

# ESSAYS

ON

## THE DISTINGUISHING TRAITS

OF

### CHRISTIAN CHARACTER :

BY

GARDINER SPRING, A. M.

PASTOR OF THE BRICK PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE CITY  
OF NEW-YORK.

*ἡ γὰρ καρδία σου ἐκ ἱστῶν ἐνδείκναι ἐνώπιον τοῦ Θεοῦ.*



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## INTRODUCTION.



THERE is a hope that is as an *anchor to the soul* ; and there is a hope that is as the *spider's web*. The former is built on the Rock of Ages ; the latter on the sand. The one *perisheth when God taketh away the soul* ; the other is *sure and steadfast, entering into that which is within the vail*.

The hope of the Christian is founded on evidence. The disciple of Jesus is *ready to give an answer to every one that asketh him a REASON of the hope that is in him*. He is *born of the incorruptible seed*. His *hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost which is given unto him*.

The hope of the self-deceived is founded on presumption. He is wrapt up in false security. *A deceived heart hath turned him aside*. There is *a lie in his right hand*. He imagines he is right, while he is fatally wrong ; he hopes he is going to heaven, while he is in the broad way to hell.

It is no inconsiderable thing, therefore, to possess the spirit of real religion. Multitudes substitute the shadow for the substance, and rest satisfied with a mere *name to live*. It is indeed no inconsiderable thing to have actually *passed from death unto life*. Multitudes cherish the hope of the divine favour, who will at last be confounded with disappointment, and sunk deep in despair. Let the reader, therefore, sit down to the following pages with this solemn question before him : *Am I the friend of God, or am I His enemy ?* It will be too late to put this question by and by. Perhaps you fear that you are God's enemy. Perhaps you hope you are His friend. To aid you in deciding this interesting point, is the design of the following pages. There are some things that are neither for nor against you ; there are others that are decisively in your favour. The first five Essays will exhibit several traits of character, that *cannot* be relied on as *conclusive evidence* of genuine religion. The last ten will exhibit several that *may* be relied on, without danger of deception.

The importance of the subject constrains the writer to use great freedom and plainness. The plainness which he has used, also constrains

him to beg his readers to suspend their decision of the solemn question before them, until they shall have taken a *full* view of the subject. If any thing should be said that wounds them, let them remember, it is the “wound of a friend.” The honour of God, the value of the soul, the awful retributions of eternity, all make me more solicitous to save you, than to please you.

Searcher of hearts! *send out thy light and thy truth, and let them lead me.* Discover their deception to the self-deceived, and make thy dear children *strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.*

*New-York, October 5th, 1813.*

## ESSAY I.

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### VISIBLE MORALITY.

*MAN* looketh on the outward appearance. It is not by a few that *visible morality* is viewed as the *narrow way which leadeth to life*. It would be an impeachment of the understanding of my readers, to say that mere morality is not conclusive evidence of Christian Character, were it not for the multitude of hopes that are built upon this crumbling basis. An unblemished moral character is in itself so amiable, that it not only commands the respect and esteem of others, but secures the confidence of those who possess it. If a man is honest, industrious, and temperate; faithful to his promises, and punctual in his engagements; if he possesses a friendly, humane, kind, generous, and noble spirit; he views himself, and is viewed by the world around him, to be a "good-hearted man," and in a fair way to heaven! If he is correct in

his external demeanour ; if he avoids all overt acts of immorality ; if he is innocent and harmless ; if his honour is unsullied and his name without reproach ; though he may confess that he is not so good as he should be, yet he believes he is much better than he is. He sees nothing to shake his hopes, or alarm his fears. Look abroad into the world, and see the thousands that rest here for eternity. Melancholy view ! *The heart is indeed deceitful above all things, as well as desperately wicked.*

The man who is *merely* moral is a stranger to the living God. While he sustains an unimpeached character in the view of the world, he may neither believe the principles of the Gospel, nor practise the duties of piety. He may be invincibly averse to every species of immorality on the one hand ; but he is equally so to the exactness and spirituality of religion on the other. The infinitely important duties which he owes to God, he keeps entirely out of sight. Of loving and serving Him, he knows nothing. Whatever he does, or whatever he leaves undone, he does nothing for God. He may be honest in his dealings with every body except God. He robs none but God. He is thank-

less and faithless to none but God. He speaks reproachfully of none but God. A just view of the relation which he bears to God, forms no part of his principles, and the duties which result from that relation, form no part of his morality. He contents himself with mere external conformity to the duties of the *second table*. Like the young man in the Gospel, he may not have committed murder, nor adultery, nor theft, nor perjury, *from his youth up*; while, like him, he may have laid up treasures for himself, and not be *rich toward God*. He is *earthly and sensual*, rather than heavenly and spiritual.

In the sight of God, such a character is radically defective. The moral man is like Israel of old; an *empty vine*, because *he bringeth forth fruit to himself*. He is no better than the unprofitable servant; no better than a cumberer of the ground, who will at last be cut down and cast into the unquenchable flame.

Let it not be forgotten, however, that no man has the least claim to Christian Character, who is not what the world styles a moral man. Vital religion is an operative principle. The spirit of piety not only lives in the heart, but flows forth

in the life. *A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit.* Whatever may be the pretensions of an immoral man, he is far from the kingdom of heaven. Still, mere morality falls far short of the religion of the cross. The grand defect is, mere morality never aims at the heart, and would never touch it, if it should. The natural disposition may be very amiable, and the external demeanour very blameless ; while the *carnal heart is enmity against God.* The Gospel of Jesus Christ requires men to be moral ; and if this were all that it required, the moral man would be a Christian. But it requires them to be moral from holy principles. The Gospel of Jesus Christ requires men to be honest, sober, industrious, and munificent ; but it requires them to be honest, sober, industrious, and munificent, from evangelical motives. *As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.* The moral quality of actions lies in the disposition of heart with which they are performed. A man may therefore be very honest, very humane, and very munificent ; but if the disposition of heart with which the acts of honesty, humanity, and munificence are performed, be not such as God requires and approves, he has no lot nor part in the portion of God's people.

There is a wide distinction between *moral virtues* and *Christian graces*. Christian graces spring from Christian motives, or such motives as are warranted by the Gospel of Christ. They regard, in the first place, the glory of God and the interests of his kingdom ; and then regulate our intercourse with our fellow men according to the principles of his word. Moral virtues spring from selfish motives. They have no regard for the glory of God and the interests of his kingdom. They go just so far as self-interest leads the way, and there they stop. Such are the virtues of men *dead in trespasses and sins* ; such is the morality of "philanthropists ;" such is the morality of the heathen ; such is the morality of infidels. Reader, look into your Bible. Will such morality be of any avail in the solemn hour, that *tries the spirits of men* ? *To the law and the testimony* : Every page will flash conviction on the conscience, that such spurious morality is of no account in the sight of God. I say, in the *sight of God* : The moral man has a higher claim upon the regard and confidence of his fellow men, than the immoral man. He is a better ruler and a better subject, a better parent and a better child, a better master and a better servant, than the immoral man. *Other things being equal*, he is less



guilty in the sight of God than the immoral man. But after all, he wants the *one thing needful*. He is a *child of wrath*. He is *without Christ*; an *alien from the commonwealth of Israel*; a *stranger from the covenants of promise*: and though he may cherish a delusive hope, is *without God in the world*.

## ESSAY II.



### FORM OF RELIGION.

“MANY,” says an old writer, “take the press-money and wear the livery of Christ, that never stand to their colours, nor follow their leader.” The character of the formalist ranks higher in the estimation of the world, than the character of the mere moralist. Formalists advance a step further than visible morality, and maintain the *form of religion*. They are those who are not only decent in their external deportment among men, but strict in the observance of all the duties of piety. They put on the *appearance* of real religion: But this is not conclusive evidence of their Christian Character.

We read of those *who have the form of godliness, but who deny the power thereof*. Men may maintain the form of godliness from a variety of motives, none of which spring from the operation of grace in the heart. Many persons do it for the sake of reputation. A due regard to the in-

stitutions of Christianity, forms so essential a part of the character of the good citizen, that among a virtuous people, it is difficult to secure esteem and confidence, without a becoming observance of the external duties of religion. Such is the homage which vice pays to virtue, that in Christian communities, it is a creditable thing to put on the appearance of religion. To those who regard the good opinion of the world around them, there are not wanting multiplied motives to appear better than they really are.

No small portion of those who maintain the mere form of religion, do it from the force of education. A religious education cannot fail to have a desirable influence, in a greater or less degree, upon all, both in restraining them from the commission of crime, and in impelling them to the external performance of duty. It often does have this influence upon many during the whole course of their lives. It is difficult to break over the restraints which have been imposed by parental instruction and example, without singular boldness and the most brutish stupidity. Hence you find many who persevere in the usual forms of religion to the end of life, who give you no satisfactory reason to believe that their hearts are

right with God. The observance of the external services of piety has become a habit; and they walk the customary round of duties, because it is a beaten path, rather than because it is a pleasant one.

Perhaps a still greater number maintain the appearance of godliness for the sake of quieting the clamours of natural conscience. The *inspiration of the Almighty* has implanted a principle in the human breast, which is capable of discerning the immutable difference between right and wrong; of giving men a sense of moral obligation; and of approving what is right and condemning what is wrong in their moral conduct. There are seasons when the silent voice of that invisible agent, who is commissioned by God to record the sins of thought and action, whispers that *God is angry with the wicked every day*. The implacable foe stings with anguish and convulses with agony. In these seasons of remorse, the carnal heart naturally flees to the covenant of works. When the moral principle is awake, there can be nothing that looks like a compromise between the heart and the conscience, short of a life of external godliness. The conscience is so seriously affected with divine truth, as often and for a length

of time, not to allow some of the worst of men in the omission of any of the external duties of religion.

There are also those who maintain the form of religion for the sake of fostering the persuasion of their own good estate. We know that *there is a way which SEEMETH right to a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.* Men who are experimentally ignorant of the nature of real religion, easily substitute the shadow for the substance. Externally, the formalist does not differ from a real saint. He performs all those overt acts of religion which he would perform, if he were at heart a sincere follower of Christ. Hence the beauty of his external conduct induces him to imagine that he is so. Thus Paul felt before the law of God came home to his conscience, discovered his guilt, and swept away his carnal hopes. And thus the foolish virgins felt till the midnight cry was given, *Behold, the Bridegroom cometh!* Rather than give up their hope, formalists continue to cherish their deception, by substituting the appearance for the reality, till their deception, their hope, and their irksome forms vanish together, and leave them amid the wailings of the eternal pit.

There are very many who, from some one of these causes, or all of them combined, carry the form of godliness to every possible extent, and are still nothing more than *sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal*. This was eminently the character of the Pharisees. They were what their name denotes them to have been, *separatists*, distinguished for their rigid manner of life, and great pretensions to sanctity. They fasted often, made long prayers, paid tithes with exactness, and distributed alms with liberality. As a badge of distinction, they wore large rolls of parchment on their foreheads and wrists, on which were inscribed certain words of the law. As an exhibition of their purity, they never entered their houses, or sat down at their tables, without washing their hands. They would not so much as touch a publican, or eat, or drink, or pray with a man that was a sinner. But all this was corrupted by *an evil heart of unbelief*, and served only to flatter their pride, and *fill up the measure of their iniquity*. All this was consistent with *shutting up the kingdom of heaven ; and neither going in themselves, nor suffering them that are entering to go in*. All this was denounced by one wo after another, as the hypocrisy of men who should therefore *receive the greater damnation*.

We need not go far to look for multiplied testimony, that there are those in this age of the Church, who, like the Pharisees, *outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.* It is not difficult to *make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter.* Men may read and pray; they may attend to the duties of the family, and the sanctuary, and often to those of the closet; they may profess to be on the Lord's side; give up their children to God in baptism; come themselves to the sacramental table; and engage in the solemn act of commemorating the love of the Lord Jesus: and yet know no more of real, vital piety, than the prayerless and profane. Especially is this too often true of those who are baptised in their infancy, and educated under the care of those churches who admit them into their communion, for no other reason and with no other evidence of their good estate, than that they have received the "initiating seal of the church\*."

\* The lax practice of admission to sealing ordinances, is an evil which cannot be too deeply deplored. In cities, where there is unhappily something like the spirit of rivalry in the churches, it is one of the most dangerous snares of the Fowler. Ministers and Elders often yield to the temptation, and it is to be feared, receive many into the church, who will at last be *weighed in the balances, and found wanting.*

But their condemnation is as sure, as their guilt is great. To look for conclusive evidence of Christian Character in the mere form of Christianity, is to expect the evidence of purity where there is nothing but the marks of pollution. The mere formalist is exceedingly sinful. No man

The ordinance of the Supper is the peculiar privilege of *believers*.

In the act of commemorating the love of the Lord Jesus, there is a virtual, nay, there is an *express* profession of *saving faith* in the Lord Jesus. Now the word of God justifies no man in professing to possess that which he does *not* possess. If it does, it warrants him in professing a *lie*. Those, therefore, who have a right to the ordinance of the Supper, are real believers.

*This cup*, says the ever-blessed Redeemer, *This cup is the NEW COVENANT in my blood*. It is the seal of that covenant; none therefore have the warrant to partake of it, except those who are within the pale of that covenant. Believers only are in that covenant; therefore, believers only have a right to its seal.

*The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many, are one bread and one body: For we are all partakers of that one bread*. This grand privilege which believers enjoy at the sacramental table, *communion with Christ and with each other*, rests upon the vital union of the soul to Christ by faith. Believers become *members of his body*. *They have all drunk into one spirit*; and are also *all members one of another*. None, therefore, have a right to come to the sacramental table who are not *real believers*; for no others have the spirit of communion with Christ and his disciples.



has a right to be a formalist, whether his formality arises from hypocrisy or self-deception, or both. He has no right to deceive himself, or to deceive others. Every species of mere formality is viewed by God as no better than detestable. How did he express his displeasure to-

The right of access to the ordinance of the Supper, we know does not *limit* the right of admission. It is not our prerogative to judge the heart. After exercising all her wisdom, a church may admit some to her communion who ought not to be admitted; and debar others who have a right to the privilege. Still, the right of admission *is not independent* of the right of access. Notwithstanding we cannot judge the heart, it is our indispensable duty to form our opinions and regulate our conduct from the best evidence which we can obtain. It is our indispensable duty to receive those who are, and to reject those who are not, *in the judgment of Christian charity*, real believers. To multiply communicants merely for the sake of multiplying them; to make converts faster than the Spirit of God makes them; to add to the Church those whom *the Lord does not add*; gives her neither strength nor beauty. "Better is it that the church should be a small, select band, cemented by ardent love to their Master and his interest, than a discordant multitude, without harmony of sentiment and affection. The three hundred that lapped under Gideon, the type of Christ, were more potent than the mighty host of Midian and Amalek. Union is the strength and beauty of our Zion. *Union, not numbers, will make her terrible as an army with banners*.\*"

\* Address of the General Association of Connecticut, June 22d, 1808

wards his ancient people for this sin? *This people, saith he, draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.* God also demands of his people, *To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me, saith the Lord? When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hands to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with: IT IS INIQUITY, even the solemn meeting.* God sets the guilt of formalists in the most striking light, by the words of the prophet: *He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood; he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol.* Killing an ox in sacrifice was required, but killing a man was forbidden; sacrificing a lamb was required, but sacrificing a dog was forbidden; oblations were required, but swine's blood was forbidden; burning incense was required, but blessing or worshipping an idol forbidden. Hence, so far is the mere form of devotion from being either acceptable to God, or evidence of our own good estate, that it is no better than if we *slew a man, or worshipped an idol.*

*Bé not deceived ; for God is not mocked. All are not Israel that are of Israel. He is not a Jew that is one outwardly. There are many that are called by the name of Israel, which swear by the name of the Lord, and make mention of the God of Israel ; but not in truth, nor in righteousness. Like the Pharisees, you may pray long, and fast oft ; and like them, you may be a generation of vipers, and never escape the damnation of hell.*

“ Their lifted eyes salute the skies,

“ Their bended knees the ground ;

“ But God abhors the sacrifice,

“ Where not the heart is found.”

O how often is this picture presented in real life ! *God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men, or even as this publican.* Would that thou wert more like him ! Thy corrupt heart corrupts all the fair forms of thy devotion, and *thou art still in the gall of bitterness, and the bonds of iniquity.* The hope of formalists is the offspring of a deceived and a wicked heart. It is an affront to the majesty of heaven ; it is a violation of the laws of his empire ; it gives the lie to the Author of Eternal Truth. Hence the state of formalists is full of danger. They are singularly prone to cherish their deception. *They are taken in their*

*own craftiness. They flatter themselves in their own eyes, till their iniquity be found to be hateful. They rest in a hope that will at last bite like a serpent, and sting like an adder.*

## ESSAY III.

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### SPECULATIVE KNOWLEDGE.

SPECULATIVE KNOWLEDGE is no less deficient in the testimony which it bears to Christian Character, than visible morality or the form of religion. Neither is conclusive.

Speculative knowledge is by no means to be undervalued. Ignorance, in most cases, is far from being venial; error is always more or less sinful. It is of serious importance that the opinions of men be formed; and formed upon the principles of the unerring standard. There can be no spiritual knowledge, where there is no speculative knowledge. God cannot be loved, where he is not known. *Truth* is the natural aliment of all gracious affections. But though there can be no spiritual knowledge where there is no speculative knowledge; there may be much speculative knowledge where there is no spiritual knowledge. Though the want of speculative know-

ledge may be decisively against you; the possession of it is not necessarily in your favour.

We have only to open our eyes, to discern the *fact* that very wicked men are sometimes orthodox in their sentiments. Wicked men, as well as good men, are endowed with perception, reason, and conscience. And they are as capable of applying these faculties in reflecting upon moral objects, as upon natural objects. They are not only capable of understanding the truth, but often do understand it with accuracy. How many have you seen who were thoroughly versed in the scriptures; who had correct theoretical views of the character of God—the character of man—the character and offices of Christ—of the necessity, nature, and cause of regeneration; who comprehended a connected system of theology, and were distinguished champions for the faith; who were, notwithstanding all this, strangers to the religion of the heart! *Thou believest there is one God: Thou dost well. The DEVILS also believe and tremble.* Satan himself was once an Angel of Light. There is no more studious observer of the character and designs of God, than the Great Adversary of both. There is no greater proficient in theological truth, than the *father of lies*. “There is “no want of orthodoxy even in hell.”

For the existence of this fact, we are not at a loss for satisfactory reasons. Speculative knowledge has its seat in the head ; vital religion in the heart. There is no moral goodness in the simple assent of the understanding to truth. We receive, and compound, and compare ideas, whether we wish to do it or not. When we see the evidence of a proposition to be clear, we cannot withhold our assent to it, while we may hate the truth we receive, and love the error we reject. Beside, there is nothing in the nature of speculative knowledge to *produce* holy affection. The twilight of reason and conscience, and the clear sunshine of the Gospel, are *in themselves*, 'alike unadapted to the causation of holiness. All the light of eternity breaking in upon the understanding of the natural man, cannot create one spark of holy love. You may follow the natural man through every possible degree of instruction ; and though his head will be better, his heart will be worse. It is irrational to suppose, that *a clear view* of an object that is hated will produce love to the object. If, when the character and truth of God are partially seen, they are the objects of hatred ; when clearly seen, they will become the objects of malignity. The understanding, therefore, may be enlightened, while the heart remains perfectly vitiated.

