellowship with his people, will reciprocally affect and increase each other.

The sum of the whole is,—that future bliss will spring from character. This character must be formed here; for the happiness of heaven is but the perfection of that holiness which, even in this world, distinguishes the people of God. Every thing in this arrangement is honourable to the Saviour, and reflects the highest lustre on the glory of his kingdom. How delightful the contemplation of his grandeur as a Priest upon

his throne, surrounded by the innumerable hosts of the saved, who have all been made kings and priests by fellowship with him; and who all, from the two on his right hand and on his left, down to the least in the kingdom of heaven, "cast their crowns at his feet!"—Let this animating prospect, which is at once so worthy of God, and so adapted to our immortal spirits, stimulate us to unremitting exertion. However painful and distressing our lot may be; whatever may be the sacrifices we are called to make—all sinks into utter insignificance when compared with this. How soothing the thought that, in proportion to the measure of our present afflictions, and the degree in which they conform us to the Redeemer in principle, will be our height in glory and in bliss!

Allow me to comfort you with these words.—Study with interest this cheering subject, and seek that the Lord would enable you to imbibe all the consolation it is fitted to impart. Meditate on the cross and glory of Christ, and pray that all the events of life may serve to work out for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of blessedness. Live by faith in the atonement, and be like Paul determined to endure and sacrifice all, that "by any means," however painful or costly, you may attain the bliss connected with the resurrection of the dead. This will know no end. Every step in it will be a promise of bliss yet greater, and an earnest of glory yet higher. Look for the day when all darkness shall flee away; and when the effulgence of the light of the Divine favour

which shines upon the Saviour, will fill you with unutterable delight. Praying that the Lord may be with your spirit, I remain, &c.

## LETTER XIII.

### ON THE DIVERSITY OF DEGREES IN GLORY.

**General remarks**—Future blessedness the result of the Divine approbation, of the approving testimony of conscience, of being blessings to others, and of an enlarged capacity for spiritual enjoyments—The diversity of rewards explicitly taught in Scripture—Consistent with salvation by grace—The works rewarded, the fruits of Divine favour—The reward bestowed for the sake of Christ—Is an addition to the general blessing of redemption—Is a display of the Divine love to righteousness—Is not an arbitrary gift, but the natural effect of existing principles—Conclusion.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I HAVE sometimes heard you speak of the different degrees of glory which shall be enjoyed in heaven. There is something very gratifying to the mind in an enquiry of this nature; and I am satisfied that the views which you and I entertain respecting it, have a clear support in the constitution of the Divine government and in the Holy Scriptures. There is nothing in the diversity of rewards inconsistent with the doctrine of salvation by grace. No creature certainly can ever merit any good thing at the hand of the Creator. I do not mean sinful creatures only, but even such as have continued uniformly obedient. Their faculties are the gift of free bounty,



and the blessings they enjoy are the same: They must ever be under the highest obligations to love and serve God; and when they have discharged every duty, they are required to say, "we are unprofitable servants." This, however, is not inconsistent with Christians being rewarded according to their works. The nature of the reward itself, and the circumstances connected with its bestowment, will shew this.

All the saved are alike redeemed through the atonement of Jesus, they are all equally the children of God through union with him; and as such, they are all joint heirs of God with him. It does not follow, however, that the enjoyments of each will be to the same extent. Are not they all as much the purchase of the same blood and heirs of the same inheritance now as they shall be hereafter? and yet they are far from being upon an equality. If their common privileges are consistent with the diversity which we see in this life, are we to suppose that their enjoyment in the next must, in all respects, be the same, because of their interest in those privileges? In the nature of things this cannot be. Redeemed infants, for example, are washed in the blood of the Lamb, and will sing eternally the praises of redeeming grace; but their sensations cannot in *all* respects be the same, as shall be felt by Christians who have actually served God in their day and generation. An infant, snatched from the womb to the grave, may be happy in the contemplation and praises of Divine grace; but surely cannot experience the transporting feelings of Paul, when

he appears with his numerous converts as his joy and his crown. Unless we admit this, how can there be any meaning in those passages of Scripture which speak of the happiness of such as have been honoured to turn sinners unto God? The thief called upon the cross, entered that day into paradise, and was blessed with the presence and enjoyment of Jehovah; but not having been spared to associate with the people of God, to minister to them, and labour with them, he cannot participate in the sensations of those who have long laboured and suffered in the cause of truth. In the very nature of things, then, there must be a difference betwixt the enjoyments of some and those of others.

In order to understand this subject, it is of the first importance to distinguish between a change of state and a change of character. In regard to the former, all Christians are on a level. The latter, however, admits of a distinction between freedom from sin, and the degree of positive excellence; and though all are certainly equal as to the former, they may not be so in respect of the latter. It ought ever to be remembered also, that Christian services are not paid as a price for a reward: They are the free offerings of love and of gratitude, and the spontaneous expression of regard to worth. The reward is found *in* the service, and will be perfectly enjoyed when the principles which now excite to obedience shall have reached maturity, and shall have found full scope in the world of light.

The reward of the kingdom of heaven will partly

consist in the Divine approbation of our services. The Scriptures often mention this branch of it. Even in this life we feel happy when our conduct meets the approbation of those whom we esteem: How much more delightful must it be to have the approbation of him whose understanding is infinite, and whose love to righteousness and truth correspond with their excellence? Our joy in the address "Well done good and faithful servant" will be heightened in the day of Christ by the clear perception we shall have of the wisdom, rectitude, and dignity of Jehovah. We shall then know the value of his smiles, and prize them the more. There is something exquisitely pleasing to an ingenuous mind, in having an opportunity of expressing and manifesting gratitude to a benefactor; and this pleasure must be increased when such expressions are acknowledged and applauded. Now, the circumstances of the righteous fully correspond with these views. Here their deeds are often unnoticed,—their alms are not seen of men,—many benevolent acts they perform in silence,—and much of their intercourse with God is in secret: Here also their words are often misconstrued; many of their best deeds are turned to reproach; their principles and motives are misrepresented, and their characters traduced. But how honourable will be the view given of them in the day of Christ! Then the judgment of God concerning their works and their character will confound the ungodly. He will bring to light their secret deeds of piety and mercy, and will set in its proper light all that had been misrepresented. Then will the Lord vindicate his people, and

it will be seen and confessed by all that the righteous is more excellent than his neighbour\*.

It must be evident, however, that different portions of commendation must be awarded to various degrees of excellence. Among the children of Israel, Caleb and Joshua stood pre-eminent: They not only upon the whole followed the Lord, but they followed "him fully;" and a suitable mark of distinction was granted them. Abraham was called the friend of God: Moses is praised for one excellence, and David for another: Enoch was distinguished, even among the faithful of his day, and was translated to heaven without tasting death: Among the seven thousand who had not bowed to the image of Baal, Elijah was conspicuous; and as a mark of approbation, as well as for other purposes, he too was translated: All the eleven disciples were objects of our Lord's complacency; but Peter, James, and John were particularly so, and accordingly they were distinguished by special favours. On the mount of transfiguration, they exclusively obtained a view of the glory of their Lord, and of the high honour conferred on Moses and Elijah. Of these chosen three again, John was the most esteemed by his Master. And when we think of the character of Christ, we must be satisfied that the man who was most like to himself must have been "the disciple whom Jesus loved." Similarity of disposition appears particularly in the tenderness and affection which distinguished John. Who can fail to see this in his nar-

---

\* Mal. iii. 16. Matt. x. 25, 26. 1 Cor. iv. 5. 2 Cor. v. 9.



rative of the death and resurrection of Lazarus, and in his epistles, where the spirit of love breathes in every line. His soul and that of the man Christ Jesus were knit together. He had the principal place of honour, and leaned on the bosom of his Master, at table.

In reading the epistles to the seven Asiatic churches, we find that some of them are praised for many excellencies, while at the same time they are blamed for certain deficiencies and evils; and that others receive unmingled approbation. But among the former class some are praised for this excellence, and others for that—some are blamed for one thing, and some for another; and of the latter the commendation bestowed upon the one Church is not the same with that bestowed upon its neighbour. The measure of approbation is proportioned to the degree in which they were free from sin, and to the kinds and the measure of the excellencies of their character. In the day of the Lord, all our sins shall be declared forgiven; but, as what needs pardon cannot be approved of, so the defects and the evils found in us must prevent us from receiving the same degree of approbation with those who have walked more consistently. In so far again as our character shall be approved, forgiveness will not be called for; and in proportion to the excellence of our principles and deportment, and to the degree in which we have been distinguished by them, will be the award of our applauding Judge.

In the parable of the pounds\*, the reward of the

---

\* Luke xix. 13—26.

servants is represented as proportioned to the measure of the profits they had gained. The sum given both was the same, but their improvement of it was different. The one, accordingly, whose pound had gained ten pounds had the government of ten cities given him; while he who had gained but five pounds received the government of but five cities. In so far as the future reward consists in approbation, it is proportioned, as in this parable, to the degree of diligence and fidelity,—the different degrees of glory being marks of different degrees of complacency. But where, as in the parable of the talents\*, there is a difference in the original number bestowed, while each is faithful to what he receives, then, in so far as the reward consists in approbation, all are on a level. But though the Divine commendation is a part, and a very delightful part, of the reward, it is not the whole of it; so that in other respects the difference of talents will be connected with different degrees of positive bliss. This distinction it is of importance particularly to remember. It is clear from these parables that future blessedness will not be the direct result of one cause only, but of several. One Christian, then, may have an equal share with another of what flows from some of these, though not an equal measure of what proceeds from others of them.

We are taught in Scripture, my dear friend, that another part of heavenly blessedness will consist in the approving testimony of conscience. In the present

---

\* Matt. xxv. 14—30.

life this is a source of heartfelt joy. Paul often found it so when he was reviled. No outward circumstances can disturb the peace which it yields. Now the pleasure arising from it must be in proportion to our sense of the value of truth and integrity; and the strength of our conviction that the Lord has every claim upon our obedience. In the other world, our perceptions of these will be clear and impressive; and our happiness will of course be proportionally great. Beholding the glory of God, we shall be delighted that we were in any way honoured to serve him. Knowing our obligations to the Redeemer, who loved us and gave himself for us, it will gladden our hearts that we were in any measure enabled to express our gratitude, and to proclaim his goodness. It will greatly enhance this part of our bliss that our good works shall be adduced, not only as proofs of our faith and love, but to refute the calumnies of his enemies; and to vindicate the character and tendency of that Gospel which they have represented, as a system leading to licentiousness. How pleasing will be the testimony of conscience to our having walked so as to adorn the doctrines of Christ! How delightful to have been enabled thus to vindicate the character of God, and to justify the decisions of heaven in the breasts even of the condemned! When we shall see the Saviour in all his excellence and glory, how transporting the reflection that we have been honoured to bear his image, and to forward that for which he bled and for which he reigns! It must be clear, from every just view of Christian principle, that when we come to see the

magnitude of our deliverance, and of the prize of eternal life, the measure of this part of our bliss must keep pace with the degree in which we have been enabled to serve and glorify the Redeemer.

This reward will also consist in the happiness of seeing others profited by our labours and sufferings. Paul exulted in the prospect of this. He looked with triumph to the day when he should appear with the seals of his ministry, as "his joy and crown of rejoicing." To a benevolent and philanthropic mind, such a reward must be unspeakably delightful. It is pleasing to be employed in relieving even the bodily wants and distresses of men. The pleasure resulting from this no sensualist or selfish character can understand. How delightful to be eyes to the blind and feet to the lame, a stay to the fatherless and the orphan, and a comfort to the heart of the widow ! But what is this when compared with the deliverance and bliss of the soul. Every thing that shows the value of an immortal spirit—the importance and indispensable necessity of the salvation of Christ—the excellence and glory of heavenly bliss—together with the glorious effects which flow from the redemption of the guilty, must heighten our estimation of this reward. Nor need any Christian, however obscure, say that this is an honour to which it were in vain for him to aspire. Every individual has a sphere of action; and success is not the favoured lot of one class only. Let all labour in their respective circles; and, through the Divine blessing, they shall participate in the joy of those who turn many to God. A holy walk, a word seasonably dropt,



or an advice tenderly and faithfully given, may issue in leading one or more to the Saviour. These may lead others, by whom again more may be benefited; and the work may go on progressively to the end of all things. This cannot fully be seen while we are below; but the result will appear to our joy in the world of light. In the day of the Lord, all that has flowed from our conduct, our exertions, and our sacrifices will be discovered and acknowledged, to the unspeakable augmentation of our bliss.