Far be it from us, by these remarks, to exclude from our theology the doctrine of *Divine Illumination*. The scriptural view of this doctrine will go far toward enabling us to distinguish between those who in truth *know God*, and those *who glorify him not as God*. In this great work, the *heart*, the *moral disposition*, is changed, and not the *head*. Without this *spiritual* illumination, the soul will be for ever shrouded in darkness that may be felt. The souls of the sanctified had for ever remained *without form and void*; totally disordered; a mere moral chaos; merged in shades of thickest darkness—had not that *God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, shined INTO THEIR HEARTS to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*. This is a kind of knowledge, however, which is far above mere intellectual speculation. It is not *immediately* the object of intellectual speculation; but of gracious affections. This is a kind of knowledge which is both of divine original, and divine nature. This is the knowledge *that edifieth*; all other *puffeth up*. The essential difference between that knowledge which is, and that which is not conclusive evidence of Christian Character, lies in this: The object of the one, is the *agreement of the several parts of a theological proposi-*



tion; the object of the other is *moral beauty*, the *intrinsic loveliness* of God and divine things. The sinner sees and hates; the saint sees and loves. The prophecy of Esaias is fulfilled in the experience of thousands: *Hearing they shall hear, and not understand; and seeing they shall see, and not PERCEIVE.* Something more is necessary to make a man a Christian, beside the enlightening of the natural understanding. Beware of the hope that is built on no firmer basis than a just speculative view of the doctrines of the Gospel!

## ESSAY IV.

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### CONVICTION OF SIN.

It is not strange, that natural men should sometimes be alarmed by a sense of their danger. When they see that the judgments which God has denounced against sin, will sooner or later overtake them; that they are rapidly passing to the gates of death; and that they are unprepared for the solemn realities of the future world; it is impossible for them to remain unmoved. They begin to think seriously of the things that belong to their everlasting peace. They cease to make light of that which is important, and to view as important that which is lighter than vanity. They begin to see things as they are. The value of the soul—the indispensable necessity of an interest in the blood of sprinkling—heaven—hell—these are subjects which engage their most serious reflection, and excite the most fearful alarm. But, strange to tell, how soon does their solemnity va-

nish! How often is their alarm momentary! The lapse even of a few weeks may convince you, that all this is but the *early cloud, and the morning dew, that quickly passeth away.*

A variety of considerations induce us to believe, that *no degree of conviction for sin* is conclusive evidence of Christian Character. The simple conviction, that *I am a sinner*, is common to all men. That view of sin which arises from *its hateful nature, as committed against the Holy God*, is peculiar to saints. There is a state of mind differing from both these, from the former in degree, and from the latter in kind, which is designated by the phrase, *conviction for sin.*

Impenitent sinners are often brought to see their own sinfulness. God gives them a just view of their character. They are favoured with a discovery of the *total corruption of their hearts*. They see that they *have not the love of God in them*. They are made sensible that they are under the dominion of the *carnal mind that is enmity against God*. The *Divine Law*, in all the reasonableness of its precept, and all the equity of its sanction, comes home to the conscience with power, and brings with it the knowledge of sin, and the sense of

guilt. They see its extent and spirituality, as well as its righteousness. They feel as Paul felt, when *the commandment came, sin revived, and he died*. Sin does actually *revive*. The law that binds their consciences, excites the enmity of their hearts. The more clearly they discern its righteousness and spirituality, the more vigorously do they hate its Divine Author. They begin to learn what kind of hearts they cherish. They see that *in them there dwelleth no good thing*. In vain do they search for the least holiness, or a single duty, in all that they have done. *Every imagination of the thoughts of their hearts is only evil continually*. All their words and all their actions, all their desires and all their prayers are in direct contrariety to the holy law of God. Now, suffer me to ask, is there *any religion* in all this? There can be none surely in possessing a depraved heart, and there is none in merely being sensible that we possess it. In the simple discovery, that I am an atrocious sinner, there is no sense of the hateful nature of sin, no sorrow for sin, no desire to be delivered from its power. To see my aggravated sinfulness and not be humbled on account of it, is evidence of unyielding enmity, rather than cordial reconciliation. If a strong sense, or if you please, the strongest sense of per-

sonal sinfulness, were conclusive evidence of personal religion; every reprobate at the bar of judgment, and all the damned in hell, would be Christians. A sense of their corruption forms no small part of their wretchedness. We know, from the unequivocal declaration of Eternal Truth, that when the *Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints to execute judgment upon all*, he will CONVINCE *all that are ungodly among them* OF ALL THEIR UNGODLY DEEDS *which they have ungodly committed*. How then can the conviction of ungodliness, be the evidence of godliness?

In the minds of the unregenerate, the sense of personal sinfulness is always accompanied with the apprehension of danger. It cannot be otherwise. When a sense of sin is fastened upon the conscience of the sinner, it cannot fail to throw him into distress. In many cases, the distress is great. The "law work" is severe. The unhappy man sees the corruption of his own heart; and therefore gives up all hope from his own righteousness. He sees the corruption of his own heart; and therefore gives up all hope from the prospect of amendment. The law which he has broken, sweeps away at a stroke all his righteousness, and cuts up his hopes, root and branch.

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All that is past is bad ; all that is to come is no better. He sees that with his present disposition, sin will only revive and increase every hour that he lives. He is wretched and forlorn. He knows that he is the prisoner of justice, and fears that he is already bound over to the curse. He looks around for help, but no kind arm will interpose. He ventures to make a struggle to shake off his bondage ; but every effort evinces his weakness, every struggle binds him faster in his chains. *The arrows of the Almighty are within him, the poison whereof drinketh up his spirits.* He sees that he is actually going to hell. He knows that nothing he shall ever do, will prevent his going there. There is but a step between him and the eternal pit ; while an invincibly obstinate heart cuts him off from every successful effort to escape it\*. He is beyond the reach of help on

\* The *inability* of the natural man to repent and believe the Gospel, lies in a heart so corrupt, that it is absolutely invincible, but by the Almighty power of God. It is an inability, the very essence of which consists in *his moral turpitude*. This the convinced sinner knows. He may not, in *form*, recognize the distinction between *moral* and *natural* inability, but every pang that shoots through his heart, is decisive testimony of its correctness. With the deep sense that he is in danger, is connected the deep conviction, that he is *without excuse*. He no longer casts the blame on God. The door of hope is open. Every obstacle, *except that which arises from his own aversion to the way of life*, is removed.

this side heaven. No means, no motives can afford him relief. He sees that he is in the hands of a Sovereign God, and that every thing without him, and every thing within him, is con-

*All things are ready ; he alone is unwilling.* While he beholds himself trembling upon the verge of the pit, and hears the voice of the Great Deliverer,—“Sinner, lay down the weapons of thy rebellion; repent of all your transgressions; come unto me”—he *will not come*. At terms like these, every feeling of his heart revolts. Lay down the weapons of his rebellion! repent of all his transgressions! come unto Christ! he *will not*, he *cannot*. He spurns the offers of mercy, and had rather *die* than submit. Here is his *inability*; an inability that is all of his own cherishing, all confined within his own carnal heart.

It would be well if those who feel so uncharitably, and speak so unadvisedly concerning persons who are conscientiously constrained to maintain both the reality and importance of the distinction between *natural and moral inability*, understood either themselves, or the doctrine they condemn. In giving the sinner a *natural power* to become holy, we do not claim for him the *self-determining power of the will*. We do not say, that he can produce holiness by an act of the will that is antecedent to the first exercise of holiness. Neither do we challenge for a worm of the dust, the prerogative of independence. Eternal life hangs on the sovereign grace of God. The work of renewing and sanctifying the soul, and bearing it to heaven at last, rests on his Almighty arm. In giving the sinner a natural power to become holy, we design to give God the throne, and humble the sinner at his feet. Not until this important truth ceases to glorify God, and

spiring to increase his guilt, and aggravate his condemnation. And you will now ask, *is there no religion in this?* NONE. Does vital religion consist in the apprehension of danger, or in the fear

abase his enemies, let it be denounced as a doctrine either replete with error, or devoid of meaning.

*Natural ability* consists in possessing all those faculties that are necessary to constitute a moral agent. A moral agent is a being that is capable of actions that can be compared with law. To be capable of nothing that can be compared with "a rule of action, commanding what is right and "prohibiting what is wrong," is to be reduced to the level of the brutes that perish. To be capable of this, is to possess understanding, conscience, will, and affections. These faculties of the mind constitute a moral agent, and make any being capable of choosing or refusing, acting right or wrong as he pleases. Destitute of these, he would not be capable of moral action. He could be neither holy nor sinful. His character and conduct could be neither worthy of praise nor blame. But possessing these, he possesses all that is necessary to the exercise of holy and unholy affections. He possesses the power to *perceive the objects* of love and hatred—to *feel the obligation* of loving that which is right, and hating that which is wrong—and to *love or to hate* in conformity with the dictates of his conscience and understanding, or in defiance to the dictates of both.

This is what we mean by *natural ability* to become holy. Take away these faculties, and there is a *natural inability*. Take away these, and it is absolutely impossible that any thing in the form of merit or demerit, should be attached to human character. This is the ability which we claim for the sinner. Strip him of those faculties which are necessa-



that we shall never escape it? Where is the *holiness* of being afraid of hell? What Christlike affection is there either in the horror of a guilty conscience, or the anticipation of the *wrath to come*?

ry to the exercise of volition, and you convert him to a mere animal. Invest the animal with these faculties, and you convert him into a moral agent; you make him the subject of moral government, and accountable for his conduct. *There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty has given him understanding.* The sinner's claim must be acknowledged. He has all the natural faculties that are necessary to holiness; and if he were disposed to use them aright, he would be holy. You say a man has power to see and hear, *if he has the faculties that are necessary to seeing and hearing.* So has he power to be holy, *if he has the faculties that are necessary to holiness.*

But while we say that the sinner is under no *natural* inability to become holy, we also say that he *is* under a *moral* inability to become holy.

When we speak, of the *moral* inability of the sinner, we do not mean to deny that his inability is *original, innate.* We know it is. We use the word *moral* in contra-distinction from *natural*, to denote that which is comparable with a rule of moral action. Thus we speak of moral and natural good, moral and natural evil. There is much *natural* good in a seasonable shower of rain, but there is no *moral* good. There is much *natural* evil in an earthquake, but there is no *moral* evil. Natural good and evil cannot be compared with a *rule of action*; they bear no relation to *praise or blame.* With *moral* good and evil, it is otherwise. I hope to be understood therefore when I use the phrase *moral inability.*

“These are feelings, which,” as the learned Dr. Owen well remarks, “belong not to the precept of the law, but to its curse; they are no part of what it requires, but of what it inflicts.”

*Moral inability* is comparable with a rule of action; it is not that which bears no relation to praise or blame. It consists in the *total depravity* of the carnal heart. It consists in an insuperable aversion to holiness. You can conceive of a man's possessing a given degree of aversion to holiness. You can see that the difficulty of his becoming holy will rise in proportion to his aversion to holiness. If his aversion to holiness be inconsiderable, the difficulty of becoming holy will be inconsiderable. If his aversion to holiness be great, the difficulty of becoming holy will be great. Now the aversion of the natural man to holiness is not inconsiderable; it is not merely great; it is complete and entire; it pervades every thought, every affection, every design. By the arm of flesh it is invincible. It is open to no successful attack. Light, motives, means of whatever character, are in themselves of no avail to remove it.

Here is an inability; here is a *serious* inability. It is an inability which belongs to every man that *is dead in trespasses and sins*. But it is a *moral* and not a *natural* inability. It is an inability that is capable of being compared with law; and therefore bears relation to praise and blame. It consists wholly in a deeply rooted aversion to all that is good. Take away this, and where is the obstacle in the way of the sinner's becoming holy? What becomes of his *natural* inability? Let those who affirm that there is an inability in the sinner to become holy, aside from this *mere moral inability*, go into their closets and ask themselves these two questions:—

In the mind of a convinced sinner, the sense of personal sinfulness is also connected with the sense of *ill desert*. When a man has a clear view of his own sinfulness, he not only sees that he is exposed

What other inability is there in the sinner to become holy, than his invincible aversion to holiness ?

What is the point of difference between the natural powers of the saint and the sinner ?

When they have given fair, logical answers to these questions, they need not be disappointed, if they find themselves driven to the result, that *the inability of the sinner to become holy, is no other than a moral inability*. By the work of Regeneration, the saint receives no new natural faculty. The *passing from death unto life* is a *moral*, and not a *physical* change. The only point of difference between the power of the saint and the sinner is, that the saint has *moral ability* to be holy; the sinner has not. The sinner cherishes a *moral inability* to become holy; the saint does not.

“ But after all, an inability is an inability, whether it be moral or natural ! You deny the sinner a self-determining power. You grant that he has no ability that can produce holiness, by an act of the will that is antecedent to the exercise of holiness.” *Neither can saints.* “ You grant that he cannot become holy without the special operations of the holy Spirit.” *Neither would saints ever have another holy feeling without the special operations of the Holy Spirit.* “ Still, an inability is an inability; and what profit is there in your boasted distinction ? ” *Much every way* : Chiefly, because without it, we cannot have just views of the character of God, and the guilt of the sinner.

*Of the character of God* : God invites sinners to be holy.

to the wrath of God, but that he is *justly* exposed to the wrath of God. He sees that he *deserves* the displeasure of the Almighty throughout interminable ages. He is stripped of all his thin

He *expostulates* with them—he *entreats* them—he *commands* them to be holy. He *threatens* them with eternal death, and *executes* the threatening to the uttermost, if they persist in the refusal to yield to his requisitions. Now if they are *naturally unable* to yield, they must lie down in everlasting sorrow for not doing that which in its own nature *cannot be done*. But, is this the God that reigns in heaven! *Has* He commanded men to perform *impossibilities*, and *does* He damn them because they cannot obey! *Does* He for ever abandon them to darkness and despair, for not becoming holy, while He has withheld the faculties that are necessary to the exercise of holiness! NO, IT CANNOT BE. *Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?* What if God had suspended the eternal destiny of your immortal soul upon your going from New-York to Rome in a day? What if he had commanded you to create a world? You would not hesitate to say, it is unjust. But He *has* required you to become holy. And you say, that you have no more, and no other power to become holy, than you have to go from New-York to Rome in a day, or to create a world. What then should make the one unjust and not the other? But such is *not* the character of the Holy God. The doctrine of man's natural inability is a libel on his righteousness. On the other hand, if all the inability of the sinner consists in his aversion to holiness; if he is under no natural inability; if he has as much power to become holy as saints; and all his inability arises from invincible perverseness; then God will

excuses, and is sensible that his sins are wholly unjustifiable. As he has before been constrained to acknowledge the reasonableness of the precept of the Divine Law, now he is constrained to admit

be glorious in sending him to hell. He ought to go there ; and all Heaven will say, *Amen ! Alleluia ! while the smoke of his torments is ascending for ever and ever. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord. Are not my ways equal ? are not your ways unequal ?* There would be no ground for these expostulations, upon the principle of man's natural inability.

Neither can we have just views of *the guilt of the sinner*, without recognizing the distinction between natural and moral inability. It is one thing to feel wretched, another to feel guilty ; one thing to feel that you are lost and ruined, another to feel that *you have destroyed yourself* ; one thing to claim pity, another to deserve blame. *Mere calamity* is one thing, and *moral turpitude* is another. Speak of man's inability without making it his crime, and his conscience will love the opiate. Speak of it as consisting in the free, voluntary exercises of his corrupt heart, and you leave him without excuse. He will feel that if he dies eternally, he is the voluntary author of his own destruction. He will never feel to blame for not performing impossibilities.

Bring this question then before the Judgment seat of Christ. Annihilate the natural ability of the sinner to repent and believe the Gospel ; and if you make God glorious in banishing the impenitent to hell, and the impenitent deserving of their doom ; the controversy is at an end. Until then, we must be *suffered to speak on God's behalf* ; we must *ascribe righteousness to our Maker*.

the justice of its penalty. He has voluntarily and perseveringly disobeyed a law that is perfectly holy in itself, and clothed with the authority of the Holy God; and he knows that it would be just, if the penalty should be executed upon him to the uttermost. He knows that the Holy God, whose character he regards with enmity; whose law he transgresses with impenitence; whose Gospel he rejects with disdain; can be under no obligation to save a wretch like him. And you will ask again, *is there no religion in this?* Again I answer, and the reply is bottomed upon the word of Eternal Truth—NOT A WHIT. *Is this no evidence that I have passed from death unto life?* I answer, it is not *conclusive evidence*; and if this is *all* that you have experienced, it is *none at all*. If you *are not* sensible that you are so vile as to deserve the everlasting displeasure of God; you are not even a convinced sinner; but if you *are* sensible of this, you may not be a converted sinner. Vital religion does not consist in the approbation of the conscience to the condemning sentence of the law. Does not the conscience of every sinner, whether renewed or unrenewed, tell him that God would be just in abandoning him to misery without measure and without end? Do not the damned in hell feel that they are justly

condemned? Was not the man without the wedding garment *speechless*? Will not the whole world become *guilty before God*, at the Last Day?

If the view which we have given of this solemn subject, will bear the test of God's word, then the reader has a right to the plain result, that *no degree of conviction for sin* is conclusive evidence of Christian Character. Look at the feelings of a convinced sinner, and find, if you can, one spark of *genuine holiness*. Find, if you can, one *Christian grace*. Find, if you can, any thing more than all those have felt, who have gone down to the pit in their blood.

But may not these be the feelings of real Christians? I answer, they may be; but they are not the feelings which *constitute the essential difference* between real Christians and impenitent sinners. All that have passed from death unto life, have in a greater or less degree, been convinced of their total corruption, alarmed at their danger, and made to acknowledge the justice of God in the penalty of his law. Indeed, it may be said, that the greater part of *real Christians* have never been the subjects of conviction, *in the degree* which has

been here exhibited. Still, every Christian has experienced *some* of it ; every Christian has felt the same conviction *in kind*. If, therefore, you are without any thing like this conviction, you may be sure that you are without religion. Still, it does not follow, that because you have this conviction, you therefore have real religion. It is true, that in the course of God's providence, *conviction always precedes conversion* ; but it is not *always* true, that conversion follows conviction. There is no necessary connexion between conviction and conversion. A sense of sin and danger does not *slay the enmity of the heart*. The conscience may be convinced, while the heart is not renewed. The carnal mind not only may, but does hate what the awakened conscience approves. It is no certain evidence, that because the conscience feels the weight of sin, the heart is humbled on account of it ; that because the conscience approves of the rectitude of divine justice, the heart bows to the divine sovereignty. The most powerful conviction of sin, therefore, is not conclusive evidence of Christian Character.



## ESSAY V.

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### CONFIDENCE IN GOOD ESTATE.

It is easy for a hypocrite to deceive himself with "false hopes and carnal presumptions." You may be *strongly persuaded* that you are a Christian; but this persuasion does not make you so. You may cherish the most *unwavering confidence* of your personal interest in the great salvation; while you have no *part nor lot in this matter*.

The confidence of a man's *own* good estate is attained in different ways. Both the confidence itself and the mode of attaining it are often scriptural. A man may be persuaded that he is a Christian, because he has reason to believe, that he possesses the Spirit of Christ. *Hereby KNOW WE, that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.* A man may be persuaded that he is a child of God, because he discerns in himself those graces that are peculiar to the childlike character. He may have *received the*

*spirit of adoption, whereby he cries Abba, Father. The spirit itself, saith the apostle, beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.* A persuasion arising from such evidence, is well grounded. Such a persuasion cannot be too confident. It not only may, but ought to rise to the full assurance of hope. It did in Job. *I know,* saith he, *that my Redeemer liveth ; and though after my skin, worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God ; whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another.* It did in David. *As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness ; I shall be satisfied when I awake in thy likeness.* It did in Asaph. *Thou shalt guide me,* saith he, *with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory.* It did in the Apostle. *I AM PERSUADED, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.* The comfortable assurance of believers enables them both to glorify and enjoy the Ever-Blessed God. It is as honourable to God to trust in his grace, as to submit to his authority. When the hopes of believers are low and languishing, they know not how deep the shade they cast on the lustre of di-

vine forgiveness ; how much they detract from the glory of the cross. The want of a cheerful hope, an humble reliance on the mercy of God, cannot fail to unman the most unwavering firmness, and unnerve the most vigorous exertion. For those who have the witness of their good estate within them, to sink down into a state of darkness, that ends in the gloom of solitude and inactivity, is sin. Many a good man, by having unhappily imbibed mistaken views of this subject, has rendered himself a mere cypher in the church, and a stumbling-block to those who are out of it. *Real Christians* need not be afraid to cherish the full assurance of hope. There is something wrong in the state of that soul that *refuses to be comforted*. It is the duty of believers to *make their calling and election SURE*. Assurance ought always to exist, and to be supported by corresponding testimony.

But this is not the vain confidence to which I allude in this essay. It bears no alliance to the presumption of the hypocrite and the self-deceived. There is a confidence which is obtained without the aid of God's Spirit, and cherished without the evidence of his Word.

Some rest this presumption on an unwarrantable notion which they entertain of the *mercy of God*. They are in the habit of viewing it as a general, indefinite, undistinguishing attribute. They imagine, that because God is declared to be *no respecter of persons*, He exercises His mercy indiscriminately. They view Him as a being so fondly attached to the interest of His creatures, as to pardon them without reference to the terms of the Gospel, and save them without regard either to their own moral character, to the honour of His law, or to the well-being of His kingdom. They rely on no promise; they rest on no covenant. They are satisfied with the thought, that *God is merciful!* They rest on the phantom, "*uncovenanted mercy.*" Tell them that they are sinners; and they tell you, that *God is not strict to mark iniquity*. Tell them that they have incurred the penalty of a righteous law, and deserve to die; and they tell you, that they have never "done any harm;" and if they have, a merciful God will forgive them. God is *too good* to send them to hell! It cannot be that He will cast them off for ever!

This is the subterfuge of thousands; the miserable hiding place that must be overflowed, when the billows of divine wrath beat upon this falling

world. It is the fatal rock on which thousands have split. How many impenitent, Christless sinners have rested here for eternity! How many have I seen on a dying bed, who had not a spark of vital religion, who still indulged the hope that God was too merciful to damn them! My heart bleeds when I think of it. Why do men forget, that God is as just and as holy as He is gracious? *All* His perfections must be glorified. We cannot be saved at the expense of one of them. God regards His own glory and the interests of His kingdom more than every thing else. To these every thing must bow. If He were not too holy; too just; nay, too good; to admit a totally depraved being into His kingdom, that kingdom would fall. Unholy men must be excluded from heaven, because they are not fit for it. To exclude them is a part of that benevolent design, which is to make, on the whole, the most happy universe. God has the same benevolent motive for excluding the unholy from the heavenly state, that He has for admitting the holy. Yes, we hesitate not to say, that the benevolent God is *too good* to admit one unsanctified soul into the pure regions of the blessed. He has too great a regard for the honour of His character, and for the excellence of His law; He loves the angelic host too well;

He loves his people, He loves His Son too well ; ever to permit the song of the redeemed to feel the jar of one unhallowed tongue. The very thought is reproachful to his glory. No sin is there. The light of heaven shall never be darkened even by the shadow of death. The designs of infinite benevolence, shall never be frustrated by the introduction of one unholy being into the kingdom of God. Where, O where, is the delusion of the miserable self-deceiver, when justice exacts the uttermost farthing !

Others attain this persuasion, in a manner still different. They have been taught that mere reformation and morality will not save them ; and they are equally convinced that the form of religion will not save them. They see the necessity of possessing the *real spirit* of religion ; and they begin to seek after it till they are weary of the search. They become awakened to a sense of their danger, convinced of their ill desert, and are thrown into some distress. But at length, through the influence of their own imaginations, or the artful devices of the Old Serpent, they are inspired with hope, and filled with joy. Some enrapturing vision has discovered to their view the Saviour extended on the cross. Some

fancied messenger has announced, that their sins are forgiven, and that God is their reconciled Father. Some text of scripture, unsought, unexpected, and fatally misapplied, has whispered peace to the troubled conscience, and their souls are filled with raptures of joy. They imagine themselves almost ravished with a view of Christ's unutterable love, and with a view of it *to them in particular*. They begin to mourn and lament over their sins, though *not after a godly sort*. They feel a kind of spurious sorrow, that they have ever hated so gracious and merciful a being as God. They have been abandoned to the delusion, that their opposition to so kind and gracious being, has been owing to some misapprehension of His character. Once they viewed Him as an "absolute God;" as a God who was *angry with the wicked*, and *angry with them*. They viewed Him as their enemy, and dreaded the tokens of his displeasure. But now they view His character in altogether a different light. They see that *God is love*. They are persuaded that He *loves them*. They are persuaded, that He has pardoned their sins, and that *it is his good pleasure to give them the kingdom*. Now all their enmity is slain. They feel reconciled to God, because they believe God is reconciled to them. Under the influence of

this pleasing deception, they now begin to be happy. Religion absorbs all their attention; and the religion of the heart is what they think they admire and love. They are full of gratitude; full of peace and joy in believing that *Christ died for them in particular*. This persuasion of Christ's *love to them*, now *constraineth them*, and they imagine that they *glory in nothing, save the cross of Christ*. They think they are ready to do any thing, and to suffer any thing for Christ's sake. The spirit of delusion runs high. They manifest for a while the greatest apparent zeal and engagedness. They cannot but glory in him, who has died *for them*, and who will finally advance them to endless blessedness in the kingdom of his Father.

All this is "rotten at the core." However closely it may resemble the holy gratitude of God's people, it is but the counterfeit of that heavenly grace. It is purely *selfish*. It is mere mercenary religion. The Spirit of God has nothing to do with the root of it, nor the law of God with its fruits. There is not perhaps any error more common and more fatal among the serious part of mankind than this. This is the very religion that is agreeable to the feelings of



the carnal heart. This was the religion of the impenitent Israelites. At the time of their deliverance from the house of bondage, and in view of the miracles both of mercy and judgment which had been wrought in their behalf, they sang the memorable "song of Moses," on the banks of the Red Sea. But how soon do you find them murmuring at the waters of Marah, and in the wilderness of Sin! The same scene, only in more awful colours, was again exhibited at the foot of Sinai. God appeared in all the greatness of his majesty. *And when the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; they removed and stood afar off. And they said unto Moses, speak thou with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die.* Sad reverse! Scarcely forty days had elapsed, than the very land that just beheld Jehovah descending in the cloud, and that trembled at the voice of his thunder, saw the golden calf an idol, and heard the heathenish acclamation—*These be thy gods, O Israel, that brought thee up out of the land of Egypt!* The same scene, though in more awful colours still, was exhibited in the streets of Jerusalem. No sooner did the Jews behold the miracles, and share in the favour of the promised Messiah, than

they overlooked all the humbling circumstances of his birth, and were anxious to make him their king. They followed him with Hosannahs; were impatient to see him enrobed with the badges of royalty, and seated upon the throne of David his father. But their attachment was soon put to a test which discovered its selfishness. They early found that the kingdom of the Messiah was a *spiritual*, and not a temporal kingdom. They soon learned, that *he was not a Jew, who was one outwardly*; and that if they would be the subjects of his kingdom, they must become *new creatures*; must relinquish their attachment to the world; must *deny themselves and take up the cross*; must become holy in heart and in life; not too proud to relish the humbling religion of a crucified Saviour, nor too righteous to submit to the righteousness of God. Their hopes of individual grandeur and national glory, therefore, withered in the bloom. The promised Messiah became the object of neglect and malignity. No longer did they follow him with acclamations of praise; but with the hiss of derision and the finger of scorn. No longer did their zeal prompt the cry, *Hosannah to the Son of David!* but their disappointed and infuriate selfishness, instigated the malignant shout, *Crucify, Crucify!* Such is the religion of

*sinners. Sinners, saith the Saviour, love those who love them. Ye seek me, said Christ, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled.*

Far be it from me to say, or to believe, that all those who inculcate this kind of religion, are to be ranked among the hypocrite and the self-deceived. We believe many of them to be Christians. The religion which they possess is better than that which they teach. Still, we do not hesitate to say, that those who *have* no other religion, have none at all that will stand the ordeal of the Last Day. *A deceived heart hath turned them aside.*

On what is such religion founded? There is no supreme attachment to the excellency of the divine character, to the holiness of the divine law, or to the perfection of the divine government. There is no supreme delight in the glory of the Gospel, for its own inherent excellence. On what then is such religion founded? Simply on the assumption, alike dishonourable to God, and destructive to the souls of men, that there is, and there can be no loveliness in the divine nature, no glory in the divine perfections, but what results from God's *particular love to them*, and His

designs *to save them*. A principle so reproachful to the character of the Deity ; so reproachful to the cross of Christ ; and so destructive to the souls of men ; has made many a man an enthusiast, and a hypocrite ; but never yet made one an humble follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. After all the glosses that can be put upon it, the amount of this principle is just this, ASSURE ME OF MY SALVATION, AND THE GOD OF HEAVEN IS AMIABLE AND GLORIOUS : DEPRIVE ME OF MY SALVATION, AND HE IS STRIPPED OF HIS LOVELINESS, AND DISROBED OF HIS GLORY ! Reader, does this look like taking your place in the dust, and exalting God on the throne ? Is this being reconciled to the character of God, or being supremely in love with yourself ?

Though selfish piety is naturally blind to its own nature, yet the effect of this mercenary scheme is unequivocal. The grand sentiment of the system is, that it is a mark of genuine holiness to be very anxious about your own welfare, but to care very little for the honour and glory of God. It is therefore a system that is perfectly compatible with supreme selfishness ; and therefore, perfectly compatible with *total* depravity. There is nothing in all this, with which the carnal mind is at enmity. If vital godliness consist in

such a system of views and feelings, there is no need of a *radical change of heart*. Let the veriest sinner on earth be persuaded that God *loved him with an everlasting love*, and from eternity designed to make him an heir of the heavenly inheritance ; and his enmity will subside without any change of nature, any alteration in the moral disposition of the soul.

The presumption on which we have been animadverting, is one which any unrenewed man may cherish, who is under the delusion of Satan and his own wicked heart. It is easy to say, “Par-  
“don is mine ; grace is mine ; Christ and all his  
“blessings are mine ;—God has freely loved me ;  
“Christ has graciously died for me ; and the Holy  
“Ghost will assuredly sanctify me in the belief, the  
“*appropriating* belief, of these precious truths.” It is no Herculean task, for a heated imagination and an unsanctified heart to make these discoveries. This is a kind of confidence which the subtle Deceiver is interested to flatter and strengthen, till the unhappy subject has lost his hold, and the Roaring Lion is sure of his prey. And the joys and sorrows, the zeal and engagedness, which spring from this delusion, *form a kind of religion*, which the blindness and deceit, the

self-flattery, and the pride of the carnal heart, very easily substitute for vital godliness.

Others attain the confidence of their own good estate in a manner still different. This mode of attainment is purely *mechanical*. According to the views of those who maintain this confidence, it seems to be “a strange kind of assurance, far different from other ordinary kinds; we are constrained to believe other things on the clear evidence that they are true, and would remain true, whether we believe them or no:—but here our assurance is not impressed on our thoughts by any evidence of the thing; but we *must work it out in ourselves*, by the assistance of the Spirit of God.” The very existence of this persuasion seems to be evidence of the truth of it. The proposition to be believed, viz: “that *God freely giveth Christ and his salvation to us in particular*, is not true before we believe it; but becometh a certain truth when we believe it\*.”

The amount of this is, that a persuasion of your own personal interest in the blessings of the great salvation, constitutes the essence of evangelical

\* Marshall on Sanctification, p. 157, N. Y. edition.

faith. If you can only *believe* that you will be saved, you are a BELIEVER, in the Gospel sense of the word: Should you find any difficulty in doing this, you must “*work it out in yourselves by the assistance of the Spirit of God; and according to your faith so shall it be unto you\*!*” The persuasion, therefore, that you are a Christian, makes you so; and the confidence that you will be saved, renders *your calling and election sure*.

It is hardly necessary to guard the mind against the influence of this delusion. Reflecting men will not rest the hope of immortality on so treacherous a foundation, unless they deliberately prefer the dreams of the self-deceived, to the sober expectations of the real Christian. If there were no difference between *being actually interested* in the covenant of grace, and the *persuasion of our own minds* that we are thus interested; this scheme might be plausible. Men must *be Christians*, before they can be *rationally persuaded that they are Christians*. They must *be* the children of God, before they can *rationally cherish the confidence that they are so*. It is not impossible, nor is it an unusual thing, for a man to *be* a Christian,

\* Marshall, p. 157, N. Y. edition.

and yet not to *believe* that he is a Christian. Nor is it less impossible, and unusual, for a man to *believe* that he is a Christian, and yet *not be* a Christian. It is to be feared, that there will be many at the Last Day, who will say, *Lord, Lord!* unto whom the Bridegroom will say, *I never knew you, depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity.* There will be many in that day, who have confidently believed, that “God freely gave Christ “and his salvation to them in particular,” who will not find, that “it became a certain truth “when they believed it.” The error is too palpable to be ensnaring\*.

Let not the import of these remarks be misunderstood. Far be it from me to discourage the followers of the Lord Jesus from placing the most implicit reliance on the *Author and Finisher of their faith.* Every attribute of His character demands confidence the most prompt and unreserv-

\* “When we affirm,” says the eloquent Saurin, “that “there is such a blessing as assurance of salvation, we do “not mean that assurance is a duty imposed on all mankind, “so that every one, in what state soever he may be, ought “to be fully persuaded of his salvation, and by this persuasion, to *begin his christianity.*”—Saurin’s Sermons, vol. 3. Sermon 10th.



ed. But, reader, real confidence in God is a thing widely different from a firm persuasion of your personal interest in His mercy. The former is your duty at all times. The latter is your duty, in the same proportion in which you have evidence that the *love of God is shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Ghost*. You have just as much evidence that you are interested in His pardoning mercy, as you have that you are the subject of His sanctifying grace. Sanctification is the only evidence of conversion. The assurance of our acceptance with God, depends on the assurance of our possessing the character of those who are accepted. The scriptural mode of obtaining assurance is that pointed out by the Apostle. *GIVING ALL DILIGENCE, add to your faith, virtue ; and to virtue, knowledge ; and to knowledge, temperance ; and to temperance, patience ; and to patience, godliness ; and to godliness, brotherly kindness ; and to brotherly kindness, charity. For if these things be in you and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. WHEREFORE, brethren, GIVE DILIGENCE to make your calling and election sure ; for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall. "The infallible assurance of faith,"* says our excellent Confession, "is founded upon

“ the divine truth of the promises of salvation,  
 “ the *inward evidence of those graces unto which*  
 “ *these promises are made*, the testimony of the  
 “ Spirit of adoption witnessing with our spirits,  
 “ that we are the children of God ; which Spirit  
 “ is the earnest of our inheritance, whereby we  
 “ are sealed to the day of redemption\*.” To  
 cherish the confidence of your own good estate  
 when your graces are low and languishing, and  
 while you live in the habits of sin, savours more  
 of presumption than of humility. No man ought  
 to live without some doubts of his own good es-  
 tate, who does not cherish such an abiding sense  
 of divine truth, and live in such prevailing exer-  
 cise of divine grace, as to have the witness within  
 him that he is born of God. ‘ It is in the exercise  
 of grace alone, that any one ought to expect, or  
 even *desire* to find evidence of his being *accepted*  
*in the beloved*. The evidence of our good estate  
 rises in proportion to our love, to our repentance,  
 to our humility, to our faith, to our self-denial, to  
 our delight in duty. Other evidence than this,  
 the Bible knows not; God has not given.

\* Confession of faith of the Presbyterian Church, chap. 18.  
 p. 85, 86. Vide also Larger Catechism, p. 211, 212.

Let the reader beware of these vain confidences! When men rest satisfied with these presumptions, they usually rest satisfied until it is too late to be dissatisfied. They see nothing either within or without, to shake their hopes, or alarm their fears. Notwithstanding there is a wide and essential difference between these unscriptural confidences, and the faith of the Gospel; notwithstanding they have all the necessary means to know their true character, and could not mistake it if they would examine impartially; yet *they sport themselves with their own deceivings, and know not what manner of persons they are.* You may easily imagine that you are safe; and while the deception lasts, it may quiet your consciences, and administer a short-lived consolation. But, when the veil is drawn aside; when the dreams of time give way to the realities of eternity; these pleasing deceptions will vanish. There is less of this vain presumption in the hour of death, than in the season of health and cheerfulness. There will be none of it at the left hand of the Judge; there will be none of it in hell.

The reader has now before him, what the author designed to say in the first five essays. How solemnly do these things call upon every

one to see whether his *heart is right with God!* If vital religion does not consist in visible morality; if it does not consist in the form of religion; nor in speculative knowledge; nor in mere conviction for sin; nor in the confidence of your own good estate; nor in the whole routine of enthusiastic experiences which that confidence inspires; nor in all these things combined: is it not time to look about you? In all that has hitherto been brought into view, there is not one holy exercise of heart; not one feeling that is in the least at war with supreme selfishness. There is not one fact, therefore, upon which I dare tell you, that you may rely for eternity, as *conclusive evidence of Christian Character.*

How many are there who are *almost Christians!* As then you review the preceding pages, look with ingenuousness into your own heart. Men may think they are Christians, and yet be in the *gall of bitterness, and the bonds of iniquity.* You may be *almost saved*, and yet—perish. You may get very near to heaven, and yet—go to hell. You may advance to the very verge of the better world, and from the threshold of glory, fall into the regions of mourning.