While the primitive servants of God ascribed the whole success of their labours to him, they did not overlook their own instrumentality. They were far from magnifying themselves, but they magnified their office. The more they felt the importance of their work, the more did they labour with humility and zeal. The moment we undervalue the use of means, our exertions decline, and we sink into apathy and slothfulness. But when we diligently employ the talents we possess, and improve the opportunities we enjoy, we may anticipate, in dependence on the Divine blessing, the most important results. While the apostles and others laboured together in the vineyard of God, and in building his temple, each expected a reward which he might call "his own;" because it should be "according to his *own* labour." Paul, addressing the Corinthians, says, "Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one; and every man shall receive his own reward, according to his own labour. For we are fellow labourers of God: Ye are God's husbandry; ye are God's building." The planter

and waterer are said to be one, because they jointly carried on one work, and were actuated by the same godlike and benevolent aim. The confident hope of the apostle was, that God would not forget their labours of love, but would certainly treat each according to his services. There is great precision used in distinguishing the reward of Paul from that of Apollos; the reward of Cephas from that of both and that of the whole three from the reward promised every underbuilder. Now, why all this reasoning, and this exact proportioning, if all are to be alike rewarded, irrespective of different kinds, lengths, and degrees of labour and of suffering.

Paul, speaking of those who had been converted by his means, calls them "his work in the Lord," "his joy and his crown," and "his rejoicing in the day of the Lord Jesus." Such as laboured in the Gospel were warned by him to take care of adding improper characters to the churches. They were told, that those added to them by their instrumentality should, if they stood the test, be their joy and crown of rejoicing; but if they did not, they should "suffer loss," in as much as they would not have the fruits of their labour to present, "perfect in Christ Jesus \*." On

---

\* In 1 Cor. iii. 7—20. (the passage referred to here) Paul is not speaking of doctrines, but characters. He represents the Church as a building, and there is here no mixture of metaphor. Every Christian is a living stone in this sacred temple; and particular churches ought to consist only of such as appear to be united to Christ, the foundation-stone. If any under builders shall add to the churches characters who are not Christians, they are adding materials, which, like wood, hay, and stubble, are unfit for such edifices. They will not stand the fire of the

this principle, Paul warns his beloved Philippians to hold forth the word of life, that he might in the day of Christ rejoice that he had not run in vain, neither laboured in vain. These declarations accord with the promise, that "they who turn many to righteousness, shall shine as the stars forever and ever." They are fitted to animate not public characters only, but all Christians, with zeal for the best interests of men.—Let every one, then, do in this work what he can, in the hope of a blessed and godlike reward.

There must be a great difference between the enjoyment of the man who enters heaven without having profited even one soul, and that of him who is accompanied by a flock of converts from the world, or of believers who had been edified and comforted by his means. In the latter case they crowd around him as he enters, or follow him in succession into that world where not a cup of cold water given a disciple, in the name of a disciple, shall pass unrewarded. This is to enter into the joy of our Lord—even that joy, the prospect of which animated him to endure the cross and to despise the shame. In proportion to our love to the Divine character, and our benevolence towards men, must be the bliss resulting from such a scene. This made Paul willing to remain in this world of evil, while he knew

---

future judgment. The precious jewels and unperishing metals of which the church of Christ is composed, as we see in Isaiah liv. 11—13. Rev. xxi. 16—24. will alone stand this test. Should a labourer have erred, through ignorance or inadvertence, he himself shall be saved,—provided he stand the trial of fire, by which he, as well as his work, must be tried.

that in other respects it was better to depart and to be with Christ. In this act of self-denial, he displayed a highly refined and elevated soul; a spirit, the very reverse of what is low and mercenary; and a temper of heart, the most devout and benevolent.—Love is to be estimated by the grandeur, the capacity, and the duration of its object,—and what can equal that which regards the salvation of souls?

This reward includes in it an enlarged capacity for contemplating and enjoying Divine things. There is an increasing meetness for the heavenly world attainable here. Those who have drunk most deeply into the spirit of Jesus have a proportionate capacity for comprehending the height and the depth, the breadth and the length of the building of mercy. They are the more fitted for entering into the wonders of redeeming love, and for receiving the fulness of God. It is not, indeed, conceivable what connection our future state could have with our present, if the attainments which we acquire here were to be absolutely useless hereafter. In the government of his creatures, the Almighty invariably makes one acquirement the means of gaining another. His wisdom always adjusts the means in a fit proportion to the end he designs, and likewise adapts the end to the means he employs. The present state is the seed-time; the future will be the harvest. Different degrees of glory will naturally result from a diversity of capacity for entering into the deep things unfolded in the Gospel. This appears to be what is taught in the parable of the pounds, where the pound of the slothful servant



is said to be given to him whose one had gained ten. He whose principles had been most exercised, had attained a proportionally greater fitness for still higher and more extended services and honours; and on this account it was meet that to him, rather than to another, this additional means of improvement should be given. We are here presented with two characters of equal talents, but whose talents have not been equally exercised, so that the attainments of the one are much beyond those of the other. And as every degree of attainment capacitates for still greater acquirements, we are very properly taught, that as the mind becomes imbued with Divine things and rises in excellence, new means for exercise, and consequently additional blessedness, will be granted to it. In the heavenly state, there will be room for the perpetual exercise and improvement of Christian principle. The object of knowledge and enjoyment is infinite; and such is the nature of an immortal spirit, that it cannot be happy unless perpetually advancing. It is not conceivable, then, in what our happiness could consist, if in heaven our knowledge of God and his ways were to be absolutely stationary. From the first moment of our introduction to it we shall be freed from all contrariety to the Saviour; but positive resemblance to him is capable of perpetual increase, as our minds are expanded, and his glorious character unfolded.

I am here led to make a remark or two on the parable of the talents. As the pound of the slothful servant was given to the more faithful of the two rewarded servants, so, in the other case, the talent of the

unfaithful servant is given to him who had the most talents, but who had not greater fidelity than the other—in fidelity they were equal. We are taught by this, that among even the faithful servants of God the degree of positive holiness will keep pace with their endowments, and with the degree in which they have been spiritually exercised. Apply this to the diversity of mental powers. I do not mean that such are the only talents intended; but they doubtless form one kind of them, and I refer to them *merely* for the sake of illustration. Holiness is just that love which is the fulfilling of the law; and that being is perfectly holy who loves God to the full extent of his rational faculties, whether weak or strong. The love of an angel, whose faculties are far superior to those of a man, must far exceed in positive strength the love even of the man who is perfectly holy, because the mental strength of the latter is greatly inferior to that of the former. Now, when, as in this parable, the man of superior endowments, and filling a situation suited to them, is equally faithful with the man of inferior talents, his positive moral excellence as far exceeds that of the other as does his intellectual strength. He, of course, is capacitated for still higher attainments; so that it is meet that to him should be granted the additional talent of the unfaithful servant. Both are equally freed from sin and from pain; but as bliss is not merely salvation from evil, but the enjoyment of positive good, so he whose capacity of enjoyment is greatest, in consequence of superior talents perfectly *sanctified*, must, in access to and union with an in-

finite good, have the greatest blessedness. It is evident from this, that though it is not intellectual but moral perfection which is exhibited in Scripture as our final blessedness, and though the qualities of the heart form the highest distinction among intelligent beings, yet there must be a proportionate degree of understanding. It is only when separated from, and compared with, moral and spiritual excellence that the Scriptures condemn it. The man who is inferior in intellect, but superior to his neighbour in holiness, is doubtless the character to be preferred: The former is but a means—the latter is the end, and with the degree of it blessedness is connected. It is difficult, I may add, to have great powers without trusting in them: Every outward advantage has unhappily a tendency to nourish pride, and requires a proportionate degree of grace to counterbalance it: Hence it is only when exercised on sacred things that such powers are the means of augmenting the bliss of the possessor. But still, since piety cannot even exist without a degree of intellect, and as even in a perfect character, the measure of the former cannot exceed that of the latter, it must be evident that where the two keep full pace with each other, there positive holiness and blessedness must be highest.

All, however, will be happy in perfection, because happy in proportion to their capacity for bliss: All vessels will be full; but, being of different dimensions, all cannot contain the same quantity. Holiness, it ought to be remembered, is not merely a negative, but a positive quality—I mean, it does not consist merely in

the *absence* of sin. This is, properly speaking, purity, not holiness. All the redeemed will be equally pure in the sense of being equally delivered from sin; but holiness in addition to this is a *positive* spiritual likeness to God. The degree of this depends, among other things, on the natural talents of the individual, and on the degree in which they have been exercised in spiritual pursuits. When the principles of piety have been cherished and exercised, they strike their roots the deeper. A work in morals is not an act without a motive—it is a principle carried into exercise. Now, it is a law in nature, that the more a principle is exercised it becomes the stronger: If so, since holiness and happiness are inseparably connected, the more we are like to God in *character*, the more must we be like to him in *bliss*: the more holy we are, the higher must be our place in the heavenly temple.

There is doubtless a difference in the degrees of conformity to our Lord here; and the Scriptures never give the most distant hint that heaven will annihilate all the dissimilarities which subsist among Christians in the present world, but clearly teach the reverse. There will be one on the right and another on the left hand of our Lord in his kingdom; and these places will be given in consequence of the character formed on earth. Though it will not hold in every respect, there is a sense in which the higher enjoyments of the heavenly temple will be ultimately the attainment of the least in the kingdom. The most exalted there are still advancing towards glory, such as creatures can attain; but which is nevertheless at an



infinite distance from that hallowed fountain of Divine perfection, from whence all life and blessedness continue to proceed. The more elevated pleasures will thus in a measure be successively laid open to every individual as he becomes capable of enjoying them, in the general progress towards that glory which no created being can ever fully attain.

Keeping these remarks in view, allow me to refer you to some passages of Scripture which bear upon the subject. In the history of the Evangelists our Lord promises a peculiar dignity to the apostles.\* They are told that in his kingdom they should sit upon twelve thrones, for the purpose of ruling the twelve tribes of Israel, or the Church of God. He refers to their apostolic character, in which to this hour they continue to give law by their writings to the disciples of Christ. It is of importance to observe, that this honour is connected with his approbation of their faithful and constant adherence to him amidst all his temptations. He felt attached to those who had manifested such attachment to him in the season of trial. "Ye are they who have continued with me in my temptations," said he, with deep interest; and then promised them the nearest friendship with himself, and the honour of ruling in his kingdom. This part of Scripture establishes the principle which regulates the bestowment of glory in the church of Christ. Nor ought we to confine the honour referred to to the present scene: We are taught in Scripture, that the wall of the heavenly city

---

\* Luke xxii. 28—30. Matthew xix. 28.

has twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. There is a connection, therefore, between the honour of the apostles and the future state of the church; though the great thing exhibited in this last passage is certainly the connection between the church and the eternal truths of the gospel, as preached by the apostles. When we think of their many failures while they were companions of our Lord in his trials—of his high claims on their obedience and attachment, and remember too that he was the author of their strength to suffer, and their will to serve, as well as of the truths they taught, we must be satisfied that the whole is a matter of unmerited favour.

We are taught by our Lord, that he who, having nothing more to give, cheerfully gives but a cup of cold water to a disciple of his when in want, shall not go without some reward: That he who is kind to a righteous man, or a man distinguished for public labours in the cause of piety, and so the more exposed to persecution, shall, for the greater risk run in entertaining such a character than in being attentive to the obscure individual called one of his little ones, receive a reward suited to the degree of principle thus called forth and exercised: And that he who received a prophet, or an inspired ambassador of Christ, who would naturally be the very butt of persecution, should, in consequence, receive a reward proportioned to the danger incurred by sheltering and honouring a character so obnoxious to the world\*. I need not say

---

\* Matthew x. 40, 42.

that this is far from implying any indifference towards the first of these as compared with the second, or towards the latter as compared with the third. The principle proceeded on is, as I have said, the greater proof given of regard to the Saviour, in the greater risk that is run in the one case than in the other.

When Paul is exhorting Gentile Christians to assist their Jewish brethren, he enforces the duty of liberality, by declaring that he who in this service sowed sparingly should reap also sparingly \*. The general principle of which I am now speaking is thus established; and though it is here applied to the blessings of this life, it does not appear that it is so exclusively. It seems to include spiritual blessings, and these in the future as well as in the present world. The same duty in substance is enforced in the epistle to the Galatians, by a similar argument; and the application of it to futurity there is beyond a doubt †.