It may be, that remarks like these, will wound some of the dear children of God, while they leave the stupid hypocrite wrapt up in false security, and impenetrable by nothing but the arrows of the Eternal. If the humble child of Jesus is hereby involved in darkness for a moment; *his light shall soon break forth as the morning.* If for a moment, his strength and courage languish; they shall *spring forth speedily*; *his righteousness shall go before him, and the glory of the Lord shall be his reward.* The hypocrite will in all probability, still cherish his deception; he will rest in carnal security, till the awful moment when he lies gasping in the arms of death, and is just about to take his flight to the judgment-seat of Christ. Then his *refuges of lies shall be swept away*, and his fancied security will only serve to render him the fairer mark of divine vengeance. Then he will discover his fatal mistake. Then his heart will tremble. Then his hopes will die within him. That which has been hidden, shall be made known. The mask will be torn off; the secrets of the heart shall be unfolded; nothing shall remain unveiled. *There will be no darkness nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves.* *The sinners in Zion*

*shall be afraid ; fearfulness shall surprise the hypocrites : Who among us shall dwell with devouring fire ? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings ?*

## ESSAY VI.

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### LOVE TO GOD.

IN the preceding Essays, I have exhibited as I proposed, a variety of views, feelings, and practices, which cannot be relied on with safety, as *conclusive evidence* of Christian Character. In the subsequent ones, I propose to give a brief view of those, which may be relied on without the danger of deception.

It is the excellence of the Christian religion, that it makes a claim upon the affections. *My son, give me thine heart. Love is the fulfilling of the law. Though I give all my goods to feed the poor ; and give my body to be burned ; and have not love ; it profiteth me nothing.*

At first view, there appears to be some difficulty in understanding with clearness, what it is to love God. Men are in the habit of placing

their affections upon beings that are the objects of sense. God is invisible. To profess to love a being that is not perceptible to our senses, appears to some, to savour more of the ignorance and wildness of enthusiasm, than of the sober deductions of enlightened and sanctified reason. But though no eye hath seen, or can see the Infinite and Eternal Spirit, yet *He hath not left himself without witness*. There is a power in the human mind, which enables it to form just notions of persons and things that cannot be perceived by sense. We need no other method of ascertaining the nature of love to God, than the nature of love to man. The mode of reflection is in both cases the same. The process of compounding, comparing, and abstracting, is the same. Seriously considered, there is precisely the same difficulty in conceiving of the nature of love to man, that there is in conceiving of the nature of love to God. You know what it is to love your friend. And yet it is not the mere external form, it is not the animal, unanimated by the living, acting spirit, that you love. But this is all that is perceptible to your senses. You see the motion, you hear the voice of your friend ; and from the nature of what you see and hear, you form the idea of his character. The *soul*, that which is



characteristic both of *the man* and *the friend*, is invisible. What you see and hear, is not that which you love; though it discovers to you *something which is lovely*. That which is the object of your senses, suggests the existence and character of that invisible, thinking being, which is the object of your affections, and which you either love or hate, as it pleases or displeases you.

You may as easily know what it is to love God, therefore, as you may know what it is to love your friend. The sensible signs by which He has communicated, and is every hour communicating His character, are vastly more significant than those which manifest the character of any other being in the universe. God is every where. The Infinite Mind is ever active. It is the great Agent throughout all worlds. *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy-work. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out throughout all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.* God has expressed His divine excellence in the work of His hands, and has ex-

hibited the lustre of His glory in the word of His truth. Every act that He has performed, together with every word that He has spoken, is an unequivocal declaration of His character. It is easy to conceive that this character must be loved or hated, and that the Invisible Being which this character unfolds, must be the object either of complacency or aversion; of benevolence or malignity.

Love to God involves complacency in His character, benevolence toward His interest, and gratitude for His favours.

It involves *complacency in His character*. You see something in the character of your friend, which to you appears pleasing and amiable. You see something which is lovely; and this loveliness is the foundation of your attachment. Thus the excellence of God is the foundation of all holy love. True love to God is a firm and steady principle, which draws its motive and its sanction from His own intrinsic loveliness. It is delight in His excellence. Those who have *put on the new man, which after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness*, love God because *He is just such a God as He is*; because His power

is irresistible ; His wisdom unerring ; His purity spotless ; His justice inflexible ; His goodness universal ; His grace infinite ; His designs eternal and immutable. Here holy love begins.

Wicked men are apt to consider God *altogether* *sach an one as themselves*. “ They clothe the Divine Being with such attributes, and such only, “ as suit their depraved taste ; and then it is no “ difficult thing to fall down and worship Him.” But it is not *God* that they worship ; it is not *God* that they love. It is an image that bears no resemblance to that Glorious Being whom all heaven adores ; it is a mere idol of their own imagination. Genuine complacency in God, therefore, is delight in His *true* character. The love which arises from delight in the character of a false god, is enmity toward the true God. The enemies of God may love Him for what they *imagine* Him to be ; none but the real friends of God love Him for what *He is*.

Supreme attachment to the character of God for His own inherent excellence, draws the line of distinction between that love which is merely mercenary, and that which is disinterested. A man may be *supremely selfish* in the exercise

of a certain kind of love to God. In all his love, he may have no ultimate regard, except to his own happiness. He may delight in God for what He is *to him*; while he takes no delight in Him for what He is *in Himself*. Such is not the love of the new-born soul. The enmity of *his* heart toward God is slain. He is reconciled to the Divine Character as it is. *God* is the object of delightful contemplation to his devout mind. In his most favoured hours, his views are diverted from himself. As his eye glances at the varied excellence of the Deity, he does not stop to ask the question, whether God is a being who will at all events regard *his* interest; it is enough for him, that He will at all events regard His own glory. He beholds a dignity, a beauty in the Divine Character, that fills his soul with high devotion. All things else are atoms, motes, dust, and vanity. The feelings of the Prophet are his: *The desire of my soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee.* The unchangeableness of the Divine Being, and the perfections of the Divine Nature excite the noblest views, and the most raised affections. The language of the Psalmist is his: *Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And there is none on earth that I desire*

*beside Thee!* The soul is satisfied with God's perfect excellence, and does not cherish a wish that He should be different from what He is.

True love to God also implies *benevolence toward Him, and the interest of His kingdom.* In the intrinsic excellence of His character, God is the *same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.* The fullness of perfection is alike necessary at all times to His very existence as God. It would, therefore, be arrogance in the worms of the dust to imagine that they *may be profitable to God, as he that is wise may be profitable to himself*; but it is presumption for them to imagine that they love Him, without feeling a friendly interest in His designs, a sincere desire for the advancement of His cause and the glory of His name. Those who love the Divine character, necessarily desire to promote the Divine glory. They regard the honour of God as comprehending every good, and as concentrating every wish. In this, every holy mind takes supreme delight. It is the ardent desire, the highest wish of a sanctified heart, that in all his works, in all his plans, by all in heaven, by all on earth, and all in hell, God should be glorified. Those who have tasted and seen that the Lord is good, have found unspeakable plea-

sure in beholding His glory, and therefore do sincerely and ardently desire to behold greater and brighter displays of it. This sublime spirit enters into the essence of all genuine love to God. The Infinite Being, who is capable of enjoying an infinitely higher degree of happiness than all created intelligence beside, shares largely in the *benevolent* affections of every devout mind.

Genuine love also involves *the exercise of gratitude*. Gratitude to God is the exercise of love to Him for the favours which He has communicated to us. The primary ground of love to God is the intrinsic excellence of His own character, without regard to any personal interest in His favour. The first exercise of love to God is, and must be, antecedent to the persuasion that God loves us. Still, it is true that no man who loves God for the amiableness of His own character, can refrain from loving Him for the favours which He has communicated to him in particular. The discovery of his personal interest in *the favour which God bears to his own people*, will excite the most tender and grateful emotions. He cannot contemplate the care which has sustained him from year to year; the goodness which encircles him every hour that he lives; the Word which instructs

him, and the discipline which is preparing him for better enjoyments—without some sensations of thankfulness. He cannot call to mind the promises that have supported him; the threatenings that have warned him, and the wonderful grace that has redeemed him—without admiration and love. He cannot look forward to scenes of temptation and sorrow, through which covenanted mercy has engaged to bear him, to the hour of death, and the joys of a future world—without a heart expanding with love to his heavenly Father. That God should show mercy to a wretch like him,—angels have no such cause for gratitude as this!

A distinguishing characteristic of true love to God, is, that it is *supreme*. *No man can serve two masters*. There cannot be two objects of supreme regard. *He, saith our Saviour, that loveth father or mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me*. When God promised to circumcise the heart of His people, it was that they might *love the Lord their God with all their heart and all their soul*. God neither requires, nor will accept of a divided affection. He is a *jealous God*. No rival may participate in that love which is due to Him. Genuine love to His character is something more than languid esteem, a mere

lukewarm affection; something more than a vague, indescribable emotion, that "plays round the head." It is the "ruling passion;" the governing motive. The *love of God* is paramount to every other principle. Every attachment is subordinate to delight in His excellence; every desire subservient to that of promoting His glory. To a mind that loves Him, God is alike the source and sum of good.

"Of all Thy gifts, thou art Thyself the crown,  
 "Give what thou wilt, without Thee we are poor,  
 "And with Thee rich, take what thou wilt away."

But while we say, that in every renewed heart, the love of God is the predominant principle, we ought not to withhold the remark, that it exists in very different degrees in different persons, and in the same persons, at different times. While the people of God remain in this *probationary*\*

\* By a *state of probation*, the writer does not intend to involve any thing that bears the remotest resemblance to the unscriptural notion, either that all mankind are not, by the apostacy of Adam, brought into a state of sin and condemnation; or, that those who were *chosen in Christ Jesus before the world began*, are in a state which renders their final perseverance in the least degree uncertain. A state of probation is "*a state of trial, in order to a righteous retribution.*" In the present world, men have a fair opportunity to *form their cha-*



state, they will be *sinner*s. Their love to God will be very unequal at different seasons, and at some, very low and languishing. The best of men have their seasons of sin, as well as their seasons of darkness. Sometimes they are on the mount, and sometimes in the vale. They are prone to forsake God ;

*racters* for eternity. They are not in a state of probation, in the same sense in which Adam was placed in that state. They are not under a covenant of works. The question to be tried, is not whether they shall stand or fall by that covenant. But they are under a dispensation of grace. If, while in the present world, they repent and believe the gospel, they may look for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if, while in the present world, they remain impenitent and unbelieving, they will heap up wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God. Unbelievers enjoy this dispensation of grace in common with believers. They have a reprieve from final condemnation, together with the opportunity of fleeing to Christ for a complete reversal of the condemning sentence. Believers also enjoy a dispensation of grace in common with unbelievers. They are *kept only THROUGH FAITH* unto salvation ; God has placed them in a world where they must *watch and pray*—where they must *forget the things that are behind, and reach forth toward those which are before* ; where they must *keep under their body, and bring it into subjection, lest by any means they should be cast-away*. A state of probation, therefore, is neither inconsistent with the *infallible certainty* of the saint's final perseverance, nor the sinner's present condemnation.

like Israel of old, they are *bent to backsliding from Him*. The glory of His character has little effect upon their hearts, and less upon their conduct. The honour of His name excites no ardent desire to promote it, no anxious concern to see it promoted. Other objects employ so much of their time, and engage so much of their affections, that for a while, they think more of *things that are seen and temporal, than of those that are unseen and eternal*.

But there are seasons also when the child of God, gradually excluding all other objects from his view, fixes his mind upon the divine character as the object of his chief delight, and upon the divine glory as the great end of his being. There are seasons, seasons of inexpressible sweetness and delight, when, like Elijah on Carmel, Moses on Pisgah, and John in Patmos, he is lost in the contemplation of the Ever Blessed God, and borne aloft to catch a glimpse at that glory that fills the temple above. He beholds the Infinite One *arrayed with majesty and excellence, and decked with light as with a garment*. He beholds the bright and brightening displays of His glory, while his bosom expands with holy fervour, and beats high with pure devotion.

It is not necessary to inquire, whether the state of declension or of vigour be the more desirable; nor which it is our duty to avoid, and which to cherish and maintain. Both the duty and blessedness of God's people point to that heavenly precept, *Be ye perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.* We do not ask the reader, whether he possesses that degree of love which he ought to possess; but, whether he possesses *any that is genuine.* *I love them,* saith the voice of Eternal Wisdom, *that love me.* The holy God cannot love those who hate Him. He cannot regard those with complacency who regard Him with aversion. He cannot be reconciled to those who are irreconciled to Him\*. He cannot be reconciled to those who hate Him, and who justify their hatred to Him. He retains His anger toward them, so long as they retain their

\* We are happy in being able to quote the words of a divine so deservedly eminent as Van Mastricht, in confirmation of a truth that meets with so much opposition from the popular theology of the present day. Speaking *De bona complacentiæ in Deo*, he says, "Nostra complacentia in Deo, "irritabit vicissim Dei complacentiam in nobis." *Our complacency in God will in return excite God's complacency in us.* Theoret. Pract. Theolog. Auct. Pet. Vanmast. p. 1267. The inference is unavoidable; God's complacency in us does not *precede*, but *follows* our complacency in Him.

opposition and enmity toward Him\*. Hence none have a right to believe that God loves them, until they first love Him. And none will believe it, without having been *given up to strong delusion that they should believe a lie*. A man must be conscious of his love to God, before he can have scriptural evidence of God's love to him. And the evidence which arises from this consciousness is conclusive. We have no more right to doubt of God's

\* The reader may perhaps ask, how is this reconcilable with the declaration in 1 John iv. 19, *We love Him, because He first loved us?*

God's love to his people is the *cause* of their love to Him; but it is not the *motive* of their love to Him. It precedes their love to Him in these two respects:—

1. He loved them with the love of benevolence, as He did other men. He sent his Son to be the propitiation for their sins. And but for this expression of benevolence, the whole human race would have been abandoned to the ruins of the fall. There would have been no Gospel; no way of reconciliation; and consequently not a vestige of holy love in the barren world.

2. He loved them with the "love of election." He gave them to His dear Son in the everlasting covenant. In pursuance of his gracious design, He makes them *new creatures*; slays their enmity, and *SHEDS ABROAD His love in their hearts*. And but for this expression of distinguishing love, they would have for ever remained His enemies. *I have loved thee with an everlasting love*, says God to his Church, *therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee*.

love to us, than we have a right to doubt of our love to Him. As our love to God grows constant and vigorous; the evidence increases, that we are friends to God, and that God is a friend to us.

*Is then thy heart right with God? Are you pleased with the Divine character? Do you love every part of that character? Do you love God's*

In these respects, the love of God to us is the cause of our love to Him. It cannot be the motive of our love to Him, for this plain reason, that we have no evidence of His distinguishing love to us, until we possess the consciousness of our love to Him.

The love which God exercises toward the elect while they are yet in their sins, is of a peculiar character. It cannot be the love of complacency; for it is exercised while the objects of it are perfectly hateful; and is therefore consistent with the utmost detestation of their whole characters. It cannot be the love of benevolence; for the love of benevolence is impartial, and this is discriminating. It is very properly styled the "love of election."

I am happy to present the reader with a correct view of this text, from an author who may justly claim more than a common share of confidence.

"They who serve God from filial affection, not slavish fear, 'love him, because he first loved them:' not that their love is *merely* gratitude for his previous benefits, which, abstracted from other exercises of love, would be a *very selfish affection*: nor could any man in that case *love*

holiness as well as His grace ; His justice as well as His mercy ? Do you love Him because He is immutably disposed to hate sin, and punish the sinner, or merely because He is disposed to forgive sin, and save the sinner ? Do you love Him because he has a greater regard for His own glory than your happiness ; or because you apprehend that he has a higher regard for your happiness than for His own glory ? There is a kind

“ God at all on good grounds, without some immediate revelation to assure him that he was the OBJECT OF HIS SPECIAL LOVE, EVEN WHILST HE HAD NO GRACE, AND WAS WHOLLY IMPENITENT AND SINFUL. But the evident meaning is, that “ if the Lord had not loved them before they loved him, even “ when they were dead in sin, they must for ever have continued enemies to him. His love suggested the plan, and “ provided the means of redemption ; he revealed to sinners “ his glorious perfections and abundant mercy, in the Person “ and work of his Son ; he sent his word, to declare to sinners this great salvation, and to invite them to partake of “ it ; he regenerated them by his Spirit, and so brought “ them, by repentance and faith in Christ, into a state of acceptance and reconciliation ; and thus taught and enabled “ them to love his excellency, to value his favour, to be “ thankful for his inestimable benefits, and zealous for his “ glory. As, therefore, his love to them was the original “ source of their love to him : so from the latter they may infer the former, and take the comfort of the happy change “ which hath been wrought in them, whilst they give him “ the glory of it.” *Scott’s Family Bible, in loc.*

of love which flows from a very unworthy principle. *If ye love them that love you, what thank have ye ; for SINNERS also love those that love them.* To love God from no higher motive than the persuasion that you are interested in His favour, is supremely selfish. Those who love God from no higher principle, do not love Him at all. This is the affection which might and does reign without opposition in the hearts of thousands who are far from righteousness, and who will finally be excluded from the kingdom of heaven.

Are you reconciled to that character of God which you see portrayed on every page of His word? Are you *well pleased* that God should not only possess that character; but are you well pleased, that all His perfections should be under his own direction and control? Do you love God as a *sovereign God*? How do you regard the manifestation of that character in the distinguishing dispensations of grace and justice? Do you approve it, or do you oppose it? Do you love it, or do you hate it? Every thing which God does, every thing which He eternally designed to do, is an expression of what He is. Every thing that He does in fixing the eternal allotments of the

righteous and the wicked, is a display of His true character. To be opposed to what He does, therefore, or to be opposed to what He eternally designed to do, or to object to his designing from eternity to do any thing ; is to oppose God, and to object to His divine excellence. Whenever *any part* of the Divine character, *clearly understood*, is the object of opposition and hatred, rather than of acquiescence and delight, the opposition is the result of selfishness and malignity, and those who cherish it have not the love of God in them.

Is the *glory* of God the great end of your being? Do you sincerely and ardently desire to see greater and brighter displays of that glory? Do you rejoice that God is unfolding, and will for ever unfold, the excellence of His character? Do you know nothing of this *benevolent regard* for God and the interests of His kingdom? Do you find your happiness *in* yourself, or *out of* yourself? Do you rejoice merely in the hope of your personal interest in God's favour? or do you rejoice in the hope of His glory? Can you unite your feelings with His, your joys with the joys of His people, and share in the blessedness which results from beholding the Ever Blessed God completely and for ever glorified?



What has your experience taught you of the *love of gratitude* to God? Do you behold *God* in all your mercies? Do you feel that you live in God's world? that you breathe God's vital air? that you are upheld by God's powerful hand? Do you delight to feel the sweet and tender obligations that bind you to the Lord Jesus Christ? Have you seen the seasons when the abundant goodness, the infinite grace of God towards you, a polluted sinner, seemed enough for ever to fill your heart with love and your lips with praise?

Is your love to God *supreme*? Does it rise superior to the attachments of flesh and sense? What, whom, do you love more than the Everlasting God? In whose character do you behold more beauty? Whose blessedness is an object of warmer desire, or more vigorous exertion? To whom are you more grateful? Do you love God more than *father or mother, wife or children, houses or lands*? Do you love Him better than *yourself*? *If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, HIS OWN LIFE also, he CANNOT BE MY DISCIPLE.*

There may be danger, but surely there can be no necessity of being deceived in a case so plain.

Supreme love to God, is decisive evidence of the renewed heart. When the soul is ushered from the darkness of sin into God's marvellous light, it beholds God in an infinitely different light from what it ever beheld Him before. Now, God is every where. There is an inexpressible beauty, a mild glory in almost every object, because it is the work of His hand, and reflects the excellence of His nature. The language of those who love God, is that of the rejoicing Church, *I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall be joyful in my God.* They think how excellent a being God is, and how exalted would be the happiness to enjoy Him to perfection, and to be swallowed up in Him for ever. To see and to love that which is infinitely lovely, to behold and to adore that which is supremely adorable, is the character and the blessedness of the heavenly world. The early dawn of this spiritual light, the first glow of this pure affection, is the glimmering of that sacred fire, which will burn with a purer and a brighter flame throughout interminable ages.

Does the reader then *love God*? If so, the question as to his own good estate is at rest. If you are a friend to God, God will be an everlasting

friend to you. Nothing shall separate you from His love. *Neither angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus your Lord.*

## ESSAY VII.

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### REPENTANCE.

THE fall of Adam involved both himself and his posterity in sin and ruin. From the moment of the first transgression, sin challenged universal empire. From that fatal hour, it began to assume dominion, with the certain prospect of swaying its sceptre over every clime and every heart. But blessed be God, though its empire is universal, it is not in all its extent everlasting. There is One who *taketh the prey from the mighty*. The conqueror is vanquished. Though *sin reigns unto death*, *grace reigns unto eternal life*.

A mere glance at the ruin and recovery of man, is enough to convince us, that of the religion of fallen beings, *repentance* forms an essential part. It is alike significant of the character and

indispensable to the happiness of a CONVERTED SINNER, to be penitent.

In the order of gracious exercises, repentance follows love to God. An affectionate view of God, prepares the mind to take a just view of sin. As it is impossible to repent of having sinned against a God that we hate ; so it is impossible not to repent of having sinned against a God that we love. When the heart has been renewed ; when the soul, enlightened by the Divine Spirit, sees the beauty, the *loveliness* of the Divine character—it cannot seriously reflect upon a life of sin, without unfeigned grief. *Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation, not to be repented of ; but the sorrow of the world worketh death.*

Genuine repentance is *that sorrow for sin which arises from a sense of its intrinsic turpitude.*

It is essential to the nature of godly sorrow, that we possess a settled conviction of the evil of sin. It is not enough to have merely a transient view of our sinfulness ; we must possess a settled conviction of *the great evil of sin*. The real penitent, though he has reason to lament that he is never so deeply affected with the view of his sin

as he should be ; seldom so much so as he hoped to be ; and very frequently not affected at all ; yet at some favoured seasons, he is enabled to view it in a measure as it is. He sees its detestable nature. He is deeply impressed with a sense of its turpitude as a *violation of law*. This is the definition which the Apostle has given of sin. It is (*ανομία*) *the transgression of law*. The God who made all worlds, and who alone is qualified to govern the worlds which He has made, has given a rule of action to His creatures, which is the result of infinite wisdom and goodness. The precept and the sanction of this law are perfectly equitable. The highest authority has pronounced them to be *holy, just, and good*.

To violate this law, is an evil. To violate this law, is nothing less than an attempt to sunder the bond that holds the moral world together. It is therefore a great evil. Every violation of this law, is an effort to resist the salutary effects of a perfect rule of action. It is a virtual opposition to all the good which that rule of action, if obeyed, would eventually secure. Could the evil nature and tendency of sin therefore be fully expressed ; could this *enemy of all righteousness* be clothed with the energy of omnipotence ; all that is good, all that is happy, would be chased away, and the

world that once smiled under the beneficent hand of its Maker, would be left bare of the last vestige of bliss. The same accursed foe that hurled the Angels from the highest heavens; that drove our first parents from Paradise; that deluged the world by a flood; that laid waste the cities of the plain; that has multiplied its trophies in slaughtered thousands; that has given death its sting and the law its curse; that has crucified the Lord of glory—would not stay his ruthless hand until he had “rolled the volume of desolation” through the empire of the Eternal, and enjoyed the malignant pleasure of brooding over the ruins of the desolated universe.

In violating the law, sin also dishonours the Lawgiver. It aims the blow *at God*. It rises in rebellion against His rightful authority. It is contrary to every attribute of His nature. It is the *abominable thing which His soul hateth*. To enhance its turpitude, think a moment against *what* a God sin is committed. He is a *great* God; a God of infinite majesty. He is *decked with majesty and excellency*. The *everlasting mountains are scattered* at His approach; the *perpetual hills bow* before Him. He is a *holy* God; so holy, that the *heavens are not pure in His sight*, and his *angels are charged with folly*. He is a *good* God.

He is *love* itself. He is a *merciful* God. *His mercy is everlasting* ; it is *great unto the heavens*. He is the Being whom we are under the greatest obligations to adore, because He is supremely adorable ; a Being whom we are under the greatest obligations to love, because He is infinitely lovely ; a Being whom we are under the greatest obligations to obey, because his government is perfect. And yet we rebel. Creatures whose *foundation is in the dust*, contend with their Maker ! Creatures who hang every hour upon His bounty, “forget His power, abuse his love !” Sinners who are upheld every moment by His mercy, tread that mercy under their feet ! O how great an evil is sin ! *If one man sin against another, the Judge shall judge him, but if a man sin against God, who shall entreat for him !*

Thoughts in kind like these, pass through the mind of the penitent, as he calls to remembrance his multiplied transgressions. No longer does he make light of sin. He views it in an entirely different light, from that in which it is viewed by a thoughtless world. To him, it is odious ; it is vile ; it is utterly detestable ; nay more, it is *exceedingly sinful*.



In view of the intrinsic turpitude of sin, therefore, the penitent mourns. And his sorrow is

INGENUOUS: It is not a *selfish* sorrow. The object upon which the soul fixes her thoughts, while indulging her grief, is *sin*, and not punishment. It is for *this* that she mourns. This, in the hands of the Divine Spirit, is the spring of all godly sorrow.

The leading principle that makes repentance a *duty*, is that evil has been done; a crime has been committed. To the renovated heart, this is also the leading *motive* to repentance. No truth is more clear, than that sinners ought to be, and that saints are, penitent *for sin*. The inherent odiousness of sin is the object of their sorrow; and were this the only consideration that could be presented to the mind, this alone would be enough to clothe them with eternal mourning, and bathe them in ceaseless tears. We cannot refrain from saying, that neither the obligation nor the motive to repentance are founded in the hope of mercy, or the actual exercise of it; though both are thereby strengthened. Notwithstanding, both the obligation and the motives to repen-

tance are vastly increased by the proclamation of mercy in the gospel; yet men must repent, and do repent, *because they have done wrong*, and not because there is, or is not, a probability that they shall escape punishment. The moment that our first father fell; before he heard the voice of God among the trees of the garden; while under the fearful apprehension, nay, the certain expectancy of the rigid execution of the curse—he was under the immutable obligation to repent. The fallen spirits in hell are now without excuse, for not humbling themselves before God. Though bearing the punishment of their iniquity, yet in view of the *intrinsic turpitude of their sin*, they ought to be overwhelmed with unfeigned sorrow.

The reader will perceive, that these remarks are made with the design of distinguishing between that *sorrow of the world which worketh death*, and that *godly sorrow which worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of*. In the world that *lieth in wickedness*, there is enough of that *sorrow which worketh death*. There is the sorrow which arises merely from a sense of danger, and the fear of punishment. Such was the repentance of Ahithopel and Judas. But this is at an infinite remove from *that godly sorrow which worketh re-*

*pentance not to be repented of.* It is one thing to mourn for sin because it exposes us to hell ; and another to mourn for it because it is an infinite evil. It is one thing to mourn for it because it is injurious to ourselves ; another, to mourn for it because it is offensive to God. It is one thing to be terrified ; another, to be humbled. A man may tremble at the apprehension of Divine wrath, while he has no sense of the intrinsic turpitude of sin, and no true contrition of soul on account of it.

There is also the sorrow which arises merely from the hope of forgiveness. Such is the mercenary repentance of the hypocrite and the self-deceived. Many, it is to be feared, have eagerly cherished the expectation of eternal life, and here begun and ended their religion. Many, it is to be feared, have eagerly cherished the hope of mercy, and here begun their repentance, who have *mourned at the last, and lain down in sorrow.* In all this there is nothing that is ingenuous ; no godly sorrow arising from a sense of the intrinsic turpitude of sin.

**Real repentance is also DEEP AND THOROUGH. It is bitter sorrow. It rends the heart. The**

penitent sees that he is a vile sinner. He sees that he has been his own destroyer. The Spirit of God has taught him, that sin is something more than a *mere calamity*. He feels that he deserves to be blamed, rather than pitied. He views his sin as altogether criminal and inexcusable. Though the dictates of an evil heart have often prompted him to go astray; yet he knows they have never constrained him contrary to his own choice. That heart, though full of evil and desperately wicked, *he has cherished*. He sees therefore, that he himself is the only blameable cause of his sinfulness. The great evil of sin is chargeable *upon him*. *He* has done it.

And can the penitent see his own vileness, without bowing in the dust before God? He is ashamed and confounded when he looks back upon his past life, and when he now looks into his own heart. He sees that he has broken God's holy law, and resisted the claim of his rightful Sovereign. The thought which most deeply affects him, is that he has sinned *against God*. In comparison with this, his other crimes vanish to nothing. The language of his heart is, *Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned!* If he had not sinned against a great, and holy, and good, and

merciful *God*, his sins would not appear so great. But, O, he *has* sinned against the God who made him; the God who has preserved and redeemed him. Creating goodness, providential care, and redeeming love have been bestowed upon him almost in vain. This is the dart which wounds him. He exclaims with David, *I have sinned against the Lord! I have committed this great wickedness!* He sensibly feels that he has sinned against the *God of all grace*. *He beholds Him whom he has pierced*; he looks away to the cross of Christ, and there sees what his sins have done; and is grieved to the inmost soul.

The *number* of his sins affects him no less severely than the aggravation of them. The penitent sees that he has not only sinned, but sinned in a thousand forms. He sees sin in a thousand things, in which he never saw it before. It appears to mix itself with almost every thing. He groans under the body of sin and death. At some periods, he goes bowed down to the earth, all the day long. He feels that his *transgressions are multiplied*. Often is his *laughter turned into mourning, and his joy into heaviness*. With what a melting, broken heart does

he lie at the feet of his injured Saviour, and beg for mercy. He is abased before God. He is ready to cry with the humbled Psalmist, *My sin is ever before me!* or with the mourning Prophet, *O my God, I am ashamed, and blush to lift up my face to Thee; for mine iniquities are increased over my head, and my trespass is grown up unto the heavens!* It is enough to break his heart, seriously to reflect upon his innumerable transgressions. *He remembers his own ways, and his doings that were not good, and loathes himself in his own sight for his iniquities and abominations.*

True repentance is not only ingenuous and deep; it is attended *with actual reformation*. It exhibits itself in real life. The penitent feels the force of considerations which never fail to restrain from sin. He is afraid of sin. He dreads its aggravated guilt. *How shall I commit this great wickedness, and sin against God!* The thought is enough for ever to cut him off from all access to the accursed thing. He is a *sinner* still; but he cannot remain a sinner in the sense in which he was a sinner once. He manifests a desire to honour the God he has so long dis-

honoured; to undo what he has done against the interest of His kingdom, and repair the injury he has caused to the souls of men. There is no genuine repentance where there is no forsaking of sin. Still to go on in sin, to practise iniquity with greediness, with constancy, and with perseverance, is incompatible with the nature of that sorrow which is unto salvation.

With these plain principles in view, we think the reader may decide the point as to his own good estate. The preceding observations will go far toward enabling him to distinguish between the precious and the vile.

If yours is godly sorrow, it is then *ingenuous*. It arises from a sense of the *intrinsic turpitude of sin*. Retire into your own bosom, therefore, and ask yourself questions like these: Do I possess any settled conviction of the evil of sin? Does sin appear to me, as the *evil and bitter thing*? Does a conviction of the evil of it increase? There are moments when heaven and hell lie out of sight: How does sin appear then? Do you hate it because it is *merely* ruinous to your soul, or because it is offensive to God? Do you hate it

because it is *sin*? Do you mourn over it because it is *wrong*?

In the sanctified heart, the hatred of sin is *supreme*. As there is nothing so bad as sin, so there is nothing the penitent hates so much. Is then your repentance *deep and sincere*? Is sin pre-  
vailingly your *greatest grief*? Seriously considered, would the deliverance from any evil be a more joyful event, than the deliverance from sin? If there could be no deliverance from sin, but at the expense of the choicest comforts, would you cheerfully make the sacrifice? Do your misfortunes grieve you more than your sins? or your sins more than your misfortunes?

Do your sins appear many and aggravated? Do you see sin in a thousand different forms, and new instances, in which you have not dreamed of it before? Do you mourn over the sins of *the heart*? Do you abhor yourself for your innate depravity, as one that was *shaped in iniquity, and conceived in sin*? Do you mourn over your vain thoughts and carnal affections; over a life of sin, ingratitude, and profligacy; over your unprofitableness and unfaithfulness? Does it grieve you that you



are worldly, proud, and selfish; that you *have lifted up your soul unto vanity, and panted after the dust of the earth?*

Does it grieve you to the heart, to call to mind that you have sinned *against God?* When your eyes *behold the King, the Lord of Hosts,* are you constrained to exclaim, *Wo is me!* When you *look on Him whom you have pierced,* are you constrained to cry out, *I am undone!*

The degree of godly sorrow is by no means to be overlooked in your self-examination. When God touches, He *breaks* the heart. Where He pours out the spirit of grace, they are not a few transient sighs that agitate the breast; they are heart-rending pangs of sorrow. *And it shall come to pass,* saith God, *that I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplication; and they shall look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him, AS ONE MOURNETH FOR AN ONLY SON, and shall be in bitterness for Him, as ONE THAT IS IN BITTERNESS FOR HIS FIRST-BORN. In that day, there shall be A GREAT MOURNING in Jerusalem, as the MOURNING OF HADADRIMMON, IN THE VALLEY OF*

MEGIDDON. *And the land shall mourn, every family apart; the family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Nathan apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Levi apart, and their wives apart; the family of Shimei apart, and their wives apart; every family apart, and their wives apart.* Thus have the Jews mourned, and thus will that devoted nation mourn again, for crucifying the Lord of glory. Does the reader know any thing of such sorrow as this? Can no solitary hour, no lonely spot, bear testimony to the *bitterness* of his grief? What grieves you more, than that you have ten thousand times pierced the heart of redeeming love?

Do you *abhor* sin? Do you turn from it? Do you cherish that regard for the law and character of God, that tender regard for the crucified Saviour, which inspires you with fixed aversion to all that is polluting in the sins of the heart, and all that is injurious in the sins of the life? Do you feel an *increasing tenderness of conscience*, whenever you are tempted to go astray? Are you afraid of dishonouring God, and do you tremble lest you crucify his dear Son afresh?

Fellow sinner ! if you know any thing of all this, you are not a stranger to that *godly sorrow which worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of*. God has promised to forgive the penitent. He has pledged His word, that the act of forgiveness on His part, shall follow the exercise of repentance on yours. Returning prodigal ! pardoning mercy is thine. It is as sure as the sincerity of thy repentance. *Whoso covereth his sins shall not prosper : but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them, SHALL FIND MERCY.* His repentance shall not purchase it ; his repentance does not deserve it. Repentance has no intrinsic efficacy. It cannot entitle to pardon. It is not THE SAVIOUR ; though without it we cannot be saved. God delights to forgive ; He does forgive, though it cost the blood of His Son. No sooner does the rebel loathe and abhor himself, than God passes by his transgressions, and ceases to retain his anger. *He rejoices over him with joy ; he rests in his love ; he will joy over him with singing.* To forgive a hell-deserving sinner ; to receive a rebel into favour ; to wash away his deep-stained guilt, and become the everlasting friend of the friendless ; is the highest exercise of perfect benevolence. O how gratifying to the benevolent

heart of God, to behold the returning prodigal, though *a great way off*! His compassions yearn over him. He longs to receive him into His arms. He is impatient to press him to His bosom. *He runs ; He falls upon his neck, and kisses him.*

## ESSAY VIII.

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### FAITH.

**THE** first glimmering of light that dawned upon the darkness of the fall, was ushered in by an obscure revelation of the covenant of grace. This covenant was faintly exhibited to Adam and Eve, in the denunciation of the curse upon the Tempter. It was made known more clearly to Noah, after the flood. It was renewed with Abraham, after God had called him from Urr of the Chaldees; with Isaac, in Gerar; with Jacob, at Bethel, and with the generation of Israel, in the wilderness. The light of truth rose gradually, and the covenant of grace gradually unfolded its blessings, till the Star of Bethlehem pointed to the Sun of Righteousness, and the promise of the covenant was sealed by the blood of its Surety.

There is an important distinction between the *covenant of redemption*, and the *covenant of grace*\*. The period of their formation, the parties, the terms of these several covenants, are perfectly distinct.

\* It is unhappy, that there should be a difference in the mode of representing this subject among divines that are reputed orthodox. The view which is given of it by an eminent divine of the Presbyterian Church, may not be unimportant in this place and day.

“ There seems to be mention made in Scripture of a covenant or agreement between the Father and the Son. This, the generality of *Calvinist* divines consider as a separate, or preparatory contract, and call it the covenant of redemption. Some, however, *especially those who have been termed ANTINOMIANS*, consider this as properly the covenant of grace, made with Christ the second Adam, as representing his spiritual seed; and the covenant said to be made with believers, to be only the execution or administration of that covenant, and therefore called a testament, being the fruits of Christ’s death, or ratified by the death of the testator.” *Witherspoon’s Introductory Lectures on Divinity.*

This distinction cannot be considered as an invention of the *New School*. It will be found expressly recognized by Van Mastricht, and I think, clearly implied by Turretin. Vid. *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, Auctore, Petro Van Mastricht. lib. quint. cap. prim. de *Fœdere Gratia*, and *Institutio Theologia*, Francisco Turretino, locus duodecimus. *Questio secunda.*

The covenant of redemption was formed from eternity; the covenant of grace, in time. The covenant of redemption was antecedently necessary to the existence of the covenant of grace. It was the perfect accomplishment of that arduous part which the Redeemer engaged to bear in the covenant of redemption, that laid the foundation for the covenant of grace. It was this, that *justified* God in entering into covenant with believers, and in engaging to save them through faith in the blood of Jesus.