The same principle explains all those passages in which Christians are exhorted to “lay up treasures in heaven”—to “lay in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come”—to have respect to the blessed recompence of reward—and to elevate their hearts under all the reproaches and persecutions which may befall them for the sake of the Redeemer, by looking for the reward prepared for them in heaven. It ought not to be thought that this bears hard on some, nor ought any thing like envy to be felt. Such a state of mind is inconsistent with a proper conviction, that

---

† 2 Cor. ix. 6.

‡ Gal. vi. 6—9.

the blessings of heaven are all the result of the most unmerited grace. Among the redeemed in heaven there can be nothing of this kind: Indeed there will be no room for it; for all will be perfectly happy, inasmuch as each will have what is exactly suited to him, and to the full extent of what he can receive.

God, we are told, is not unrighteous, or unfaithful to his promise, to forget our work and labour of love shewn towards his name. Hence he will refer, at the day of judgment, to the deeds of kindness and benevolence done to his poor and distressed people, as delightful proofs of love to the Redeemer himself, and as genuine fruits of faith in the Gospel. Nothing, however, of the nature of meritorious retribution is set before us in such representations of judgment. Eternal life is the gift of God, through Christ. But having obtained admission into the family of God, we are also made meet for its exercises and enjoyments by a change of mind; which change is progressive while we are here, and keeps pace with our advancement in obedience. Thus, at the last day, God will manifest at once the exceeding riches and freeness of his grace, and his love of righteousness and holiness. The saved will trace all to the favour of God; while, on the other hand, all creatures shall see and acknowledge the fitness of his procedure in judging every one according to his works\*.

---

\* There is nothing in the Parable of the Labourers (Matt. xx. 1.), who received every man a penny, at all inconsistent with this view of future glory. It is not the design of this parable to represent directly the reward of the redeemed in the day of Christ. They who are said to



Permit me, my friend, now to suggest some remarks on the consistency of this view with the doctrine of salvation by grace. It is of great moment to remark,

---

have laboured from the morning, and who mourned against the householder, cannot be Christians; for they are put last, and, though called, are not chosen, which clearly implies that they are not children of God. The disciples had been promised the honour of sitting on thrones in the kingdom of Christ; and this promise was associated by them with the common notion of their countrymen, that the Jews had a peculiar title to the blessings of his reign. While they expected the chief places for themselves, they thought that all other honours would be enjoyed by their countrymen, to the exclusion of the Gentiles, who were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel. To correct this error, our Lord stated the general principle, that the first as to advantages should be last as to attainments; and then illustrates it by this parable, in which he taught them, that the Gentiles, who were called long after the Jews, should, as to acceptance with God and admission into his church, be placed on a level with the Israelites; and that while the bulk of the latter should reject the Gospel, many of the former would receive it. This he says would call forth the murmurs of such as thought themselves righteous, and despised others, as we know it did. As the Gentiles should thus be accepted of God and received into his family without regard to previous distinctions, so the situations to which they should rise in his family should correspond with the degree of positive likeness to the Saviour, which they should acquire, without regard to their *birth*. It is, however, of the former, or of acceptance with God, that the parable *directly* treats; though the latter, or the rule of their elevation in the kingdom, is evidently implied. The instruction communicated respects the question of justification, though the rule as to this goes upon a principle which illustrates that of the future rewards of Christians. The door of acceptance with God through faith in Christ is equally open to all, however different their previous character may have been. All who enter receive the same blessing. But, in perfect consistency with this, we are elsewhere explicitly taught what is here left to be inferred—namely, that the particular place occupied by each in the kingdom of heaven shall be the result of the particular measure which each shall attain of positive conformity of character to the Redeemer, without regard to any other distinction. Of this likeness to himself Christ speaks in Matthew xix. 29, where conformity to him as a sufferer is introduced. This parable, then, instead of militating against what I have stated, serves to confirm it. Compare Matthew xix. 30, with chap. xx. 16, chap. xxii. 14, and Luke xiii. 30.

that the works which are rewarded are themselves the fruits of Divine favour. Paul says, that he laboured more than all the apostles; but he adds, "yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." If, then, what is done be entirely owing to Divine grace, the reward must be quite gratuitous. The free favour of God is strikingly seen in the different measures of endowments, time, opportunities, and success that are bestowed on different individuals. One man is possessed of strong powers of mind—another is as a child: One is placed in a public and useful station—another moves in a private and narrow circle: One is honoured to turn many to righteousness—another is useful on a smaller scale. The man of splendid talents, however, is sometimes very unsuccessful, while the comparatively weak are much blessed in their labour. The man too who is employed in what are called great things sometimes falls into a snare, while another, who does the small and common things of his sphere with a great spirit, rises in true excellence. Hence faithful menial servants are promised "the reward of the inheritance." It ought also to be remembered, that it is the intention which our Lord chiefly regards; and that he will reward his devoted and faithful servants according to what they would have done if they could. In the eternal world, then, the last as to talents and advantage will in many instances be the first. In some again talents of the first order are accompanied, as in the instance of the apostle Paul, with proportionally great and ardent piety, and followed by extensive usefulness. In such instances of the union of greatness

and goodness there is much that interests the heart, and glorifies God. I may here add, that one is called in early life, is preserved to old age, and favoured with many opportunities of serving God; while another is called on the brink of the grave, or is snatched from the womb to it. The one is honoured to labour and suffer long in the cause of Christ—the other has no opportunity of doing either. All this we must trace to the mysterious government of heaven. The future glory of some will of course far surpass that of others; but this will afford no cause for boasting, for the whole will be traced to pure favour.

It is evidently a mistake, then, to confine the grace of God to one point. Some speak as if it were confined to the deliverance of the guilty, and their admission into heaven. It is not so; for it is also displayed in the different circumstances and attainments of the saved below, and in the different degrees of their glory above. If the whole of the blessings of the everlasting covenant be the fruit of undeserved favour, surely God may communicate them in such measures as he pleases. We have no reason to complain because we are not angels, nor have the lowest angels any reason to do so, because they are not on a level with the highest of the heavenly spirits. As little cause is there for objecting to a diversity among the redeemed. In fact, the varieties which obtain among all the works of the Almighty form a proof that all his gifts are the fruit of free bounty. This future reward, then, instead of obscuring the lustre of Divine grace, must

itself be resolved into that grace, and is a striking continuation and display of its richness and its glory.

The reward in question is given, I would here remind you, not for our sakes, but for the sake of Christ. As our persons are accepted for the sake of the beloved, so are our works. Jesus says, "He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father:" He also says, "The Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me." Such as give a cup of cold water to a disciple of his shall not lose their reward. The reward, then, is not given as the retribution of merit to *us*, but as a public testimony of the love of God to his *Son*—of his approbation of his character, and his complacency in his sacrifice. Were a person to reward our friend because of that friend's love to *us*, he would by this means give a striking proof of *his own* affection for us. In proportion to the greatness of the reward, compared with the littleness of what our friend had done for us, would be the proof of affection and esteem afforded to us. "Ye are my friends," said the Saviour, "if ye do whatsoever I command you." Every expression of friendship, were it but the gift of a cup of cold water to a disciple, because of his relation to Christ, shall be acknowledged by his Father. The reward of the righteous is intended, then, for the honour of the Saviour. What can we do for him that is worthy of notice? and yet the reward is unspeakably great. What an honour does God put upon his Son, when every expression of love to him, and the least service performed, is so liberally rewarded! This, instead of mi-



litating against grace, exhibits its glory: Here it is seen expanding and perpetuated.

Another thing illustrative of this subject is, that this reward is conferred to display the Divine love to righteousness and truth. Jehovah is distinguished for his love of rectitude and integrity; and it is his aim to impress his creatures with this view of his character. The rewards granted his creatures are employed as means of illustrating his name to created intelligences. For example, had Adam continued obedient, he would have been rewarded according to the implied promise of his God. He could not however have pleaded any merit; for nothing more than duty had been done. The reward would have been only an expression of love to holiness. The holy angels have nothing to boast of; but in developing and ministering in the accomplishment of the plan of redemption they have been rewarded by increasing knowledge of God, and progressive bliss in the enjoyment of him; and their happiness will be yet more augmented. This manifests the Divine love to righteousness. The same is true of the redeemed from among men. In the service of God there is a present reward arising from the very nature of the thing itself, and at the end this will be vastly increased; but instead of elating with pride it will raise their views of the gracious and holy character of God: It will serve also to silence the wicked and to justify the administration of Heaven.

This reward is bestowed in addition, if I may use the expression, to the redemption from wrath, and from sin, obtained through the atonement. Should a

prince pardon and raise to honour and wealth an atrocious and worthless rebel, the pardoned criminal would be bound by every tie to become an obedient subject. Should he be so through life, it would not be said that he had repaid the kindness of his king; but if the prince, in addition to his pardon, were to reward him munificently for every piece of service, surely the grace which originally forgave him would be displayed more than ever. The Lord pardons sinners freely, without difference. Of pure grace, he takes them into his family and gives them eternal life; and that this may never even *seem* to be repaid, he gives an exceeding great reward for every, even the smallest piece of service done by them. A reward so circumstanced, in place of *obscuring* the grace of God, is one special means of illustrating its absolute freeness: It displays the unbounded goodness of Jehovah; and must command the homage, the love, and the gratitude of his people, throughout eternity.

Every man, then, in the future state will reap fruit analagous in kind to the seed which he now sows. The state on which all will enter on leaving this world will correspond with their fixed principles, their habitual dispositions, and their predominant character. Future blessedness is not an arbitrary gift, but necessarily arises from the principles which animate the hearts of believers. Future misery likewise will be, not an arbitrary infliction, but the natural result of sin. The degree of it will be proportioned to the degree of transgression and of depravity. We are taught in Scripture, that the sins of believers are blotted out,

and yet that all shall be judged according to their works. In regard to this I would remind you, that men shall be judged according to the kind and the measure of their works. The former will be a test of character, and the latter will show the degree of the character disclosed. The sinful deeds of the condemned will prove, that, when on earth, they believed not in nor loved the Saviour; and they shall be treated accordingly. On the other hand, the good deeds of the righteous will show that love to Christ, flowing from faith in him, was the governing principle of their conduct. The measure of those works cannot, however, be ascertained without comparing with them their sins and deficiencies. The degree of approbation to be expressed by the Judge must be determined, that the consequent reward may be seen by all to be the natural result of the degree in which they resembled the Saviour. All their sins will be declared forgiven, and so they will "find mercy in that day;" but the measure of praise must keep pace with the measure of their obedience. The whole reward, indeed, has its origin in mercy, but it will also be expressive of righteousness and faithfulness.

The events of this passing scene derive an importance indescribable, from their connection with the formation of our character. In heaven, holiness and happiness will perfectly correspond. They will do so, because every evil, natural and moral, shall be removed, and the principles which were here planted in a strange soil and an unfriendly clime will there flourish in the garden of God, and under a more genial sky. This

is the seed time, and as we now sow we shall then reap. When I speak of future happiness and misery as arising from character, I am far from excluding the direct interposition of Heaven. In regard to the righteous, the direct agency of God will be employed in giving them such a body, and in placing them in such circumstances, as shall best afford scope for the exercise of their principles, and for the enjoyment of their blessed result. In regard to the ungodly, his hand will be employed in placing them in such circumstances as shall fully allow their evil propensities to produce their natural and unhappy fruits. This shews the consistency between ascribing our future situation to character on the one hand, and to the direct agency of our Judge on the other. Sin and misery are not in all respects the same thing, but they are inseparably connected; and so it is with holiness and happiness: And the hand of God is seen in arranging every thing, so as to mark their inseparable connection. The judicial and natural effects of character are thus united.

While we, then, build our hope of pardon and acceptance on the finished work of Christ—no more depending for these blessings on our duties than on our transgressions—let us bless God for what he hath wrought in us, and seek much of that spirit which animated the apostle when he said “I count not my life dear unto me, if I may but finish my course with joy.” Delightful indeed was his state of mind, when, not with pharisaical self-complacency, but with humble gratitude, he exclaimed, “I have



fought a good fight—I have finished my course—I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also who love what shall accompany and follow his appearing.” Thus did he exult in the thought that he had been enabled in any measure to live to the honour of his much loved Lord.