The covenant of redemption subsists between the sacred persons in the ever-blessed Trinity, of which the atonement of Christ for the sins of the world is the stipulation, and the salvation of his *chosen seed*, the promise. The covenant of grace subsists between God and believers, of which, faith in Christ is the stipulation, and the salvation of believers the promise.

The covenant of grace, therefore, in distinction from the covenant of redemption, is nothing more nor less, than *the promise of God to save all those who believe in Jesus Christ*. The law of God is not now the rule of justification, though it is the rule of duty. We no longer hear the righteous demand, of

that broken covenant, *This do, and thou shalt live* ; but the milder language of gracious economy, *BELIEVE, and thou shalt be saved*. Of this covenant, *faith in Christ* is that part which is fulfilled by the believer. *He believes* ; and upon the principles of this covenant, the first act of faith gives him an humble claim to the promise.

Every Christian grace is the effect of the immediate agency, and the Almighty power of God upon the heart. Faith is expressly declared by the Apostle to be the *gift of God*, though it is at the same time the *act of the creature*\*. It is uniform-

\* Every Christian grace is the *gift of God*, and at the same time, the *act of the creature*. The dependence and the activity of man, are perfectly reconcileable. *God worketh in man* ; but *He worketh in him both to WILL, and to DO*. In the day of *God's power, his people are made WILLING*. The enmity of the heart is slain, and they are made *willing* to do what they were *able* to do before.

From the note on the 35th page of this volume, the reader will perceive that the author is aware of some difference in the mode of representing this subject, by divines that profess to be equally attached to the great doctrines of grace. But for protracting that note, he should then have exhibited the views of a number of men of deserved eminence, substantiating the remarks which were there made. Such an exhibition, it is hoped, will soften down some of the prejudices of plain Christians, if it does not blunt the edge of opposition on



ly represented as *of the operation of God*. It is one of the fruits of the Spirit. *The fruit of the*

the part of those who are persevering adherents to the doctrine of man's natural inability.

If any one will take the trouble to turn to *Scott's Family Bible*, he will find the following sentiment in his remarks on Rom. viii. 7, 8. *Because the carnal mind is enmity, &c.*

"This carnal mind is not subject to the divine law, and indeed cannot be so; it is MORALLY UNABLE to do any thing; but rebel against it, and refuse obedience to it."

The observations of the same author on John vi. 44. *No man can come, &c.* are of the same import.

"The ground of this impossibility lies in the *contrariety* which subsists between the proud, worldly, unholy, rebellious, and ungodly nature of fallen man, and the humbling, spiritual, holy nature of the gospel. The gospel finds none *willing to be saved*," &c.\*

Let the reader also advert to *President Witherspoon's Essay on Justification*. In vol. i. and page 53 of his Works, he will find the following paragraph.

"Since mention has been made of perfect conformity to the will of God, or perfect obedience to his law, as the duty of man, which is indeed the foundation of this whole doctrine," (that is, the doctrine of Justification,) "I think it necessary to observe, that some deny this to be properly required of man as his duty in the present fallen state, because *He is not able to perform it*. But such do not seem to attend either to the meaning of perfect obedience, or

\* In regard to the controversy between Marshall and Bellamy, concerning the nature of faith, Scott is most decidedly in favour of Bellamy's view of the subject. Vid. Scott's Theological Works, vol. 4th, p. 248, 249, 250.

*Spirit is love, joy, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, FAITH. No man can say, that Jesus is the*

“the nature or cause of this inability. Perfect obedience is  
 “obedience by any creature, to the utmost extent of his natural powers. Even in a state of innocence, the holy dispositions of Adam would not have been equal in strength  
 “and activity to those of creatures of an higher rank; but  
 “surely to love God, who is infinitely amiable, with all the  
 “heart, and above all, to consecrate all his powers and  
 “faculties without exception, and without intermission,  
 “to God’s service, must be undeniably the duty of every  
 “intelligent creature. And what sort of inability are we  
 “under to pay this? Our natural faculties are surely  
 “as fit for the service of God as for any baser purpose.—THE  
 “INABILITY IS ONLY MORAL, and lies wholly IN THE  
 “AVERSION OF OUR HEARTS from such employment. Does this then take away the guilt? Must God relax his law because we are not willing to obey it?”

The same great man, in a sermon on the “absolute necessity of salvation by Christ,” has also a sentence which is full of meaning. “For I hope NO CHRISTIAN will assert, that any person in the world who hath the exercise of reason, is under a natural, but only a moral impossibility of coming to the knowledge, and doing the will of God. If the first were the case, it would TAKE AWAY ALL SIN; but the last is such an obstinate disinclination, as is still consistent with guilt and blame.” Vid. Witherspoon’s Works, vol. ii. p. 357. Philadelphia edition.

The following representation of the subject, I take the liberty of giving to the public, principally because it is from an unexpected quarter. It is extracted from a “Catechism adopted by the Consistories of the REFORMED DUTCH

**Lord, BUT BY THE HOLY GHOST.** It is expressly said of those who believed on Christ in the days

“CHURCHES in the town of Rhinebeck, for the use of their people, and published by their order\*.”

“Q. Why do men thus break and transgress the law of God?”

A. “The reason is, the reigning *aversion of their hearts* to it, so that they are *unable* to keep it.”

Q. “And does not this their inability release from obligation?”

A. “No, *for it is of such a nature*, as tends not in the least, to break or weaken our obligation.”

Q. “Of *what kind* is it then?”

A. “It is not of a *natural*, but of a *moral kind*.”

Q. “What is *natural inability*?”

A. “Natural inability consists in a defect of rational faculties, bodily powers, or rational advantages.”

Q. “What is *moral inability*?”

A. “Moral inability consists in a *want of a proper disposition of heart* to use our natural ability aright.”

Q. “Can you illustrate the distinction by producing an instance?”

A. “Yes, the case of Joseph’s brethren who *hated* him so, that they *could not* speak peaceably to him.”

Not viewing this sufficient, the Catechists then subjoin the following Note.

\* When this Catechism was adopted by these churches, the Rev. Dr. John B. Romeyn, now the Pastor of the Cedar-street Church, New-York, was the stated minister of the gospel in Rhinebeck, and was himself one of the committee appointed to revise and re-publish the original Catechism of *John Sutcliffe*, of Olney, England. The above Note forms part of a work which the American publishers say, in their advertisement, “is among the best Catechisms extant.”

of his humanity, that they *were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, BUT OF GOD.* It is also unequivocally declared, that *whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is BORN OF GOD.* Faith then is the exercise of the *new heart.*

It is difficult to give a definition of faith that comprehends all its properties. In its most general character, it is *reliance upon the testimony of God's word.* It is *receiving the truth in the love of it.* The apostle Paul uses the phrase, *received not the love of the truth,* as synonymous with the phrase,

“ Thus we say of a man destitute of an honest principle,  
 “ that *he cannot* refrain from cheating you if he has an op-  
 “ portunity; that some are such profane wretches, that *they*  
 “ *cannot* open their mouths without an oath; and others, are  
 “ such liars, that *they cannot* speak the truth; that some are  
 “ so revengeful, that *they cannot* forgive an injury; and  
 “ others so easily provoked, that *they cannot* keep their  
 “ temper, if you contradict them. So a carnal mind *CANNOT*  
 “ *be subject to God's law*; for a man that hates God *cannot*  
 “ *serve him, cannot rejoice* in seeing him glorified; *cannot*  
 “ *love his image*; *cannot see* any comeliness in Christ, nor  
 “ fall in with the gospel plan of salvation. The difference  
 “ between moral inability, and that which is termed natural,  
 “ is *plain and self-evident.* It is said of the mariners, that  
 “ they rowed hard to bring the ship to land, but they *could*  
 “ *not,* Jonah i. 13. Also of Joseph's brethren, that they  
 “ *could not* speak peaceably to him. In the former case

*believed not the truth.* Faith, however, when viewed as that evangelical grace which is the condition of the New Covenant, possesses altogether a peculiar character. Though the elementary principles of every evangelical grace are involved in that *love*, which is *the fulfilling of the law*; yet every grace has a specific form. Faith, strictly speaking, is distinct from every other exercise of the renewed heart. It is not love, nor repentance, nor humility, nor submission, nor self-denial, nor hope. It is indeed the exercise of a heart that already loves God, and that is humbled on account of sin; but it is one which

“there was a natural, in the latter, a moral inability. Thus  
“the inability of Zacharias to speak, Luke ii. 22. was widely  
“different from that mentioned in 1 Sam. xxv. 17.

“The importance of a proper attention to this distinction  
“appears, when we observe that *the former releases from obligation*, but *the latter does not*. It was *no crime* in Isaac,  
“being old, that he *could not* see, Gen. xxvii. 1.; but the case  
“seems very different with those who *have eyes and see not*,  
“Jer. v. 21. or such as have eyes full of adultery, though it  
“is *expressly said* of them, that they *cannot* cease from sin-  
“ning, 1 Pet. ii. 14.”

On this subject, the reader may also consult Watts' *Ruin and Recovery*. Works, vol. 6. p. 291-2. as also Watts' *Liberty and Necessity*.

He may turn to Charnock's Works, vol. 2. p. 187; and Edwards on the Will, Part 1. Sect. 3d.

takes that view of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which is taken by no other grace.

One of the best definitions of faith will be found in the Shorter Catechism of the Assembly of Divines at Westminster. In answering the question, "*What is faith in Jesus Christ?*" they say, "FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST IS A SAVING GRACE, WHEREBY WE RECEIVE AND REST UPON HIM ALONE FOR SALVATION, AS HE IS OFFERED TO US IN THE GOSPEL."

Faith in Jesus Christ is a complex act of the mind, and comprises several distinct things. One of its properties is *a true knowledge of Christ's character*. It is impossible to "receive and rest upon" a Being whose character we do not know; and whose character we do not know to be worthy of confidence. *I know whom I have believed*, says the Apostle. Faith views the Lord Jesus as He is. It discerns the Divine excellence and majesty of His character. It recognizes the child that was born in Bethlehem, as the *Mighty God*, the *Everlasting Father*. The proper divinity of the Saviour's character is one of those plain principles of the Gospel that are essential to evangelical faith. To make an all-sufficient atonement for

sin; to soften the obdurate heart; to aid the believer in his trials and sufferings; to defend him from the power and subtlety of his enemies; and to bring him off conqueror at last—would baffle the designs of all but Eternal Wisdom, and mock the power of all but an Almighty Arm. Faith views the Saviour as truly divine. None other than the **ETERNAL WORD MADE FLESH**, can be the foundation hope, for none other can be *mighty to save*. It is of presumption to profess to know Christ, without acknowledging Him as the second of the three coequal persons in the Godhead.

As the believer discerns the Lord Jesus as He is, he also acknowledges Him as a real and proper man. He views Him as He is represented by the Apostle, to be *the one God and one Mediator between God and men, the MAN Christ Jesus*. It is expressly said, that Christ *took not on Him the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham*. The acknowledgment of Christ as man as well as God, cannot be separated from the true knowledge of Him as He is revealed in the Bible. There He is represented, and there He must be viewed, as encircled with all the majesty of the self-existent God, and all the “milder glories” of the man Christ Jesus.

The believer regards Christ in His whole mediatorial character. He sees the fulness, the perfection of His work, no less than the divine excellence of His person. He has respect to *all the offices of Christ*. He views Him as THE PROPHET, who came to publish the will of God, and declare the way of salvation. He views Him as THE PRIEST, whom it became God to institute, and sinners to possess; as the One *whom God hath set forth to be a Propitiation, through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, that God might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus*. He views Him as THE KING in Zion, the Head over all things to his Church, the LORD Jesus, the LORD that bought him. In Christ, the believer discovers all that can qualify Him to be a Saviour, and all that can encourage guilty, miserable man to trust in His grace. In Him, he beholds One that is eminently all-sufficient; One who is able, willing, and faithful *to save to the uttermost*. He receives the record which God has given of His Son.

*Sincere love to the character of Christ*, is also essential to the nature of genuine *faith*. It is as impossible to "receive and rest upon" a being



whom we hate, as it is to "receive and rest upon" one that we do not know. Faith in Christ is not an exercise of the understanding merely; it is an affection of the heart. *With the heart man believeth. If thou believest* WITH ALL THY HEART, said Philip to the Eunuch, *thou mayest be baptized.* To those who believe, Christ is *precious*. The excellence which they see both in His person and in His work, they love. All that they know of Christ, they love. All the truth which is connected with the character and work of Christ, they love. They possess spiritual discernment of His divine excellence. They have the *single eye* that discovers His moral beauty. They see a loveliness in Christ and His gospel, that captivates their hearts. When the wandering Spouse was met by the watchmen that went about the city, and accosted with the unexpected inquiry, *What is thy beloved more than another beloved?* the reply was at hand: *My beloved is the chief among ten thousands, He is altogether lovely. Abraham rejoiced to see Christ's day, and he saw it, and was glad.* The pious Psalmist was enraptured with a view of His loveliness. *Thou art fairer*, says he, *than the children of men; grace is poured into thy lips, therefore God hath blessed Thee for ever.*

The spirit of this language is not peculiar to David or Abraham. In the dignity, purity, and amiableness of Christ's character, in the design of His mission, and in the way of salvation by His cross, every believer sees enough to engage his sweetest and most exalted affections.

With this acquaintance with the character, and this attachment to the person of the Redeemer, the believer "receives and rests upon Him alone "for salvation, as He is offered in the gospel." He *makes an implicit surrender of his immortal soul into His hands, as to One who is both able and faithful to save.* The yielding up of the soul to the disposal of Christ, is an act of the mind which cannot be separated from living faith.

It is of some importance to bear in mind, that faith is the act of a lost sinner, seeking deliverance from the power and punishment of sin, toward a Being who is exhibited *in the character of a Deliverer.* It cannot, therefore, imply less than an application of the soul to Him who is the delivering character; the actual adventuring of this vast concern with Him; together with the hope, that with Him it will be secure. Faith *receives* Christ; it *rests* upon Christ *for*

*salvation*; it rests upon Him alone for salvation, as *He is offered in the gospel*. Sensible of his ill-desert and helplessness, persuaded of the all-sufficiency of the Redeemer, the believer therefore makes a voluntary surrender of himself into the hands of Christ, *to be saved upon his own terms*. He is convinced of the necessity of committing his cause to better hands than his own. He relinquishes his vain confidences, and places all his hopes on Christ. He casts himself into His arms. *Lord, to whom shall I go, but to thee!*

In the act of surrendering the soul into the hands of Christ, the believer takes a view of the Great Deliverer, which is as deep as his own wants, and as large as the provision that is made to supply them. He receives Christ as his Prophet, his Priest, and his King.

Is he ignorant? exposed to wander from the path? The Great Prophet is his Teacher and his Guide. *The meek He will guide in judgment, the meek will He teach His way.*

Is he polluted with sin? He looks to the blood of the spotless sacrifice to be cleansed *from all*

*sin.* Jesus Christ he knows gave *Himself* for *his Church*, that *He might wash and cleanse it*. He rests on Him; and looks for *the sanctification of the spirit unto obedience only through the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus*.

Is he guilty and condemned? No longer does he trust to his own righteousness, but looks to Jesus as the *end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth*. He yields a condemned soul to Him, to be arrayed with a righteousness with which a just God has declared himself to be ever *well pleased*. He rests upon Him as the sole ground of acceptance. With all his natural attachment to his own goodness, *he counts it loss for Christ*. *He counts it but dung, that he may win Christ, and be found in Him, not having his own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith*. This is his refuge, his crown of rejoicing. He looks to Jesus, recognizing the high relation in which He stands to His people, and the endearing *name by which He is called, JEHOVAH OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS*.

Is he weak and helpless? He engages the grace of the Redeemer as his consolation and strength. To Jesus does he surrender himself as the head of all divine influences. *I live, yet not I, but Christ that liveth in me.* This is the language of faith. The act of the soul in surrendering itself into the hands of Christ, forms a connecting bond between him as the Vine, and the soul as the branches, which communicates life, strength, nourishment, and beauty. In a word, with a just view of the character, and a supreme attachment to the person of Christ, the believer yields himself into His hands, *as a full and complete Saviour.* Him he receives; upon Him he rests, and rests for time and eternity. With humble joy will he tell you, "Christ is my all. I want no more. To Him do I look to be sanctified by His Spirit; to be governed by His laws; to be protected by His power; to be saved by His death; to be disposed of at His pleasure, and to be the means of promoting His glory."

This is "to receive and rest upon Christ alone for salvation, as He is offered to us in the gospel." This is confidence in Jesus Christ, as a Divine Saviour. You cannot possess these feelings without possessing saving faith. This is the

*substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen.* This is the grace which renders invisible things visible; future things present; and enstamps the permanent idea of *reality* upon every thing that rests upon the testimony of God. This was the faith of Old Testament saints and New Testament saints. It is that *trust in the Lord*, of which we read so often in the Old Testament, which is nothing more nor less than *the confidence of the new born soul in God, as reconcileable through the Mediator.*

Thus have we seen, that faith has properties peculiar to itself. Its character is perfectly distinct from every other grace. There is no exercise of the renewed heart that *views the whole gospel plan as it is*, except this. Faith, from its essential nature, implies the fallen state of man, while it recognizes the principles of the covenant of grace. It is itself the condition of that covenant\*. It is a grace which is alike distinguish-

\* When the author styles faith a *condition* of the New Covenant, he does not mean, that it is the meritorious ground of acceptance with God. The covenant of grace bears no resemblance to a contract, in which the part to be performed by the believer is a mere *quantum meruit*. Every principle of that covenant rests upon the fact, that man is unwor-

able from the love of angels, and the faith of devils. It is peculiar to the returning sinner. None but a lost sinner needs, and none but a humbled sinner relishes, the grand sentiment of faith, that *grace reigns through righteousness, unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Here then let the reader *examine himself whether he be in the faith.* He may possess the *faith of devils.* He may be fully persuaded, that there was such a person as Jesus Christ; that he *was delivered for our offences, and rose again for our justification*; he may possess the vain confidence of the hypocrite, which neither *worketh by love,* nor is *of the operation of God*; he may cherish the pernicious hope of the self-deceived—while he remains blind to the excellence of the Divine character, and while enmity to the cross of Christ is the governing principle of his heart and his life. Every carnal mind, whether sensible of it or not, maintains the most decided aversion to

thy, and that salvation is all of grace. When we say, therefore, that faith is the condition of the New Covenant, we mean, *that faith is that act of the creature, wrought in him by the agency of the Holy Ghost, without which, according to the tenor of the New Covenant, there is no salvation—It is a sine qua non.*

the person of the Redeemer, the benefits of His purchase, and the terms upon which those benefits are proffered. The whole character and work of Christ bear so intimate a relation to the unbeliever; they so pointedly take the part of God against *him*; they so unequivocally condemn *his* character and conduct; they will have such a damning efficacy upon *him* throughout eternal ages—that when clearly seen, they cannot fail to draw forth the latent enmity of his heart.

If it be true, as it unquestionably is, that you may have a just view of the character of Christ, while you have no love to that character as infinitely deserving your affection, and while you make no surrender of yourself into His hands, as to one who is supremely worthy of your confidence; it becomes you to inquire, whether you love the Lord Jesus in sincerity and truth, and whether you trust in him as your only foundation of hope.

*Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?* Apply the question. Do you love Christ? And why do you love Him? Do you love Him merely because He died to *save* you, or because He died to *honour God* in your salvation? Do you love Him



because He descended from heaven to take the part of God against man ; to show the world, that in the contest between the creatures and the God that made them, God is right, and man is wrong, and with His own blood to set His seal to the truth, *that the soul that sinneth ought to die ?* Or does He appear to you on this account, *as a root out of a dry ground, as having no form, nor comeliness, no beauty that you should desire Him ?* The true believer loves the Lord Jesus, because he effects his eternal salvation in a way that harmonizes with the glory of the Divine character. To be saved in a way that is in the least reproachful to that glory, would rob Heaven of its sweetness. It is for this that Jesus Christ is so precious to those that believe ; in this, that He is eminently *fairer than the sons of men*. Do you love Jesus for the divine glories of His person, for the excellence of His life, for the benefits of His death, for the prevalence of His intercession, for His resurrection, His dominion over the world, and His office as the Supreme and Final Judge ? Are the feelings of your heart drawn out toward Christ as your chief joy ? *Can you sit down under His shadow with great delight, and find His fruit sweet to your taste ?* When affected with a view of your lost state and guilty character, when

bowed down under a sense of sin, does Christ appear *precious*? Is a view of Him refreshing?

Do you receive the Lord Jesus, and rest upon Him alone for salvation? Can you take the place of a lost and hell-deserving sinner, and with a broken, contrite heart, make an implicit surrender of your immortal soul into His hands to be saved upon His own terms? Beloved reader, this is a plain question. Every humbled heart, in the exercise of faith, knows how to answer it. Can you relinquish every other hope? Can you adventure this vast concern with Him?

Can you receive and rest upon the Lord Jesus as *He is offered in the Gospel*? Are you at heart reconciled to the *terms* of the Gospel? Are you at heart reconciled to the humbling doctrine of being justified *by faith in the righteousness of Christ*? It is a doctrine which, if correctly understood, will be seen to reduce the returning rebel to the lowest point of degradation. To a heart that is invincibly attached to rebellion, it is hard to bow. To one who is naturally attached to his own supposed goodness, it is hard to renounce it all, and desire and receive mercy only

for the sake of Christ. To a man who loves himself supremely, and values himself supremely, who has cherished the most extravagant notions of his own importance from the womb, it is hard to lie down at the footstool of sovereign mercy. It is cutting indeed to the pride of the human heart, to be constrained to feel that we are guilty, and then forced to admit that there is no pardon for our crimes, but through the merit of another. Say, reader, is thy heart bowed to the humbling terms of the Gospel? Do you delight to take your place at the foot of the cross, and while reaching forth the hand to receive the robe of the Saviour's righteousness, to shout, grace! grace! *Not unto me, O Lord, not unto me, but unto thy name, be the glory, for thy mercy and truth's sake?* If so, you believe. If so, amidst all your doubts and fears, you have that faith, which is *the gift of God*. If so, you may humbly claim the promise. Here is your consolation, *He that believeth—shall be saved*. Yes, SHALL BE SAVED! What more has God to bestow; what more can the creature enjoy? Here are blessings as great as the capacity of the immortal soul, as eternal as the God that engages to bestow them. In the comprehensive promise of that covenant to which faith makes

you a party, the mysteries of eternity lie concealed. Life and death, earth and heaven, things present and to come, joys high, immeasurable, and immortal—what shall I say? *All are yours ; and ye are Christ's, and Christ's is God's.*

## ESSAY IX.

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### HUMILITY.

“IN the school of Christ,” says the devout Archbishop Leighton, “the first lesson of all is “humility; yea, it is written above the door, as “the rule of entry or admission, LEARN OF ME, “FOR I AM MEEK AND LOWLY OF HEART!” Humility is a grace that is nearly allied to repentance. Repentance respects the nature and aggravation of sin; humility respects the person and character of the sinner. Humility consists *in a just view of our own character, and in the disposition to abase ourselves as low as the vileness of our character requires.*

**A just view of our own character is a view of it as it actually is. The pride of the human heart, naturally casts a veil over the**

character of man, and aims to conceal his worthlessness as a creature, and his deformity as a sinner. The humility of the Gospel naturally throws aside the veil, and discovers that native worthlessness which ought to sink the creature in the dust, and that moral deformity which ought to cover the sinner with confusion. Genuine humility is inseparably connected with a sense of our dependance, of our unworthiness, and of our ill-desert.

Although dependance, absolute and universal, is necessarily attached to the very being of *creatures*; yet a sense of this dependence is a most unwelcome visitant to the unhumbled heart. The spirit of the carnal mind is an independent spirit. It is a spirit in which the pride of man glories. Though men are creatures of yesterday, and know nothing; though they are upheld by the visitation of God's arm, and supplied by the beneficence of His hand; they have no apprehension, that they actually *live, and move, and have their being in Him*. An abiding sense of His universal presence is what they cannot bear to cherish.

But a sense of perfect dependance is a grateful guest to the broken and contrite heart. To a

humbled sinner it is sweet to feel that he is absolutely dependant on God for all that he is, and all that he has. He is sensible that he is nothing ; that he is *a worm, and no man*. He realizes that God is every where, and that worms and seraphs are alike at His disposal. He feels with Paul, *that he is not sufficient of himself to think any thing as of himself ; but his sufficiency is of God*. Does he enjoy signal favours ? he calls to mind, that he enjoys nothing *that he has not received*. Life, health, as well as the blessings of both, he sees flowing through a thousand channels from the same exuberant source. As the child hangs upon the kindness of its parent, or as the abject poor depend on the daily bounty of their fellow-men ; so do the poor in spirit, conscious of their helplessness, *wait only upon God, for their expectation is from Him*.

With a sense of their dependance, the humble unite a *conviction of their unworthiness*. They are unworthy ; and they feel that they are so. They are sensible that they are sinners. They have seen the plague of their own hearts. They know, at best, they are unprofitable servants ; and at best, ought to be for ever overwhelmed with a sense of their unworthiness. Merit they have none.

Desert of good is not in all their thoughts. *Who am I*, exclaimed the King of Israel, *Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my father's house, that thou hast brought me hitherto? I am not worthy*, said the humble Patriarch, *I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth which thou hast showed unto thy servant!* The people of God need not be told that they have forfeited every favour. Much as they need the divine compassion, they are sensible that they do not, and cannot deserve it. Often as they seek the divine face and favour, they do not seek them as the reward of personal worthiness. They turn their thoughts inward, and see and feel that they are *less than the least of all saints*. They are mere pensioners upon sovereign mercy. There was no distinguishing excellence in them, that made them the objects of favour; there was not the shadow of difference in character, which operated as a reason why God should regard them with the special tokens of His love, rather than the most abandoned wretch that ever lived. “*Behold, I am vile! Grace hath made me to differ.*” When they seek the presence of God, they do it with the humble spirit of the Centurion, *Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldest come under my roof!*



When they cast themselves upon the care of their heavenly Father, it is with the spirit of the prodigal, *Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and in thy sight, and am NO MORE WORTHY to be called thy son!*

In the humble heart, a sense of dependance and unworthiness, is also connected with a *sense of ill-desert*. Humility holds up to view the bright mirror of God's holy law. From this faithful glass the character of man is reflected in all its native deformity. Here there is no deception. The merit and demerit of character are determinately fixed by this impartial standard. Here God has exhibited His right and our obligation, His righteousness and our ill-desert. Weighed in this unerring balance, the character of man is found wanting. It is the character of a transgressor. It is the character of a rebel against the King of Heaven; a character which is condemned, and cursed, and in its own destestable nature deserving everlasting wrath.

Unfeigned humility prompts a man to view his character as base, and himself as ill-deserving, as the law of God views them. The humbled heart

knows that the *law is holy, and the commandment holy, just, and good*. He not only feels that the *wages of sin is death* ; but approves the law which threatens him with death for every transgression. He not only sees that sin and guilt are inseparably connected ; but approves of the Lawgiver for hating and punishing sin according to its desert. He prostrates himself in the dust, and exalts God on the throne. He takes his proper place at the footstool of God's amiable and awful sovereignty. He knows that he ought to lie as low as vindictive justice can reduce him. He feels that *it is of the Lord's mercies that he is not consumed*. Such is his sense of ill-desert, that he not only feels that he is justly condemned ; but magnifies the justice that condemns him, while he adores the grace that rescues him from the condemnation.

Such is the view which the humble man takes of his own character. This is *to think soberly of himself, and as he ought to think*. This is to have just views of his own character, and voluntarily to abase himself as low as the vileness of his character requires him to lie. This is the disposition with which he renounces his own righteousness, and relies on the righteousness of the Lord Jesus

Christ. Once, the humble man thought little of his own vileness; now, a sense of his vileness covers him with shame. Once, he thought himself *rich and increased with goods, and in need of nothing*; now, he sees and feels that he *is wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked*. Once, he was too proud to become a beggar; now, he begs for *mercy*; begs with hope and with joy in the name of Jesus.

This is the disposition that is interwoven with his experience and his conduct. It manifests itself both toward God, and toward man. Especially does it manifest itself *toward God*. When thinking of God, when beholding His glorious perfections, when rejoicing in the perfection of His government, and in the excellence of His designs, the humble heart adopts the language of Job, *I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee; wherefore, I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes*. When thinking of God, he feels the weight of obligation to love and serve Him *with all the heart*. Hence he is borne down under a sense of his inexcusable deficiencies. A view of his corruption keeps him near to the earth. He is ashamed that he is no more holy. How often is he con-

strained to exclaim, "*O wretched man that I am!*" Can it be that one who knows no more of the "love of God, who is no more conformed to His image, is in truth His own dear child?" He desires to divest himself of all his pride; to empty himself; to feel as nothing, and be as nothing and vanity.

In the more immediate presence of God, the humble Christian remembers that he is a redeemed sinner. When approaching the mercy-seat, he takes the place of a broken-hearted beggar. He goes to the God of all grace like a man who knows that he deserves to sink into hell. He is ready to bow low before Christ; to *wash His feet with his tears, and to wipe them with the hair of his head.* Like the woman of Canaan, he begs for the crumbs of divine mercy. He does not desire to plead his own merit, but with a bosom bleeding for sin, and an eye cast down to the earth, makes mention of the name of Jesus. Though at times he is ashamed to approach the throne; though he hardly dare approach; yet like the publican, *standing afar off, he does not so much as lift up his eyes to heaven, but smites upon his*

*breast, saying, God, be merciful to me a sinner.* His most favoured moments are those in which he is enabled to lie low before a Holy God, and in which he has increasing desires to be kept humble to the end of his days.

This humble temper of mind also naturally flows forth *in his intercourse with his fellow-men.* It is true, that some good men have vastly more native haughtiness, vastly more of the over-bearing spirit of the carnal man to struggle with, than others. Notwithstanding this, real Christians are humble; and their humility will necessarily express itself in the modesty and meekness of their habitual deportment. *Let nothing, says the Apostle, be done through strife or vain-glory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.* The spirit of Christianity is congenial with its precepts, though it is not in the present life perfectly conformed to them. There is such a thing as *in honour preferring one another*, though we may sometimes be led to imagine that there is not much of it visible. There is such a spirit, and however those who indulge the hope of their good estate may be disposed to shrink from the test, such is the spirit of all *Christians.*

*Charity*, saith the Apostle, *vaunteth not of itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly.* With a humble frame of mind, a man will set a due value upon his own attainments. He will not be apt to think highly of his own virtues, nor consider himself injured if he is not highly esteemed by others. It is difficult for an unhumiliated, self-righteous man not to betray his hypocrisy by being proud of his supposed self-abasement. He has much to say of his frames and experiences; much to boast of the abasing views which he has had of himself, and the wonderful discoveries in divine things with which he has been favoured. But the truly humbled soul desires more to *be* humble, than to appear humble. It is no part of his character to make great pretences to humility. There are indeed seasons when he is favoured with unusual manifestations of the divine glory, and abasing views of his own vileness. And he sometimes speaks of them. With modesty he may speak of them. He is not freed from the duty, nor deprived of the privilege of *telling what the Lord has done for his soul*, merely because the world may brand him with the name of Pharisee. But when he does it, it is that he may strengthen the weak, re-

fresh the weary, cheer the desponding, and give honour to divine grace. He does it, not boastingly, not with the language, *God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men!* but with the spirit that *esteems others better than himself*. He knows that he has nothing to be proud of; and that if he is made to differ from others, it becomes him to adopt the language of the Psalmist, rather than that of the Pharisee, *Not unto me, O Lord, not unto me, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy and thy truth's sake!*

Something like this is the spirit of the gospel. A sense of dependence, of unworthiness, and of ill-desert, manifesting itself both toward God and toward man, is the spirit of humility. When the Christian, *as the elect of God, puts on bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering*, then he exhibits the power and sweetness of vital religion. Seated in the lowest place, and clothed with humility, he exhibits some degree of the amiableness of his Divine Master. Well may we call humility a Heaven-born grace. She is indeed the daughter of the skies, the "meek-eyed child of Jesus," and dwells only with him, who, like herself, is born from above.

Here then you have a rule of trial. The spirit of humility is conclusive evidence of vital godliness. It enters into the essence of religion. Here the new nature eminently discovers itself. The humble spirit is that child-like, Christ-like temper, which is exclusively the effect of the Almighty power of God upon the heart.

Can the reader lay his hand upon his heart, and say, that he is conscious of this heavenly temper of mind? Can he in the sincerity of his soul, say, that he is conscious of this spirit of voluntary self-abasement? Did he ever, and does he still, take a just view of his own character, and does he possess the disposition voluntarily to abase himself, as low as the vileness of his character requires him to lie?

Do you cherish a conviction of your dependence? Or do you live *without God in the world*? Do you live from day to day, and from year to year, realizing the relation which you bear to the great First Cause? Do you delight to feel that God sees you, and upholds you, and governs you? Or do you banish a sense of your perfect dependence upon Him, and feel, and act, as though



God had no concern with you, and you had no concern with Him?

Do you cherish a sense of your great unworthiness and ill-desert? Do you feel yourself to be a vile and hateful sinner? What if others should esteem you according to the vileness of your character; would you not view yourself injured? If God should esteem you, and *treat you* according to the vileness of your character; would you not think it hard and unjust? Should you not murmur and complain?

Is the humble temper of the Gospel interwoven with your religious experience? A savour of humility is diffused throughout all the Christian graces. "Christian affections," says the immortal Edwards, "Christian affections are like Mary's precious ointment, that she poured on Christ's head, that filled the whole house with a sweet odour. It was poured out of a *broken box*; till the box was broken, the ointment could not flow. So gracious affections flow out of a *broken heart*. Gracious affections are also like those of Mary Magdalene, who also pours precious ointment on Christ out of a broken

“alabaster box, anointing therewith the feet of  
“Jesus, when she had washed them with her tears,  
“and wiped them with the hair of her head. All  
“gracious affections that are a sweet odour to  
“Christ, and that fill the soul of a Christian with  
“an heavenly sweetness and fragrancy, are broken-hearted affections. A truly Christian *love*,  
“either to God or men, is a humble, broken-hearted love. The *desires* of the saints, however  
“earnest, are humble desires. Their *hope* is an  
“humble hope, and their *joy*, even when it is *unspeakable and full of glory*, is a humble, broken-hearted joy, and leaves the Christian more poor  
“in spirit, and more like a little child, and more  
“disposed to an universal lowliness of behaviour\*.”

Is the humble spirit of the Gospel also interwoven with your habitual deportment? Are you habitually disposed to *esteem others better than yourself*? or to esteem yourself better than others? Do you rejoice to see others of equal merit with yourself, as much beloved and honoured as you are? And if their merit exceeds your own, are you willing to see them more beloved and honoured than you are? Or are you for ever

\* Edwards on the Affections.

restless and dissatisfied, because you are not more beloved and honoured than every body else? *Do you love the praise of men more than the praise of God? How can ye believe, saith the meek and lowly Jesus, How CAN ye believe, who receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?*

In the character of a Christian, humility is the *one thing needful*. Where this is wanting, all is wanting. A proud, haughty spirit is inconsistent with the spirit of the gospel. It is the genius of that gospel, it is one grand design of all the dispensations of grace toward fallen man, to exalt him to glory, by first humbling him in the dust. *He that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.*

Does the reader indulge the hope of having made his peace with God? Let him remember, that God is at peace with none, except the humble and contrite. *He lifteth up the meek, but casteth the wicked down to the ground.* No matter what are your professions; no matter how high your supposed attainments; if you have never felt the contrition of a broken heart, you have never tasted that the Lord is gracious. Still, you are

not to reject the hope of your good estate, because you find much of the spirit of pride within you. Alas, how much of this detestable spirit have the best of God's people! With this enemy will be our longest and severest conflict. It possesses so much of the cunning of the Serpent, that it is perhaps less easily detected than any other form of depravity. When you have mortified it in one shape, you will find that it rises in another; and when you fondly hope it is dead, you will find that it has been secretly gathering strength, to commence the attack with new vigour, fresh courage, and perhaps greater success. Pride will live, until the Old Man is dead. It is the "ulcerated part of the body of sin and death." It is the main spring to all the obstructions which impede our progress toward Heaven. It is the secret avenue through which the Tempter too often enters and leads the best of men astray. It is the "great inlet of the smoke from the bottomless pit," which darkens the mind, casts a gloom around their fairest prospects, and sometimes leaves them awhile in the gloom of despondency. With this enemy will be your longest and severest conflict. Put on, therefore, the whole armour of God, and watch unto prayer. The clashings

of pride and humility should often drive the Christian to the throne of grace. *Who can understand his errors? Cleanse Thou me from secret faults!* You may have much pride; but have you any humility? Be not deceived. *Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? There is more hope of a fool than of him. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for their's is the kingdom of Heaven.*

## ESSAY X.

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### SELF-DENIAL.