Fired with the same spirit, let us ever be diligent. We ought to be ambitious of having the happiness of casting many crowns at the feet of the Redeemer. Never let us harbour the unworthy and ungenerous thought, that if we but get to heaven, nothing more need be minded. I here refer, not to that humility of mind which leads us, under a deep sense of guilt and demerit, to feel ourselves utterly unworthy of the very least of the Divine mercies, and to say from the heart that the very lowest place in heaven were an astonishing gift of mercy; for surely we ought ever to feel thus: but I refer to that disposition which, being satisfied with deliverance from misery, and with a vague hope of happiness in heaven, cares not for the glory of God and is indifferent to the good of others. Even should a slothful professor of religion get there, he must enter as a solitary individual—he could have no fruits of his labour—his conduct could not be applauded, nor could he participate in the joy of having served his Redeemer on earth. Let it not be said, that it is selfish and mercenary to labour and suffer in the hope of this reward. Is it selfish to covet the approbation of God? Were it not the greatest selfishness to be indifferent to

it? Is it selfish to seek the approving testimony of conscience? Is it selfish to exult in the happiness of others? Is it selfish to rejoice in enlarged and transforming views of the worth and elevation of Christ, and in being honoured to manifest the riches of the Divine character and glory? Surely it is not. Moses had respect to the recompence of reward: Jesus himself was animated by the joy which was set before him. Let us "be stedfast and immoveable, always *abounding* in the work of the Lord, knowing that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord."

I remain, &c.

---

## LETTER XIV.

### ON SOME DIFFICULTIES RELATIVE TO COMING TO CHRIST.

Difficulty respecting convictions of sin—Relative to repentance—The nature of coming to Christ—The state of mind connected with coming to the Saviour—Mistake relative to the work of the Spirit—The nature of genuine humility—Conclusion.

DEAR MADAM,

PERMIT me to refer to what I have already written you, respecting the simplicity and suitableness of the Gospel of Christ; and in connection with it, to make a few more observations on the difficulties which you mentioned to me when I last had the pleasure of seeing you. Through the Divine blessing, this may be

the means of invigorating your faith and adding to your joy.

I begin by directing your attention to the difficulty you mentioned, respecting conviction of guilt. Some are much disquieted from a fear, that they are not sufficiently convinced of sin to warrant them to go to the Saviour, in the confidence of obtaining mercy. This proceeds upon the principle, that a certain degree of conviction, and a particular measure of alarm, are necessary as a sort of qualification for pardon. This, however, is by no means the case. There is a wide difference between what a sinner is called and warranted to do, and what, in point of fact, he will do. Every sinner is invited to come to Christ, and has a warrant on the ground of the Divine promise to expect mercy on his going to him. Convictions of guilt and of danger form no part of the warrant to go, they only excite him to do so. A sense of sin leads to seek pardon; and a sense of danger leads to seek safety; and where the need of these blessings is not felt, the sinner feels no excitement to apply for them; but neither the one nor the other is, in the least, a qualification entitling to them.

I am far from meaning that convictions of guilt are in themselves self-righteous. The subject of them may err as to the way of obtaining relief; but the convictions themselves are founded on truth, and are what *ought* to be felt. Not a few having been convinced of guilt, and filled with a fear of the Divine displeasure, have despaired of relief from any thing in themselves, but have been kept from giving way to utter despair

by something they have heard of the Gospel ; and from some glimmering of hope, have been led to seek for relief, to search the Scriptures, and to enquire after the truth. These exercises are not in themselves sinful, though at the time the glory of the Gospel is not discerned, for the truth has never been properly before them, and they cannot be said to be opposing it. So far from this, it were sinful not to cherish such convictions—it were to stifle the voice of conscience, and so to rebel against the light. The cry of mere distress, as uttered by the Jews on the day of Pentecost, and by the Philippean jailor, is quite different from the supplications of arrogance and proud self-sufficiency. The former excites pure pity, the latter calls forth the Divine indignation. There is an obvious distinction between the nature and necessary desire of happiness and deliverance from pain ; and the criminal wishes and self-righteous pursuits which flow from voluntary and sinful principles. The former is essential to every rational, yea every animal being, and forms no part of the depravity of our nature. Its moral character is entirely derived from the direction of its exercise. It may take a wrong direction, and often is connected with what is sinful, yet in itself it is but an instinctive feeling ; and it is of importance to remember this in dealing with awakened inquirers.

I mean not by this, that such characters are free from the principle of self-righteousness, for this is natural to every man ; but that this principle does not consist in convictions of sin, and a desire of relief. But when such begin to think that their conviction of



guilt, and their consequent fears are in some sense meritorious; or at least that they form a qualification for obtaining the benefit of the work of Christ, they become self-righteous in all their prayers, and tears, and services. Convinced of sin it becomes them to be; and hardened, indeed, are they who are not afraid because of it—but can this be a ground of confidence? It is passing strange, that men should deem it meritorious to be sensible that they are sinners, and should build a degree of hope on the circumstance of being convinced of rebellion against God. When a person imagines that before he can come to Christ for salvation he must have, as a *qualification*, a certain measure of convictions of sin, he has doubtless begun to make a righteousness of that very thing which ought to humble him in the dust.

You will perceive that there is a wide difference between that necessary principle which impels a creature to seek its own enjoyment, and the principle of love to God, which unites it to the Creator as the source of its happiness. The former is a universal natural instinct: the latter not being a necessary principle, is in its exercise voluntary. This distinction explains the difference between the supplications which the Scriptures condemn, and the mere cries of a wretched creature for mercy. The former must be positively sinful, but the latter are in themselves neither good nor evil. Such calls for relief cannot be objects of complacency, but they may be objects of pure benevolence. These two things are quite distinct.

Some, it is true, before they have believed in Christ

have been the subjects of deep conviction of guilt, and of the most overwhelming fears; but these did not qualify them for obtaining pardon. Peter would have more hope of a good issue when his hearers were roused and alarmed, than had they remained insensible, because their excitement might lead them to seek deliverance in the Gospel; but he could not encourage them to hope for mercy except in believing in Christ. When the Gospel came to be seen by them, its suitability to their wretched circumstances at once struck them, and, from a sense of guilt and of want, they were led to flee to the Saviour for pardon and peace; but till they did so, they were not in respect of positive holy dispositions the least nearer the kingdom of heaven than before. It was not of the spirit of the scribe who answered our Lord discreetly, but of his confession that the love of God was of more value than multiplied sacrifices, that our Lord spoke, when he said that he was not far from the kingdom of God. He meant that if this sentiment were followed out by him (as it ought conscientiously to have been), it would lead him to embrace the Gospel. Others, again, have been first convinced of sin, by hearing and reading of the death of Christ as an atonement for it. They came to see their disease in perceiving the nature of the remedy provided for it by the great Physician. In fact the Gospel itself declares the guilt and danger of men, so that the belief of it involves a conviction of our lost and miserable condition. As the death of Christ was designed to honour the law, this conviction of guilt may be said to have been effected by it—not indeed as

nakedly stated, but as magnified by the atonement. In the order of nature, a conviction of sin must precede an application to the Saviour; but in some cases the one precedes the other but for a short time; and in others the latter so very speedily follows the former, that they appear to the mind as one complex exercise. They are the more likely to be viewed in this light, because the mind at such a time is otherwise employed than in attending to its own operations. In the case of the Jews on the day of Pentecost, we see deep convictions of guilt in having murdered the Prince of life, and we see deep anguish arising from the dread of wrath; but when the Gospel was unfolded to them, they found instant peace and joy in believing. We see a similar scene in the case of the jailor at Philippi, who, in the course of a short time, passed from a state of insensibility to a state of alarm; and from that to a state of enlightened confidence. God does indeed often employ the dread, and in some cases the horror, which arises from a conviction of guilt to arouse the sinner from security, and finally to lead him to the Saviour: But the length of time, during which this state of mind lasts, varies in different individuals, and so does the degree of distress; and whether the time be long or short, or the distress great or small, there is nothing in either that qualifies for mercy.

It is with this as with disappointments in worldly pursuits. By such disappointments, many are driven to overwhelming despondency; and others again are led by them, through the Divine blessing, to enquire for a better portion. But because many are led by

worldly bereavements and crosses to seek for peace in the Saviour, it surely does not follow that such calamities are qualifications necessary to warrant a sinner to go to him, or that every one must be afflicted before he can come to him. So far from this, though many are led by afflictions to the Saviour, there are others who, in the enjoyment of prosperity, have been drawn to him, and have found mercy through him. An instance of this kind we have in the case of Zaccheus, and another in that of the Ethiopian Eunuch.

These remarks apply to deep and prolonged distress of mind, arising from convictions of guilt. Because this has been experienced by many, it does not follow that it is a process which must be gone through by *all*. The truth is, had such believed in Christ sooner than they did, or even at the very commencement of their trouble of mind, they had been as welcome to the blessings of salvation then, as when they actually embraced the Gospel. They had the same invitation then as when they *did* go to Christ; it was their *sin* that they did not go sooner, yea at the very first. The reason why they did not, was an aversion to the humbling and holy truths of the Gospel, united with a self-righteous principle. This they are brought to see when they believe in Christ. They are convinced of sin because they did not sooner believe in him, and they find that the use they made of their distress contributed to blind them.

That there is no necessary connection between distress of mind and being brought to believe in Christ, is evident from the fact, that not all who trembled



under the discourse of Peter on the day of Pentecost, but only a part of them “gladly received the word.” It is true, that without a sense of what renders the salvation of the Gospel necessary, it cannot be believed; but, though by means of the distress and alarm I refer to, God often leads to a welcome reception of the truth, they do not in themselves contain any *holy* advances towards it on the part of the sinner. They respect the state of the intellect and the conscience; not that of the heart. Convictions of sin arising from the law frequently lead either to despondency on the one hand, or to a delusive hope on the other. The slavish terrors resulting from the former, and the groundless confidence excited by the latter, are of course no infallible signs or prognostics of conversion. Such convictions may issue in it, but often they do not: Witness the cases of Felix, Judas, and Saul. Of themselves, they cannot reconcile the heart to God and his word; but on the contrary, they sometimes call forth the most unhallowed ideas of both. It is with these as with the afflictions of life; which, although blessed to many, others have felt most keenly, and yet have afterwards forgotten them, and gone into every vanity. When such sensations are experienced, the hand of God may be ordering them in subserviency to the designs of his mercy, which are afterwards to be manifested; but, I need not say that the subject of these fears has not been subdued, while the Gospel is not received by him, as far as he is made acquainted with it. Why, then,

act as if a particular preparatory course of tormenting dread must necessarily precede faith in Christ?

There are some, however, who have had partial views of their guilt, sufficient to cause pain, but accompanied with a half persuasion that they were Christians; who have been awakened to a sense of their true character by occurrences which proved to their full conviction, that they were yet strangers to the truth. Their perplexity arose from an attempt to reconcile the evils which they saw in themselves, with the existence of true religion, and not really from deep convictions of guilt. Had these partial convictions been followed up by them as they ought to have been, they had not remained so long in suspense. Every man, I may here add, knows, in some measure, that he is a sinner—he feels that this is a world of suffering; and he more or less feels an apprehension of something future, and ought to obey the light he has received. He is, of course, so far, in a state of readiness for hearing and at once believing the Gospel; connected, as the statement of it ought ever to be, with a statement of the **equity** and the goodness of the Divine law, the exceeding sinfulness of sin, the liability of the sinner to the Divine curse, and his utter insufficiency to deliver himself. I may remark, too, that some, like Timothy, have known the Scriptures from their childhood, and have been early and gradually brought to see their disease and the remedy. Such, of course, may not have had the same deep convictions of guilt as some others, and the transition from their natural condition to a state of

acceptance with God, may not have been so striking. There are cases not unlike this even among persons more advanced in life. With such the work is very gradual, so that the same marked changes do not appear in them as in others.

In reference to this, as well as with regard to affliction, allow me to refer you to the cases of Zaccheus and of the Ethiopian Eunuch, and also to those of the deputy, Sergius Paulus \*, of Lydia †, and of the Jews whom Paul met at Rome ‡. In these there is not the same process seen as in the case of the Jews on the day of Pentecost, and that of the Philippian jailor. Indeed, it is vain to reduce all to one method. All are brought to see their lost and guilty condition; that there is full salvation to be had through the one perfect work of Christ; and that in no other way can this blessing be obtained. The whole are led, though not all exactly in the same manner, to rest their eternal all on the grace of God, as it flows to sinners through the atonement of his Son, and to live by faith in him. Let this always be kept in view, and let not Jehovah be limited to one mode of producing a change in the heart.

It appears, then, that though a sense of sin is necessary to lead a sinner to apply to the Saviour for relief, and though a very great degree of it has sometimes been employed in order to excite to go to him, yet it is not a qualification warranting to do so; that no particular measure of conviction and alarm is a prerequisite; that it is enough as to the act itself, if the

---

\* Acts xiii. 7, 12.    † Acts xvi. 16.    ‡ Acts xxviii. 23, 24..

sinner be led to go to the Redeemer, whether the measure of conviction be great or comparatively small, or whether it be just a feeling of wretchedness and unhappiness, which, though easily conceived, it may not be easy to express; and that in believing the Gospel itself, there is included a conviction that we are lost and guilty sinners.

Connected with this, is the difficulty you feel relative to repentance. The mistake arises from the principle which has led numbers to withhold the invitations of the Gospel till the sinner is, as they think, sufficiently alarmed and humbled because of sin, and then to introduce them as something to which he is entitled. Thus to limit the *proposal* of the blessings of mercy is to act very differently from the inspired messengers of Heaven. It may have the appearance of wisdom, but it defeats its own end, by turning the mind from the atonement, and from the grace of the Gospel, to something in itself. It is true, that though no man is justified on account of his humility and contrition, it is only such as are humble and contrite in heart that can in the very nature of things relish or enjoy the blessings of redemption; but still the invitations of mercy are addressed to all indiscriminately. The promises of the consolations of God are made to sinners considered as bowing to his will; but it is by means of the goodness exhibited in the unlimited invitations of the Gospel, by the rich provision that is made for the salvation and bliss of believers, and by the wonderful medium through which the Divine grace flows to the guilty, that the rebellious heart is subdued.



Now, as it is in believing the Gospel that true penitence is exercised, it cannot be a pre-requisite to our being called to believe it and to come to the Saviour. For a sinner to think that he ought not to embrace the Gospel till he be more deeply humbled and penitent, is but a specious deceit of an evil heart.

Repentance is not a condition of obtaining salvation—it is a branch of salvation itself. Considered in a *general* view, it is that entire change of mind which takes place when a sinner is converted to God. This change, when spoken of in relation to the divine testimony, is termed “repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;” when spoken of in relation to the Almighty, it is called “repentance towards God;” and when viewed in relation to sin, it is called “repentance from dead works.” If, then, it be a change of mind to the acknowledging of the truth, it of course must include faith in it. This is that part of the change which respects the Gospel; and it must be connected with that branch of it which respects the views and the affections of the heart “towards God.” In so far as this change relates to sin, it includes a change of sentiment regarding it—a change of feeling towards it—and a change from hardness or impenitence of heart to sorrow because of it. I need not tell you that this is very different from the notion that repentance is just a feeling of regret, or remorse, for sin; and even from that which confines it to heart-felt sorrow for it. It includes, indeed, sorrow for every transgression, but only as a part of the change which takes place on receiving the truth. The whole inclu-

ded in this repentance was preached by John, the har-binger of our Lord, by "saying unto the people that they should believe on him who should come after him—that is, on Christ Jesus." Surely, then, it cannot be a pre-requisite warranting an application to the Saviour; and what is true of it as a whole, applies in particular to that sorrow which is an essential part of it.

It is only by looking on Calvary, and on the beauty of holiness as exemplified by him whom our sins pierced, that our sense of guilt and of demerit is deepened, and that we are made to mourn for sin with genuine and heartfelt contrition. Instead, then, of refusing comfort because our previous convictions and our sorrow for sin were but slight, let the mind now dwell on the cross of Christ. It is this display of the unbounded goodness of God towards us, notwithstanding of our guilt and impenitence, that softens the hard heart and melts the soul into tenderness\*. There we see that law honoured which we have so often violated; and the exceeding sinfulness of sin is read in the overwhelming woes of the Redeemer. The mind takes its station here, and contemplates the flowings of mercy in the blood of the Saviour. Looking with the deepest interest on the Lamb of God, we see the love of his heart in his manifold sufferings. Convictions of guilt flash upon the mind, when we take our stand at Calvary: There, love and grief, hope and joy, unite their streams, and become sweetly blended.

---

\* Ezekiel xvi. 62, 63. Jeremiah xxxi. 19. Zechariah xii. 10.

The heart is not distracted—its very weakness is met; for that same object which impresses most deeply a sense of the danger consequent on sin, gives the most reviving views of the Divine mercy and love.

I beg you to notice, that there is nothing in these statements which can sanction the practice of addressing those as Christians who do not give evidence of a change of mind. Some do so as soon as alarm is felt, and others when the word is received with joy, but both are in the wrong. Holiness of character is not necessarily connected with a strong or a sudden excitement: The question is—From what does it spring? Care ought to be taken that while the gospel is stated without reserve, the wounds of the sinner may not be healed slightly. It is an awful thing to buoy up with presumptuous hopes such as are deceiving their own souls. It is in vain that they dwell upon the agony of distress which preceded their emotions of joy, for if they are not building their confidence on the basis of the work of Christ, they are yet far from God.

Let me now call your attention to the difficulty you mentioned relative to the nature of coming to Christ. In Scripture, believing in him, and coming to him, are expressions used interchangeably: Strictly speaking, the latter is the effect of the former; but so closely are they connected, that the one involves the other. Still, however, the distinction between them is explanatory of their nature. When a sinner is persuaded of the truth, that salvation is to be had through Christ, and that in no other way can he be delivered from absolute ruin, he comes to him for the precious blessing,

or, in other words, he commits himself to him, or trusts the salvation of his soul in his hands. On hearing the invitation, Come unto *me* and I will give you rest, instead of fixing on the word *coming*, and desiring to know how to perform this act aright, that he may find rest from the consideration of having done it well, he fixes his eye on the word *me*, and says, "Does Christ say come to *me*? To him, then, will I go." In coming to the Saviour, then, he is not engaged in speculating on the act of coming as an exercise of the mind, but is occupied with the character of him to whom he comes, and with his gracious invitation to cast his all upon his perfect atonement. In His work and character he sees all his salvation and all his desire; and in His unfettered invitation, he finds abundant assurance of a free welcome. The result is, that this sense of the free and exuberant love of the Saviour excites him to trust his all in His hand; and in doing so his soul finds rest.

Connected with this, is what you said respecting that fervour of affection and desire which accompanies an application to the Saviour. Perhaps, my dear friend, you are striving to gain the effect, without dwelling sufficiently on the cause. I need not tell you, that faith in that Gospel which preaches peace to the very chief of sinners is the principle from which all holy affections proceed. It is so because of the glorious nature and assimilating influence of the truth believed. Let your mind, then, be carried beyond its own exercises, to the attractive object of its faith; for in no other way can the effects you desire be produced.



Saving faith is the belief of the saving truth; for the efficacy of faith arises from the thing believed. In believing it, we see nothing to encourage us before God, but his plain testimony concerning the all-sufficiency of the atonement to take away sin, and his promise of eternal life to all who believe in it. When convinced of the fulness, freeness, and suitableness of the salvation of Christ, the heart, with all its thoughts and affections, comes to be completely engaged with it. Being persuaded that he has done all that is necessary as the ground of salvation to sinners, we rest on his work; and we feel attracted to the Gospel, because it contains all that is requisite to gladden and purify our spirits. The more that we feel the necessity of this salvation, and the more that we see of its interesting nature, the more must we cling to and exult in the Saviour. These workings of the affections, the desires and the feelings of the heart, naturally flow from the belief of the Gospel; and in vain do we look for them while the great spring of them is forgotten. To expect that these warm affections will spring up into lively exercise while faith is weak, is to forget their connection with it as the principle from which they proceed, and to look for the fruit without the due culture of the tree. Such mistakes frequently arise from confounding faith with its effects,—a practice by which the beauty and simplicity of the Gospel are exceedingly marred.

When the Scriptures represent Christians as running to the Saviour—as leaning upon him and laying hold of him, they exhibit in a most natural manner the

effects of faith in him. The truth is involved in obscurity when we attempt to explain faith from such figures, instead of explaining, as is most rational, the figures from it. When exposed to the storm, for example, how eagerly does the traveller flee to an open shelter: In the time of extreme danger, with what pleasure do we run to a place of safety; and with what affection do the needy go to a generous benefactor upon his kind invitation. Such cases serve to illustrate the feelings and the workings of the heart on believing the Gospel, in which Christ is exhibited as "a refuge from the storm and a covert from the tempest, as rivers of water in a dry place, and as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." It is easy to see how love and desire, hope and gratitude, delight and holy activity, will all spring from faith in the message of mercy. The heart, however, is at the time engaged in reflecting on the objects which occasion its feelings, rather than on the feelings themselves.

These exercises, then, are not pre-requisites to our going to Christ, but are the effect of going to him on the warrant of the Gospel itself. When faith is weak, and the Gospel but dimly discerned, these holy fruits are proportionably small. There may indeed be a natural movement of the animal affections by the new objects about which they are exercised, but this warmth and false luxuriance are very different from the real growth of heavenly dispositions. The way to increase their genuine warmth and real vigour, is to look at all times to that from which they proceed, and to continue and abound in the active exercise of

the principles produced by it. I speak not, you will perceive, of simply looking on the cross and character of Christ, as if nothing more were necessary, but of acting in all cases with these in our eye. Confidence in him, and unremitting activity, ought ever to be united. The life of a Christian is not a life of mere contemplation, but of assiduous diligence:—His diligence, however, is stimulated by looking to “the Author and Finisher of our faith.”

I beg here to call your attention to a very common error among inquirers after the truth, and to which I think you referred. It is that of waiting till they shall find some change, or good disposition, wrought in them by Divine influence, before they will come to Christ, or take comfort from the Gospel. In opposition to this, and every self-righteous course, the Scriptures teach that the finished work of Christ, exclusive of every exercise of man, is that for the sake of which God justifies a sinner; and that the first scriptural consolation received by the believer arises from the Gospel, and not from reflecting on the feelings or change of his own mind towards it—though doubtless his comfort is increased and continued by the influence of the truth upon his character. According to what I have stated, this change, and all good dispositions, are obtained *in* coming to him. As it is only, however, by surrounding objects *appearing* to a man previously blind, that he knows the blindness of his eyes to be removed, so it is by the *result* that we come to know of Divine influence. The spirit of God inclines the heart to go to the Saviour, and to renounce all other

grounds of confidence. But that which *inclines* a sinner to go to him, and that which *calls* him to go, and warrants him to hope for pardon on his going, are quite distinct. No consciousness of any internal, or external, qualification whatsoever is necessary to authorise any sinner to apply to the Saviour. The general and the indefinite calls of the Gospel, in which sinners are described merely by their *guilt* and their *necessities*, form the ground on which they are warranted to go to him in the confidence of obtaining mercy. It is in leading the mind to these, and to the work of Christ, that the Spirit acts. It must be a great mistake, then, to place the consciousness of his work between us and the free salvation of the cross. The effect of doing so has in some cases been, that even when every false confidence was abandoned and no help was expected but from Christ, the mind has been long kept in perplexity from not seeing that any sinner may go to him for mercy.

The influence of the Spirit is not something of which we have a distinct and an immediate perception. There are no new faculties given us—those we have, are only directed by him to their proper objects. Sanctification is not effected by immediate inspiration. No new revelation is made,—the mind is only taught by the Spirit to discern and to receive the truths already recorded in Scripture. His agency is not perceived or felt separate from the influence of the word of God upon our minds and our affections: It is known only by its effects. The word and the Spirit are not, indeed, the same—they are in them-



selves quite distinct. The word, however, is the medium through which he works. The mode in which he operates is beyond our comprehension; but whatever it may be, we can have no sense of his operations separately from the workings of our minds. His gracious influence mingles itself, so to say, with the reasonings, motives, and persuasions of his word. At the time that we are taught by him, it is the thing taught, and not the teacher, that engrosses the heart. On reflecting on the effects, however, we trace the whole to him, and give him the glory. When the mind is occupied with discussions about the *mode* of his operations, it is turned from the great objects exhibited by him, and so ceases to feel their power.— Beautiful is the simplicity of Scripture, in which we are directed to the Gospel, as that by which he works; and to the throne of grace for his necessary and gracious influences. Activity and dependence are thus united; and while we are sanctified, God is glorified. No one, then, ought to be distressed, as if he had not been the subject of this influence, because he cannot tell, from an immediate perception of it, how it is exerted; nor should any one boast of Divine impulses apart from the power of the truth. Neither should any delude themselves by waiting for some extraordinary impressions, before they will apply to the Saviour. Let the Gospel, then, be contemplated by you with an humble and devout heart, and in dependence on the promise of Divine teaching; and let its gracious calls be at once yielded to, in the faith of acceptance through Christ. The belief of it will produce

acceptable principles and acts of obedience. These acts of obedience will tend to increase the knowledge of the truth, and this increasing knowledge will invigorate you for duty; so that faith and obedience will be found to have a reciprocal influence—they will act and re-act the one upon the other.

Be not misled by a false humility, which feels as if it were improper to expect the blessings of the everlasting covenant in your present condition. The spirit of this spurious humility we see in Peter, who, when our Lord condescended to wash the feet of his disciples, said, "Lord dost thou wash my feet?" and again, "Lord thou shalt never wash my feet." Peter in this shewed a deep sense of the dignity and the greatness of his master, and of his own insignificance. He did not, however, dwell sufficiently on the purity and the holiness of Christ, and his own guilt and demerit as a sinner. Hence our Lord led his attention to that spiritual purification of which he stood in need. In doing so, the Saviour had his eye on what He should have to suffer, in order to the purification of the souls of men; and when Peter at last came to see what was included in the language of his Lord, he would deeply feel for the erroneous views he had formed. If it were too much for our Lord to wash the feet of his disciples, what would it be to suffer what Gethsemane and Calvary witnessed; to endure the desert of sin; and to expire under the curse of the Divine law? True humility consists, not in deeming it an act of presumption to expect, or receive, the blessings of heaven, and for that reason declining the ac-

ceptance of them ; but in feeling that, great and many  
 as they are, they are all necessary ; and that wonder-  
 ful as is the medium through which they flow to us,  
 no other could have sufficed. The question with us  
 ought not to be, are not the blessings of redemption  
 too great for our deserts? but, can we do with less?  
 The *least* of the Divine mercies is beyond our deserts,  
 but the greatest of them is not beyond our *necessities*.  
 God hath already given his Son, and nothing is too  
 great to be given through *Him*. In feeling that such  
 is our guilt, and such our wretchedness, that unless all  
 the mercies of the new covenant are granted us, we  
 must perish ; and in gratefully receiving what the  
 abundant goodness of God hath provided, we manifest  
 that true humility which the Scriptures extol. The  
 heart, on viewing the astonishing means by which re-  
 demption is provided, admires the riches of Divine  
 grace ; and conscious that nothing less could have  
 answered the end, feels itself shut up to this method  
 of salvation, and is subdued by the overpowering in-  
 fluence of gratitude. Thus David, when the Lord  
 made him many promises, which included the salva-  
 tion of the Messiah, went into the sanctuary and  
 humbly worshipped God, saying, that such was “ not  
 the manner of man ; ” — that when he thought of himself  
 and of his father’s house, he was lost in wonder at  
 what had been promised. His humility was not of  
 that spurious kind which would have led him to re-  
 fuse the blessings in question, as too much for him to  
 receive : on the contrary it appeared in his praying,  
 that it might be to him “ according to the word of his

God," and that the whole of the promised blessings might in due time be fully communicated\*. Such is the humility which all ought to feel and to manifest.

Pray, as did the disciples, for an increase of your faith. Do it with an importunate heart; encouraged by the call and the promise of the Saviour, who feeds his flock like a kind and a faithful Shepherd. He conducts them with the utmost tenderness and care; and with a wise and affectionate regard to their age, strength, and situation. He does not overdrive, or leave the least of them behind. Such of them as cannot keep pace with others, he waits upon with all patience and kindness, and leads them softly along.—Those who cannot walk at all, he takes up in his arms; and in a manner the most engaging, "carries them in his bosom." Such are the beautiful images employed to represent the tenderness of his heart, and his affectionate concern for the very feeblest of his people.

Be not, I entreat you, discouraged or cast down because you meet with difficulties—but persevere. Wait upon the Saviour and implore his aid. In the most eminent Christians there is a conflict. They all feel much within that is evil; all of them are obliged to maintain constant vigilance; and not one of them expects complete rest in this world. This is far from lessening their sense of the evil of sin, but it keeps them from despondency. They know that the truths of Scripture are written "that they sin not," and this preserves them from presumption; but they know

---

\* 2 Sam. vii. 18—29.



also that, if unhappily they do sin, there is an Advocate with the Father ; and this leads them with humble hope to the throne of grace, for mercy to pardon, and grace to help in time of need. It is with them, as with a person who is afflicted with a disorder of which he does not expect to be ever perfectly cured, but which may be kept under by a particular regimen and medicine. If he neglect these means of keeping it in check, it instantly gains vigour. Or if he do, or take any thing which will counteract their influence, the same effect will follow. His safety, of course, depends on his continuing without intermission in the use of the precautions and the medicine adapted to his malady. In like manner, the Christian does not expect to be perfectly free from sin in the present life ; but by continuing to apply the remedy provided in the Gospel, he, in a measure, keeps sin under, and gradually subdues it. If, on the other hand, he let the truth slip out of his mind, or has recourse to other means of deliverance, then sin instantly gains strength. You will perceive from this, that our safety lies in living constantly by the faith of the Son of God. Let a life of faith, then, be your aim. With your heart turned to heaven for assistance, seek to be progressively sanctified, and “look for the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.”

I am, &c.

## LETTER XV.

## ON CHRISTIAN CONFIDENCE IN PRAYER.

Confidence in prayer the privilege of Christians—Arises from the character of God as a Father—From the atonement—From the intercession of Christ—From the promises of a gracious answer—Includes freedom of speech at the throne of grace—Necessary because of discouragements—Blessings we are warranted to ask.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I HAVE repeatedly recommended to you the exercise of prayer, and shall now lead your attention to the duty, and the privilege, of coming to the throne of grace with filial confidence and freedom of speech.—Prayer is the very life of genuine religion. It serves to maintain on the mind a devout sense of our entire dependence on God, of his right to govern us, and of our deep responsibility as his creatures and his redeemed children.—It is calculated to excite the most profound veneration, and the deepest self-abasement and contrition of heart; while it endears to us the character of Christ, and increases our desire of conformity to his spirit.—It relieves, sanctifies, and enriches the soul; fits for the thankful reception of the blessings of heaven; and prepares us at once for the duties, the conflicts, and the varied circumstances of this life, and for holy fellowship with God in that which is to come.

The throne to which we are called, is denominated a “throne of grace.” Had it been merely a throne

of glory, and still more had it been a throne of judgment, we might well have been filled with alarming fear and with slavish dread.—But as it is a throne of grace, we may approach it with composure and confidence. It were, indeed, at once dishonourable to God and injurious to ourselves, did we come to it with rude audacity, or coarse and trifling familiarity. That boldness which the Gospel warrants is opposed, not to holy veneration and godly fear, but to servile dread and distrustful despondency\*. It is such confidence as is adapted to the case of a suppliant imploring mercy and unmerited favour, under a consciousness of guilt, and filled with contrition. It arises from nothing in ourselves, but from the gracious character and the wondrous love of God; and consists in a confident persuasion that as we are allowed, yea invited and besought to come to him, we may assuredly expect a cordial reception.

He whom we address is our Father. This is a most endearing relation, and fraught with abundant consolation. It serves to aid our conceptions of the Divine goodness, but yet it cannot do justice to the subject. Conceive in your mind the bowels of compassion, which fill the breast of an affectionate friend and an indulgent parent, and then think of the perfection of all that is kind and amiable in the heart of the Father of mercies. He gives with the heart of a parent, not reluctantly but with cordial pleasure,—even with all the love, tenderness, and bounty, which this character

---

\* Heb. iv. 16, compared with chap. xii. 28, 29.

supposes. Earthly parents may be unnatural; a woman may forget her sucking child, but He will never forget his children. He tenderly pities them; and even when he afflicts them, it is with the yearning bowels of a Father, and with a view to their profit. We should certainly approach him with filial confidence and sacred boldness, did our faith correspond with this view of his relation to us; in which he so far condescends to our weakness as to excite our trust in him, by an appeal to the feelings of a parent's heart. He knows all our circumstances and wants; he is ever with us; and is ever able to relieve us. He delights in shewing mercy; and never does he upbraid with guilt, with favours formerly conferred, or with the frequency of our applications. He will, with the utmost readiness, forgive our sins; purify our hearts; keep us from evil; give us strength for duty; patience under suffering; in due time deliverance from trouble; and, finally, everlasting life. "Fear not my dear flock," said the Saviour, "your Father is delighted in giving you the kingdom." He gives it with all his heart; it gratifies his very soul to confer it; and will he not, then, cheerfully give all that is necessary on the way to it?

The confidence which this view of the Divine character inspires, is exactly that which, as sinners, we need. Sin at one time was viewed as nothing; it was difficult to excite our fear, and to convince us of our need of mercy.—We rushed headlong with presumptuous boldness.—The stupor of insensibility was mistaken for the peace of God. When, however, we are brought to see it in its true light, we can hardly be persuaded



that God will forgive it, and receive us into favour, and so are in danger of perishing with the fearful and unbelieving. To meet this state of mind, and to gain our confidence, he has revealed himself as merciful and gracious—as full of pity and compassion—and as abundant in goodness and truth. He adapts his dispensations to our necessities and our fears, and seeks to recover our alienated minds by the overflowings of his goodness. He has even given up his own Son unto suffering and death, that he might “commend his love towards us,” in all our guilt and demerit. Much has been done, that the heirs of promise might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to the hope set before them. And why has he done all this? but because, till we are brought to trust in him, we cannot come to him with a proper spirit, and cannot be conformed to him\*.

Admirably fitted are the discoveries of the divine goodness, and the gifts of divine love, to attract us to God, and to cherish the most assured hopes of all that is good in itself, and adapted to our condition. Animated by this, we may come to the throne of grace with holy and steady confidence. We are apt to view God as rather unwilling, than otherwise, to communicate the blessings of his covenant; and to consider what is bestowed as drawn from him by the interposition of Christ: But the whole of the mediatorial work of the Saviour is the fruit, and not the cause of his love. The opposite view must destroy all confidence,

---

\* Psalm cxlvii. 11. Heb. xi. 6, 7. with Gen. iii. 8.

and infuse a spirit of jealousy and suspicion. Scriptural apprehensions of his character lead us to him as one cheerfully disposed, yea delighted, to do us good.

I shall now call your attention to another ground of confidence in approaching unto God—namely, the boundless merit of the atonement and character of our great High Priest. He is the way to the Father. Our state and character require that all intercourse between God and us should be through a mediator; and we are accordingly called to approach him in the name of Christ. To come to God in his name, is to draw near to the throne of grace as guilty sinners, disclaiming all confidence in ourselves, and pleading exclusively the worth of his character and sacrifice; and looking for all that we ask as the reward of his work.

The Throne of Grace means the Mercy Seat. The reference is to the covering of the Ark in the Mosaic Sanctuary; on which, and towards which, the blood of atonement was sprinkled. Here God sat as propitiated: Here he could display his mercy and his grace, in consistency with the purity and the holiness of his character. This was an expressive emblem of the Redeemer, by whose atonement the curse of the law has been removed, and whose sacrifice has become an honourable medium of the forgiveness of sin, and of communion with God. As the Jewish mercy-seat or propitiatory was the medium of mercy, and of fellowship with heaven for the ancient worshippers, so Christ is the great medium through which we have access to God, and through which he communicates of his goodness to us. It was towards the mercy-seat that

the Israelites directed their prayers \*. This was not from a superstitious regard to the place, but because there God dwelt as the God of peace, and because their services could not be accepted, except through the Messiah, of whom the Ark was an expressive figure. This, in New Testament language, was looking to God through a Mediator. In drawing near to the throne of God, we ought to trust to the precious blood of Christ. However unworthy we are, the Saviour is worthy to receive all glory and blessing. In proportion to our knowledge of his work and character, and the steadiness of our reliance on his sacrifice, will be our enlargement, confidence, and happiness in devotion. From him our hope springs, and it is in believing in him that we are filled with joy and with peace.

But consider not only the atonement of Christ, but likewise his intercession. He pleads for us; he presents our services; and he obtains for our prayers, audience and acceptance. Even after a rebel has been pardoned by his Prince, he will feel afraid to enter the presence of his Sovereign; and will be anxious that he, through whose mediation he obtained forgiveness, should take him by the hand and present him to the King. So is it with us. We could not be admitted into the Divine presence by ourselves, but the Mediator introduces us by kindly presenting us to God. This meets the fears of the returning sinner, and the discouragements of the timid and dejected Christian. The intercession of the Saviour is always

---

\* Josh. vii. 6. 1 Kings viii. 29, 30. Dan. vi. 10.

prevalent, and it embraces all our concerns. *Our* prayers are very defective; we know but little of our wants and our dangers,—but the gracious Advocate within the veil is perfectly acquainted with the whole. When, like Peter, we see not the approaching evil and danger, he does; and he prays for us that our faith may not fail. He asks that we may be blessed with all necessary blessings below, and at last with all the mercies of the everlasting covenant. Since, then, we have such a friend and a brother in the heavenly temple, we may approach the Divine throne with confidence, resting assured that through him we shall receive the desire of our hearts. How fitted is this view of his character to encourage, revive, and satisfy the soul!

Let me also remind you of the many promises that the Lord will hear the prayers of his people\*. These promises have been illustrated by a succession of examples, all admirably calculated to banish the fears which a sense of guilt and of demerit frequently suggests. The history of the Patriarchs, Prophets, and Apostles, is full of such examples. Nor are they confined to such eminent characters; for in every age the Lord has heard his people however feeble they may have been, and whatever were the circumstances of their lot. John was told, that the incense offered up in heaven accompanies the prayers of *all* saints. Through the intercession of Christ, signified by the incense, they are received and answered. When we engage in

---

\* Psalm lxxv. 2. Prov. iii. 6. Isa. lxxv. 24. John xiv. 13, 14.



this duty, and continue in it in a proper spirit, we come to know, from our own experience, that the Lord never said to his people, "Seek ye my face in vain." This serves to increase our confidence, and to endear to us the privilege of prayer. With these things before us, we may well follow the Apostolic exhortation,—to draw near with a true heart in the full assurance of faith, happy in deliverance from a sense of unpardoned guilt, and in the confidence of acceptance with God, through the purifying virtue of the blood of sprinkling. Through the Mediator, we have access even into the holiest of all, and there he himself ever liveth to make intercession,—so that we may at once, with confidence and humility, triumph over the fears of condemnation.

But this boldness includes not only confidence of success in our petitions, but full freedom of speech in addressing God. This liberty of speech is expressive of intimate and endearing fellowship with him as a Father, and is one of the privileges of his family. We are not kept at an awful distance, as if we were strangers; but like children we have free access to him at all times, and in all circumstances. In every thing we may make our requests known to him, for there is nothing he will think too insignificant to be laid before him. To him, then, we may completely unbosom ourselves, and freely and fully unfold what we could tell no earthly friend, however near and dear to us. Yes—to him we are exhorted to pour out our hearts, when so burdened with cares and anxieties, or with griefs and alarms, that we know not how to bear

them, and are ready with a bosom full of sorrow and perplexity, to sit down and mourn over our lot.

Distressing it must be to sit deploring our fate, and saying, "What shall I do!" But there is no reason whatever for thus giving way to sad lamentation and despondency. We are encouraged to go to the Lord with a heart full of grief, and tell him of our distresses—to keep nothing back, but to pour all our complaints into his merciful bosom—to make him our counsellor and friend—and on him to cast our every burden and care, in the confidence that he careth for us, and will sustain and bless our souls. This relieves the mind. Having told him of all our cares, anxieties, and distresses, we feel calmed and encouraged: The peace which passeth all understanding guards the heart: We rest on God as one who knows all our state; and feel satisfied that it is for us to keep the path of duty, and to leave all events with Him. How sweet thus to be enabled to recline with humble confidence on the bosom of our Father, and calmly to fall asleep in the absence of all corroding care and disquieting anxiety! When the mind is stayed on God, we feel serene and satisfied in the wildest storms, and the darkest dispensations. In the deepest afflictions he can sooth the mind and strengthen the heart. "The waves may beat and the tempest roar, but the anchor of Hope fixed in the heavenly temple will be a complete preservative."

The grounds of confidence to which I have referred you are particularly necessary, because of the many *discouragements* we meet with in the exercise of prayer.

To a few of these I beg your attention. We are under the necessity of daily struggling with an evil heart of unbelief, and resisting temptations to depart from God: We are conscious of many errors, and feel how feeble are our efforts, and how small is our progress in the Christian course. Smoothly as we proceed in the absence of temptation, we have to lament that when our temper is crossed, or any thing opposes our natural bias, we instantly stumble. When thus conscious of guilt we feel ashamed; our minds are shaken, we feel shy, and are in danger of fleeing from God, instead of going to him and fully confessing our sins and demerit. In the case of some heinous offence we must be filled with the deepest concern, and will naturally feel afraid to approach the throne of our God. Deeply, without question, we ought to feel our guilt and our baseness; and it becomes God to frown upon us in our such circumstances, by withdrawing the joys and the consolations of his love. Indeed, in the very nature of things, joy must be interrupted, and confidence marred, at a time such as this. No earthly resources can then calm the conscience or tranquillize the heart. To be conscious of living in transgression of the will of God made Adam miserable even when in Paradise. What was Eden to him when he heard the voice of God—*Adam, where art thou?* We are in danger of supposing that, in circumstances like these, it were presumption to pray, and that it is duty to refrain from it: But the greater our transgressions have been, the more necessary it is to confess them, with our eyes turned to the sacrifice of

Christ, and with fervent supplications for mercy in his name. We need not be afraid to do so, for he who knows what we need before we ask him, hath expressly invited us to return to him immediately, through Christ; and hath declared that, if "we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

To the Saviour then let us go for pardon and purity. If we keep guilt in our bosom, it will only make it rankle. Dangerous as a wound may be at first, it will become much more so if neglected: If allowed to fester, it may end in a gangrene, and so in death. Wisdom calls for an immediate application to the physician and to the prescribed remedy. Never can peace be recovered but by utterly despairing of help from ourselves, and falling as sinners into the arms of free and sovereign mercy. David for a time refrained from confessing his guilt, and though he might not entirely abandon devotion, he had no enjoyment in it. He was a stranger to peace, and the prey of vexing recollections, till he went to God, and frankly acknowledged his iniquity and supplicated forgiveness. When he thus went to the throne of grace, he obtained mercy; and with deep feeling, and in language expressive of his own experience, he wrote the thirty-second Psalm, which commences with a declaration of the blessedness of the man whose transgressions are forgiven, and whose sin is covered. Nor did he rest here: He had supplicated the complete cure of his spiritual maladies, and he now blesses God for hearing him, and expresses the sense he had of the blessedness of



the man in whose spirit "there is no guile\*." Sweet indeed in such a case is the message of reconciliation, through that blood which has been sprinkled on the heavenly mercy-seat, and through which we again obtain as at first pardon and acceptance! This is quite a different thing from working up ourselves into a persuasion, that because God is unchangeable all is well, whatever be our spirit or deportment. Such a persuasion is utterly presumptuous, and partakes not of that confidence which arises from a fresh application to the fountain, opened for sin and uncleanness. Let no dread however deter us from going to God, with our eyes fixed on the work and mediation of his Son. This will melt and purify the heart. How bitterly must we weep when Jesus looks on us with kindness, even after we have denied him.

Another discouragement arises from the prevalence of sloth and indifference. We often feel little fervour—little spirituality—little of the exercise of faith and of love. The mind, feeling cold and earthly, deems it improper to pray. In such a case we ought doubtless to feel deeply, and to be humbled in the dust. They are not to be envied, but pitied, who are unconcerned about the state of their minds, whether carnal or otherwise; and who boast of their correct notions of divine truth, while far from being anxious to glorify God. But still, the remedy is not to be found in keeping back from the throne of our God, because we are sunk into a state of great insensibility to things unseen and

---

\* Psalm li. 10. Psalm xxxii. 2.

eternal, but in drawing near to him with the greater concern; convinced that the more weak and lifeless we are, the more we need the communications of his grace. If we refrain from prayer, from reading the Scriptures, and from the institutions of Christ, because we feel not that life and comfort which we desire, we are putting from us the *only* things which can cure us of the evil we deplore, and produce that spiritual state of mind after which we are seeking. Prayer tends to subdue evil habits, and it exercises and strengthens holy dispositions: It is also an appointed means of obtaining assistance from above. Let no sense of weakness, then, no temptations, no fears keep from the throne of grace.

The spirit thus cherished is the same with that which keeps many a trembling sinner from coming to the Saviour, till he can persuade himself that he is better, and so more fitted for mercy. The language of Scripture to such a character is "Go to the Physician *as you are*;" and similar is its language to every Christian who keeps back from God, because his mind has become lukewarm or insensible. Should an individual question his Christianity, let him remember that the Gospel addresses us, not as converted nor as unconverted, but as sinners. If he cannot approach God as a child of his family, let him do it with the prayer and the spirit of the publican. Have we sinned against God, and are we still addressed in the Gospel? Surely, then, the question with us ought to be, "Are the testimony and the promises of the Gospel true?" If we doubt their truth, our business is with the evidences of *their divinity*, and not with evi-

dences in *us* of a change of mind. If we suppose that because faith is the fruit of Divine influence, and we have no sense of that influence, it is therefore in vain for us to think of believing, we have forgotten that the power to believe does not consist in some active energy in the mind, but arises from the fulness and clearness of the *evidence* of the truth impressing it. Let the Gospel itself, therefore, occupy the soul, that its glory may, through the Divine blessing, influence our hearts: Let the heart dwell on the character of God, the work and intercession of Christ, and on all that the Cross discloses: Let it be devoutly turned to the heavenly Teacher, that the soul may be revived, and all that is within us brought under the transforming influence of redeeming goodness. To this remedy let us have recourse at once, for the longer we delay the worse shall we become.

We are ready to be discouraged, also, in the time of deep and distressing affliction, and in circumstances of extreme difficulty. Seeing no visible means of relief, we give way to despondency, and think it is vain to call upon God for what he seems to have denied us. It were well for you when discouraged in this way to turn to the cloud of witnesses that have gone before you, and to study their characters. Think of the many and great perplexities and entanglements through which they were carried: Observe how they were preserved when ready to fall and to faint—how they were aided and strengthened when ready to despond—and how they were delivered in circumstances the most perilous and calamitous. Think of the Ark in the

midst of the deluge—of the rock and the manna, of the cloud and the pillar in the wilderness: Think of the passage through the Red Sea and through Jordan, and of the many interpositions of a gracious Providence which marked the history of the chosen people. See the ancient worthies, through faith, stopping the mouths of lions, quenching the violence of fire, and happy in God, though destitute, afflicted, and tormented: See Abraham giving up Isaac, and Moses enduring as seeing him who is invisible: Turn to the apostles and primitive Christians and mark the strength of their faith, and the constancy of their devotion, in circumstances the most trying to nature. In these narratives we see the character and the privileges, not of strangers, but of our own family: They are our brethren and companions in tribulation. That which supported and animated them is equally free and sure to us, so that we may well imitate them, who, through faith and patience, are now inheriting the promises. Let all, then, be left in the hand of your God: Trust in him at all times, be your condition what it may. He is a refuge that never fails; and it is his delight to aid the helpless—to deliver the afflicted and relieve the distressed.

This discouragement becomes greater, if, having often and long prayed, an answer is delayed. The time fixed by God is, however, the fittest: It is for him to order our lot, and to his will it becomes us to bow: His promises cannot fail—He is but bringing his plans to maturity. Long did Abraham wait for Isaac, and long did his family wait for Canaan; and



still longer did the Church wait for the Redeemer. He waits, and causes us to wait, for the proper season. When *it* comes, all will be fulfilled. I speak of things which are promised, and not of things which, though he may give, he hath not *said* he will; far less of things which it were sinful to ask. With regard to things in themselves good, but which he hath not promised, it becomes us to pray with deep submission to his will, because the things in question may not be good for *us*. I would here remark, too, that much of what is said in Scripture of waiting on God has a respect to express promises of events connected with the great promise of the Messiah. For him, and for all that was preparatory to his coming, did the people of God wait: In like manner we are now waiting for his second coming, and for all the events of whatever kind which are to precede it; and are praying for what is promised in connection with this solemn event. Though, in regard to what is not promised, we should not get the very things we ask, we may obtain what is better, as you know was the case with Moses. We may not get ease, but we shall be profited: Bodily relief may not be obtained, but the heart may be enriched with more than we could ask or think. At all events, prayer will be found a blessing as a means of sanctifying the soul, and fitting it for the bliss of heaven.

There are times when we are plunged into immoderate sorrow, and so are enfeebled and distracted. We have an example of the effect of this in relation to watchfulness and prayer, in the three disciples who witnessed the agony of our Lord in the garden. They

were quite overwhelmed with grief, and were found by the Saviour sleeping for sorrow. The spirit was willing, but the flesh was weak. The weakness of the bodily frame was not in *itself* sinful, but as it might become a snare, and so the *occasion* of sin, vigilance was required, that so the mind might rise above it, and not be unfitted for the duty of the moment. Nature must feel, and it is not sinful to feel; but our feelings ought to be guided and regulated by an enlightened judgment. If we give way to the spirit which nurses melancholy, and ceases not to brood over all that is gloomy, we shall become quite heavy with the stupifying influence of desponding sorrow; and looking entirely to the dark side of things, we shall feel indisposed for devotion, and leave the throne of our Father. Such a spirit is the bane of all confidence. God is viewed as a hard master; and the mind, being quite unnerved, cannot find pleasure in his service. Such is the influence of the mind on the body, and of the body on the mind, that if in such circumstances they are not watched, we may soon refuse all consolation and write the most bitter things against ourselves: See how David in the xlii. and xliii. Psalms, again and again, calls upon his soul to dismiss its dejection and its gloom, and to go to God; trusting in his goodness, and hoping for all that his wants required, and the covenant of God contained. In this struggle between the convictions of the judgment and the feelings of the heart, and between faith and unbelief, a striking, consoling, and salutary example is exhibited. It sometimes happens that through the dejecting influence of

trouble, the truth, even when the judgment admits it, fails to impart corresponding comfort. The origin of this is but an infirmity, yet it ought to be watched and repressed, for though not in itself criminal, it may become an inlet to evil. It is easy to tell the afflicted of the promises of the Gospel, but it is quite a different thing to lay firm hold of them in the day of heavy and perplexing calamity. Still, however, it is for us to maintain a conflict as David did, and as the three disciples ought to have done, with such infirmities of nature. The latter were exhorted to pray, that their weaknesses might not betray them; and the former poured out his soul unto God, and so found relief.

Allow me to turn your attention to the great things for which we are called to pray. We are exhorted to implore *mercy*. We need this as guilty sinners, and as the subjects of affliction and tribulation. In the former character we need forgiveness, and shall do so while in the body. Our best services are stained with sin, and daily are we transgressing. The prayer of Paul for Onesiphorus, in which he poured out all his heart, was that he might "find mercy of the Lord in that day." Blessed, indeed, is the privilege of access to the throne of grace, where the Saviour ever pleads, and from whence forgiveness is freely dispensed to all who come to God by him.

But we need also the merciful support and sympathy of our great High Priest, as the subjects of affliction. He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, in consequence of having been himself tried in

all points as we are, yet without sin; and it is in connection with this view of his lot, that we are encouraged to come to the throne of grace with confidence. It is not of the first approach of a sinner to the Saviour that the Apostle here speaks, but of the daily and repeated access of believers to him, for the constant assistance and support which they need. We receive mercy, not only when we obtain forgiveness of sin, but also when we are granted all that gracious consolation and succour which our circumstances of distress and difficulty require. This is called mercy because it springs from the tender pity and compassion, the kindness and the benignity of God; and from the sympathizing tenderness of the compassionate and tried intercessor who is within the veil. That you may be encouraged to draw near with confidence for this blessing, look to the days of the man of sorrows, and contemplate his many heavy and complicated woes. Think of his whole life of pain, and ponder with the deepest interest what Calvary discloses; and learn from all this wondrous history that we have an High Priest, who can have compassion on the ignorant and on them who are out of the way. Mark his confidence of God in the midst of all that seemed to oppose it, and certainly tried it to the utmost. Survey the workings of the generous and disinterested affection of his heart; and remember that all this he endured, that he might by his own experience in our nature, know and feel the difficulties and the trials connected with the lot of his people. In approaching the throne of grace, the recollection of these things



will impart humble and holy boldness. The thought of them ought ever to be connected with the cheering consideration, that, though in the highest heaven, he hath not dropped our interests. There with the most unremitting attention he watches over us, and affectionately says, "On me let all thy wants lie." Even amidst the grandeur and adorations of the celestial kingdom, he listens to the prayers of each individual of his people; and is delighted in protecting and blessing the very meanest and the feeblest of his beloved family.

We are called to go to the throne of our Father not only for mercy, but for *grace* to help in time of need. Seasonable grace, or grace adapted to all our circumstances, and according to our wants, is meant. The reference is not to the acceptance of our *persons*, but to that special assistance which we need in particular situations, and which we obtain on special applications to the fountain of all good. Of this, the free favour of God is the source; and all of it is to be sought as the gift of unmerited bounty. This grace assimilates the mind to its Author, and so fits us for our condition, relations, and trials. Every moment are we in want of spiritual blessings, and of course we constantly stand in need of the grace of God. There are circumstances, however, in which we particularly require it, and in which we especially feel our weakness and dependence. It is our duty, and also our privilege, to ask seasonable help, in the hope of receiving all that is adapted to times and situations.

In the day of *prosperity* we need grace to keep us humble and watchful, spiritual and heavenly, in our views, dispositions, and deportment. He who preserved Joseph and Daniel in places the most slippery, can keep us from falling in situations the most flattering to nature. Even in the day of prosperity, Job was exhibited by God as a remarkable example of piety. Many, however, have fallen before it, and become awful monuments of the bewitching influence of the objects of sense. Hence the need of fervent prayer for the aid of Divine grace.

In the day of *adversity* we need to be kept patient, submissive, and contented.—We need grace to make affliction the means of reclaiming us from the devious paths of folly and of sin ; of calling forth every latent energy of the soul, and promoting our faith, our hope, and our love ; of weaning us from all undue attachment to this world of vanity ; and of fixing our hearts on God as the only happiness of our souls. The grace of our heavenly Father can make adversity quicken our progress in the ways of obedience, enable us to be useful to others, and form us for the inheritance of the saints in light. We are prone either to despise the rod, or to faint under it ; and in vain do we dream of acting with propriety, by means of a supposed stock of wisdom and strength gained by experience. Without fresh and special assistance we shall certainly fall. I do not mean that a mature Christian has learned nothing in the course of his progress—far from it. But that whatever he has learned it will be of no use

to him without the Divine blessing. God works by means, but their success depends upon himself. The acquired endowments of the most advanced are but means by which He acts, and, of course, without his gracious blessing they cannot produce the desired effect. The grace of God alone can make affliction the means of bringing forth "the happy fruit of righteousness," by cherishing that self-denying, meekly resigned, and heavenly temper of heart which adorned the character of Christ, is the very essence of holiness, and the happiest state of mind at once for this world and for that which is to come. The troubles of life when thus blessed, invigorate the principles of genuine religion, prepare for the sacrifice of our own will, habituate us to the contemplation of things unseen and eternal, and lead us to aspire after spiritual enjoyments. Let us, then, pray that in the day of trial, we may receive that grace which can make affliction the means of attaining ends so exalted, holy, and blissful.

This will be found particularly necessary, when we are assailed with reproach and opposition for the sake of religion. In this case we have in a special manner fellowship with Christ in his sufferings, and we may confidently look to him for support and for comfort. Then, too, in a particular manner, we are called to follow Him, whose glories shone in their brightest lustre when in this cause he became obedient unto death.

In the time of temptation we need special aid from above. If you are tempted by the things or the men of the world, by the flesh or by Satan, imitate the servants

of Christ, who in such circumstances became fervent in prayer; committed themselves to him who had overcome in their cause;—without whose permission nothing could assail them;—and who was able to preserve them. He himself was tempted, but he overcame by faith in the Divine word,—and he hath promised that, through the same means, we too shall be victorious.

When called to arduous and self-denying duties, we stand in special need of aid from on high. Abraham, when called to leave his kindred and his home, and still more when called to offer up him in whom the world was to be blessed, is an example of this.—Moses and Aaron were often thus tried; and Caleb and Joshua had a very difficult part to act on the return of the spies, and the murmuring of the children of Israel. The Apostles and their assistants were frequently engaged in duties the most embarrassing and trying. Their minds, however, were supported by the encouraging reflection, that they could do all things through their Lord who strengthened them. When we are placed in situations of difficulty, and have duties seemingly opposite to perform, and duties requiring great wisdom, meekness, and firmness, and also many sacrifices, let us have recourse to him who learned the difficulties connected with obedience, by the things which he suffered.

Prayer for assistance in duty ought to be connected with the faithful discharge of it. If we regard iniquity in our hearts, the Lord will not hear us. In relation



to what I have said of waiting for an answer, I would remark, that to continue doing what is wrong, because we are praying and waiting for the removal of the occasion of our error, is quite inconsistent with the word of God. In this way not a few act, and mistake it for waiting for an answer to prayer. It is for us, as little children, to learn the will of God from his word; to obey it; in the way of *obedience* to pray for his kingdom; and to leave all consequences with him. All our calculations about usefulness, while neglecting the will of heaven, resolve themselves into the wisdom of this world.

Forget not, my dear friend, that we are very incompetent judges of what we really need. We are too apt to be guided by our feelings, rather than by our judgment. Our heavenly Father knows what we need, and he consults our profit more than our feelings: He looks into eternity, and arranges our lot so as best to secure and increase our enjoyment of bliss in the world to come,—when all his glory shall be displayed, and his ways vindicated. The Lord heareth prayer; and though you may not always obtain the very thing you ask, yet you will obtain what he sees to be better for you. Paul prayed thrice, that his trouble might be removed: It was not removed, but yet his prayer was heard. His Lord said to him, “My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is displayed in thy weakness.” This satisfied the apostle, so that he said, “Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of

Christ may be displayed in me\*." This, so far from being an objection against the love of God, is a most striking proof of it. Earthly parents may, and sometimes do, hurt their children by giving them all that they ask; but our heavenly Father is infinitely wise, and he manifests his love in a way worthy of his wisdom and knowledge. He is a sun and a shield; and what is truly good for us he will assuredly give. There are many things which tend to our hurt, concealed under circumstances which to our view have no connection with them, but yet they are all known to God; and being so, he denies one thing, not on its own account, but because it would lead to other things which might hurt us. This should teach us to submit to his will, and to exercise the most willing resignation to the dispensations of his providence. He may allow one calamity to overtake us, to preserve us from a greater, or to pave the way for the bestowment of the very greatest of blessings. *We* see but a short way, but His eye at one glance sees through eternity. Hence it is that He is not so moved as we are by present events: He views present occurrences as they stand in relation to futurity; and he acts accordingly. This is a consolatory thought, and ought to lead us to this conclusion, that what he is pleased to give, we should enjoy with gratitude; and that what he is pleased to inflict, we should bear with patience.

In this world of vicissitudes we may expect changes

---

\* 2 Corinthians xii. 9.

in our lot; and at such seasons we require much grace, that we may conduct ourselves as becomes pilgrims and strangers, who are heirs of the heavenly inheritance, and are waiting for the Lord from heaven. A change in circumstances often detects what was not in the least suspected. Such a time is truly a time of need. Often has it occasioned a departure from the truth; but it has also been blessed as a means of leading to it, and of growth in the knowledge of it.

In anticipating futurity, and in particular our dissolution, we need to look with deep seriousness to the guide of our lot, and to the conqueror of death. Our great High Priest is able and ready to lead, comfort, and support us with his rod and his staff, while passing the valley and the shadow of death, and to conduct us to the abodes of perpetual peace, happiness, and glory. In the last hour we may be sorely tried; but if we look again to the holy temple of our God and our deliverer, we shall find that the wondrous and the gracious scenes exhibited on the heavenly mercy-seat, connected as they are with the Cross and the appearance of the Lamb there slain, will dissipate the gloom of the grave, and enable us to glory in the warmth and the perpetuity of that love, from the benefit of which neither death nor life can separate us. Blessed indeed in that hour is the hope of the heavenly inheritance, where neither sin nor suffering shall ever be known; and where the voice of praise and of thanksgiving shall for ever be heard! How delightful the thought, that the whole of the celestial city

will be a temple for God and the Lamb, where the glory of Jehovah shall shine in its utmost effulgence in the face of the Redeemer, illuminating every part of the Sanctuary, and transforming every worshipper into his image !

That the enjoyment of this blessedness may be your happy lot, is the prayer of,

My Dear Friend,

Yours, &c.

---

DUNDEE :

*Printed by A. Colville.*