FROM the formation of the first Angel of light down to the period when the heavens shall pass away as a scroll, the Creator of the ends of the earth had His eye steadfastly fixed on the same grand object. As all things are *of* Him, so all will be *to* Him. He who made all things for Himself, cannot fail to pursue the end for which He made them, and to obtain it at last. When the proceedings of the Last Day shall have been closed; when the assembled worlds shall have entered upon the unvarying retributions of eternity; when the heavens and the earth shall have passed away, and a new heaven and a new earth, the Holy City, the

New Jerusalem, shall have come down from God out of heaven: *He that sitteth upon the throne shall say, IT IS DONE; I am ALPHA and OMEGA, the beginning and the end!* In the winding up the scene, it will appear that God Himself is the first and the last; not merely the efficient, but the final cause of all things. The vast plan, which has for its object nothing less than the brightest manifestation of the divine glory, has an unalienable right to the most unreserved devotedness of every intelligent being. To the advancement of this plan, God therefore requires every intelligent being to be voluntarily subservient. All the strength and ardour of affection which we are capable of exercising, must be concentrated here. Every faculty, every thought, every volition, every design, must be devoted to this great cause. The injunction is explicit: *Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.* Now the heart of depraved man is obstinately averse to such a course of feelings and conduct. Instead of being supremely attached to God, and the good of His kingdom, men are by nature *lovers of their own selves*. Hence there is a controversy between man and his Maker. God requires men to re-

gard His glory as the great object of their affections, and the ultimate end of their conduct ; but they disregard His requisitions, and in all their feelings and conduct have respect ultimately to themselves. This controversy draws the line of distinction between friends and foes. As the spirit of self-advancement is the root of all sin ; so the spirit of self-denial is the root of all holiness.

Self-denial consists *in the voluntary renunciation of every thing which is inconsistent with the glory of God, and the highest good of our fellow men.* It does not imply the voluntary renunciation of good, or the voluntary toleration of evil, as being desirable *in themselves considered* ; though it does imply both as being desirable *all things considered*. There is no absurdity in the proposition, that a thing may be very unpleasant in its own nature, but, taking all things into view, may be very desirable. It is perfectly consistent for men to desire to enjoy themselves, and yet desire to deny themselves ; to hate misery, and yet be willing to suffer it. Neither does it imply the renunciation of all regard to one's self. The desire of happiness, and the aversion to misery, are insepara-



ble from human nature. The natural principle of self-love does not constitute the sin of selfishness. A man may have a due regard to his own happiness, without being supremely selfish. There is no moral turpitude in being influenced by the anticipation of good, or the apprehension of evil, provided I am not influenced by these considerations supremely. There is no sin in regarding my own interest, provided I do not put a higher estimate upon it than it will bear. The evil lies in viewing it of greater moment than it is; in making every thing subservient to myself, and myself subservient to nothing.

Self-denial is diametrically opposite to supreme selfishness. "Selfishness," says Dr. Owen, "is the making a man's self his own centre, the beginning and end of all that he doth." It is difficult, with the bible in our hands, or upon the principles of sound philosophy, not to acknowledge the distinction between affections that are supremely selfish, and truly disinterested, to be both plain and important. There is no need of the aid of metaphysical discussion to establish the proposition, that no man ought to regard his own happiness more than every thing else, and that the man who does, possesses

none of the spirit of the Gospel. The affections of men must be placed on some one object that is paramount to every other. Two objects of supreme delight there cannot be. Two paramount principles of action there cannot be. There is no intermediate object between God and self, that can draw forth the highest and strongest affections of the soul. As there is "no such thing as a creature's going out of himself, without rising as high as the glory of God;" so there is no such thing as a creature's going out of God, without descending as low as himself. Other objects may be loved; but if they are not loved merely as the means of self-gratification, they are not loved supremely. Affections that do not terminate on God, terminate on self. Men who do not *seek the things that are Jesus Christ's*, seek *their own*. Inordinate self-love is the ruling passion of their hearts, and the governing principle of their lives. They love themselves, not as they ought to love themselves, but supremely. They set up their own private good as the highest object of desire and pursuit. Their affections operate in a very narrow circle. They have no ultimate regard but to themselves. They have but one interest, and that is their own. A supreme re-

gard to their own happiness is the main spring of all that they do for God, of all that they do for themselves, and all that they do for their fellow men.

It is needless to say, that with this spirit, Christian self-denial has no communion. The nature of this heavenly grace is expansive. It is the result of a supreme attachment to a higher interest than our own. It lights on self; but does not terminate on self. It stops at nothing short of the highest good; and in pursuing that, terminates on an object large enough to gratify the strongest desires of the most benevolent mind. He who is not a stranger to the spirit of self-denial, has learned to make his own interest bend to the interest of God's kingdom; and that from supreme regard to the interest of God's kingdom, and not from supreme regard to himself. The glory of God is the great end of his conduct. It is his great concern that God should be glorified; that His laws should be obeyed; His gospel loved, and the highest interest of His infinitely extended Kingdom prevail and triumph. Once he denied Christ for himself; now he denies himself for Christ. Once he lived to himself; now he lives to God. No duty is so hard, that he is

not willing and resolved to perform; no sin so sweet, that he is not willing and resolved to forsake. He takes up the cross at the hazard of every thing. Nothing is too dear to give to Christ; nothing too great to be cheerfully sacrificed for the promotion of His glory. Such is the disposition of good men, that they *place their happiness* in the glory of God, and the prosperity of His kingdom. They delight in this, in itself considered. They love and pursue this, for what it is in itself considered, and not merely for the happiness which will result to them from pursuing it. And the spirit of disinterestedness will irresistibly impel them to do so\*. The glory of God the Christian must seek.

\* If the opposition of the present day to the use of the word disinterestedness did not strike deeper than at the *name*, we should be chargeable with great incivility in not abandoning the use of it. But we cannot abandon the *truth*—no, never! Once let the Christlike spirit of disinterestedness be reduced to the level of mere selfishness, and the maxims of Godwin, Bolingbroke, and Hume, will harmonize with the maxims of Edwards, Paul, and Jesus Christ. It well became an infidel to say, “Self-love is the only spring from which all moral duties and affections flow.” It well became the Apostle to say, “Charity seeketh *not* her own.” Here their systems differ. Here their characters differ. This is the point of difference between the precious and the vile. Systems and characters

Seeking this, he cannot be miserable ; not seeking this, he cannot be happy. He knows he is but a point in the universe of God, "an atom in the sum of being," a single member of Christ's mystical body ; and is willing that God should lift him up, or cast him down at His pleasure. His own advancement is as a feather, a nothing, when put in

that diverge here, and that continue to diverge, will find the impassable gulph between them at last.

It is unhappy that plain Christians should have imbibed the notion, that the doctrine of disinterestedness is an innovation. *It is not true.* It is a doctrine of the *Reformation* ; a doctrine well understood, and clearly taught by the divines of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The leading principles of that doctrine as exhibited in this essay, do not differ from the views of *Calvin*, *Van Maastricht*, and *Witsius*.

"Non propterea," says the great *Witsius*, "Non propterea, sanctitate operam dat vere fidelis, ut gloriam famamque apud homines aucupetur. Non mercenario sui amore ad propria vel hujus, vel futura vitæ commoda solum collimat. Sublimior longe sanctorum est intentio : quæ in Deum, et in seipsos, et in proximum feruntur. Ante omnia Dei gloriam quærunt. Hanc amant, hujus amplificationem expetunt, omnique suo nisu promouent : Dicant jugiter, magnificetur Jehova, amantes salutis tue. Huc omnibus suis exercitiis tendunt, inoffenso cursu pergentes, at diem Christi ; repleti fructibus justitiæ, qui sunt per Jesum Christum, ad gloriam et laudem Dei. Quorum operum scaturigo et principium est amor Dei, eorum finis non potest non esse ejusdem Dei gloria. Qui

the balance against the honour of Christ and the good of His kingdom.

Such is the spirit of self-denial. It is the result of a calm, deliberate, invincible attachment to the highest good, flowing forth in the voluntary renunciation of every thing that is inconsistent

“ enim Deum impense amat, id quoque supra omnia amat,  
 “ quod Deo est amatissimum. Deus autem ita suam diligit  
 “ gloriam, ut ejus gratia faciat quodcunque facit; ideo om-  
 “ nia sunt ex ipso, ut sint rursus ad ipsum, et ipsi gloria  
 “ sit in secula. Hac quoque in parte Deo similes sancti sunt,  
 “ quod in omnibus actionibus suis Dei gloriam præ oculis  
 “ habeant.

“ *Post hanc* Divini nominis gloriam, licet quoque viro sancto  
 “ sui ipsius rationem in virtutum suarum exercitio habere :  
 “ atque id intendere, ut suæ sibi a Deo electionis æternæ sit  
 “ conscius—ut inoffensæ conscientiæ testimonio, eaque quæ  
 “ illud consequitur, tranquillitate exultet, &c. Hæc tamen  
 “ omnia ita expetere sanctitas Christiana docet, non ut nis  
 “ tanquam *ultimo sine* subsistamus; sed ut *ea* quoque ad  
 “ *Dei gloriam* referamus.” That is,

The true believer does not strive to obtain holiness for the sake of human applause. He does not, by a *mercenary self-love*, aim merely at his own advantage, either in *this* life or the *life to come*. The object of good men is far more pure and elevated; whereby they are carried out both toward God, themselves, and their neighbour. Above all things, they seek the *glory of God*. This is the grand object of their affections. This, they ardently desire and indefatigably pur-

with the glory of God, and the good of our fellow-men.

That this is the scriptural idea of self-denial, it would be easy to illustrate by a multitude of examples. This is the elevated spirit that prompted the father of the faithful to offer up the son

*sue. Let such as love thy salvation, say continually, the Lord be magnified! Hither, in all their exercises they tend, proceeding in an easy course, until the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God. As the source and principle of their works is the love of God, so the end of them is His glory. For he who loves God fervently, loves above all things what is most beloved by God. But God so loves His own glory, that whatever He does, He does with a view to promote it; so that all things are of Him, that they may be again to Him, and to Him be the glory for ever. In this respect the saints are like God, because in all their actions, they have a supreme regard to His glory.*

In subordination to the glory of the Divine Name, the child of God may also in the exercise of the christian graces, have respect to himself, and endeavour to gain the assurance of his own eternal election—to rejoice in the testimony of a good conscience, and in that peace of mind which flows therefrom, &c. But evangelical holiness teaches so to desire these things as not to rest in them as our ultimate end, but to direct even them to the glory of God.

Vid. Hermannii Witsii, *de æconomica fœderum*. Lib. III. cap. xii. p. 478—81,

of promise; that bore the three worthies of Babylon to the burning fiery furnace, and that led the Apostles and martyrs to glory in tribulation. It has borne the test of ridicule and reproach; stood undaunted before the scourge and the prison; triumphed amidst the light of the faggot, and smiled at the point of the sword. This is the spirit which shone with such signal lustre in the sufferings and death of our Blessed Lord. It was eminently the characteristic of this Divine Personage, that in all He did and suffered, *He pleased not Himself*. He sought *not His own glory*, but the glory of the Father who sent Him. *Though He was rich, yet for OUR SAKES He became poor, that we through His poverty might become rich*. He often anticipated the day of His death, and in itself considered, earnestly desired to be delivered from that fatal hour. He knew the malice of His enemies, and expected to feel the weight of it in His last sufferings. He foresaw all the circumstances that would add poignancy to his anguish, and foresaw them with distress and agony. But does He shrink from the dreadful undertaking? You see Him steadfastly setting His face to go to Jerusalem; you hear Him telling His disciples that He *must* go; He *must* suffer; he *must* be killed; but do you hear Him complain? Go to Gethsemane, and



there behold the Son of God under the most clear and awful view of His approaching crucifixion, and learn what it is to deny yourself for the sake of advancing the Father's glory. Listen to the language of a heart already broken with grief: "*I am poured out like water, all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. This body sweats as it were great drops of blood. The hidings of my Father's face are enough to bury me in eternal darkness. The guilt of this falling world will sink my feeble frame to the grave. O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me! But now is my soul troubled. The hour is come, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour! But for this cause came I to this hour. Father, GLORIFY THY NAME!*" This was carrying self-denial to its highest pitch. So pure was the disinterestedness of the Saviour, that the sweetest feelings of His heart would have remained for ever ungratified, without the privilege of expiring on the cross.

This too is the spirit which is no less strongly enforced by precept than example. How often are believers exhorted, *NOT to seek THEIR OWN; NOT to live unto THEMSELVES; and whether they live,*

*to live UNTO THE LORD ; or whether they die, to die UNTO THE LORD ? That charity which the apostle represents as the distinguishing characteristic of believers, is self-denying ; it SEEKETH NOT her own. If any man, saith the divine Saviour, will come after me, let him DENY HIMSELF, and take up the cross and follow me. Whosoever will save his life shall lose it, and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake, shall find it.*

One would think it difficult, after such an explication, to be long in doubt as to the nature of one of the most decisive evidences of real religion. We can hardly turn to a page in the Bible, without being convinced, that the grand distinction between true religion and false, is that the one is disinterested, the other is supremely selfish. *For whether we be beside ourselves, says the apostle to the Corinthians, it is TO GOD ; or whether we be sober, it is for YOUR CAUSE. For the love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead ; and that He died for all, that they which live should NOT henceforth live UNTO THEMSELVES, but unto HIM WHICH DIED FOR THEM AND ROSE AGAIN. Those who are in the flesh, unbelievers, live unto*

themselves ; those who are in the spirit, believers, live unto Christ. There are but two moral characters that are essentially different, and this is the radical difference between them.

Here then you have another criterion of Christian character. It is not supposed that in the present state, we shall find self-denial unalloyed with selfishness. *There is not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not.* Still, in the affections and conduct of every child of God, the spirit of self-denial is the prominent feature. He who possesses most of this spirit, possesses most of the spirit of his Divine Master. In the same proportion in which the glory of God and the welfare of His kingdom take the place of personal advancement, does vital religion predominate in the soul.

I wish I could press this point upon the conscience of the reader as closely as its importance demands. The end of the Christian in the exercise of grace, is the *glory of God*, and not merely his own present or future happiness. The object at which he aims rises far above any thing that is confined within the limited circle of which his little self is the centre. Let the reader call

in his wandering thoughts, and inquire, Have I ever been taught to fix my heart on any thing infinitely more important than *myself*? Do not all my religious affections spring from some *selfish motive*? Is the desire of self-advancement, or the desire to advance the glory of God, the paramount principle of my feelings and conduct?

The Monastery and the Cloister, are not the only evidences that there is much of the show of self-denial where there is none of its spirit. We must look diligently into the nature of our religion, if we would not be deceived. Men may deny themselves in a thousand instances, from no other motive than that they expect to be the gainers by it. *And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.* You cannot know whether your self-denial is genuine, or whether it is spurious, without knowing whether it is founded upon a supreme attachment to the glory of God. To deny yourself from a supreme regard to a higher interest than your own, is to possess the spirit of the gospel. Is this then the principle which regulates your conduct both toward God and toward man? Which do you pursue most, your interest or your duty? Which do you think of most, your interest or your du-

ty? Can you sell all for the pearl of great price? Can you renounce your ease, your profit, your honour, when they come in competition with your duty? Can you renounce every thing which is inconsistent with the glory of God, and the highest good of your fellow men? Are these the natural breathings of your heart—*Thy kingdom come! Thy will be done!* Is the highest interest of this kingdom identified with the object of your highest wish, and your most vigorous exertion? Is the cause of Christ your concern? the dishonour of Christ, your affliction; the cross of Christ your glory? If so, you are not strangers to the spirit of self-denial. You are not without conclusive evidence, that you are born from above. The more you forget yourselves in a supreme regard for God's glory, the more will you advance your own interest, both in this world and that which is to come. But the more you seek a selfish, private, separate interest, in opposition to the glory of God, the more are you seeking an interest which God has determined to destroy.

## ESSAY XI.

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### SPIRIT OF PRAYER.

SAUL of Tarsus was once a hardened obstinate sinner. He styles himself the chief of sinners, a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious. But he was a chosen vessel. It pleased God, who separated him from his mother's womb, suddenly to arrest him in his career ; and near the spot where he had anticipated the success of a commission armed with the most unrelenting virulence against the trembling Christians, to humble him to the dust. He had in all its strength and prominence, borne the image of the earthly ; but now he bears the image of the heavenly. *Behold*, saith the testimony of the faithful and true witness, *Behold, he prayeth !* He is not now the persecuting Saul ; but the heaven-born, praying Paul, The

proud Pharisee has become the humble suppliant; the stubborn rebel the meek child of Jesus. "No sooner is the soul born than it breathes; no sooner is Paul converted, than *Behold, he prays!*"

When we say that the spirit of prayer is conclusive evidence of Christian Character, we feel under obligation to point out wherein that spirit consists. We are not to forget that there is such a thing as *drawing nigh unto God with the mouth, and honouring Him with the lips, while the heart is far from Him.* The hearts of men may be as stupid and unfeeling, as proud and as self-righteous; they may be in the exercise of as sensible opposition to the character of the Most High, to the law and the gospel, while offering up the most solemn expressions of homage, as they are when God is not in all their thoughts. But it is not so with the righteous. His prayer *goeth not forth out of feigned lips.* With the spiritual worshipper, the heart feels what the lips express.

The spirit of prayer is humble. It flows from a broken and contrite heart. The publican *could not so much as lift up his eyes to heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sin-*

ner ! Before Him who is so great, that the nations are as the drop of the bucket in His presence ; and so holy, that the heavens are impure in His sight ; the suppliant feels as a man of unclean lips. Every sentiment of his heart constrains him to make the affecting confession, *O my God, I am ashamed, and blush to lift up my face to Thee, for my iniquities are increased over my head, and my trespass is grown up unto the Heavens !* Sometimes a sense of guilt so overwhelms the soul, as to prevent its free access to the throne. *Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me,* says the Psalmist, *so that I am not able to look up ; they are more than the hairs of mine head, therefore my heart faileth me.*

The spirit of prayer is also believing. Numerous and aggravated as his sins appear ; much as they attempt to discourage the believer from duty, he does not yield to the discouragement. He has respect unto the sacrifice of the Son of God. *He believes that God is, and that He is a rewarder of all who diligently seek Him.* He looks to Jesus, the Mediator of the better covenant, as the way of access to the Father. The efficacy of His blood, the virtue of His righteousness is his only plea. He has an unshaken confidence,



that God can glorify Himself by answering his requests for Christ's sake, and he is therefore emboldened to press them in Christ's name. Though he has a lively sense of his own unworthiness, yet he knows that *he has a Great High Priest that has passed into the Heavens, Jesus the Son of God, who is touched with a feeling of his infirmities, and he therefore comes boldly to the throne of grace, that he may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.* Until the work of redeeming grace shall cease; until the Father shall forget the Son of His love; until the name of Christ shall cease to be precious, and His intercession shall be no longer prevailing—faith in the blood of the spotless sacrifice will appertain to the nature of prayer.

But the spirit of prayer is also submissive. The suppliant prefers God's will to his own. This was the disposition which our Blessed Lord manifested in the Garden. It was an awful thought to Him to die; but it was a still more awful one, that His Father's will should not be accomplished. Though Christ viewed the death of the cross in its own nature dreadful, yet he viewed the will of His Father delightful. He

chose that His Father's will should be done rather than His own. *The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?* His will was absorbed in the will of God. *O my Father, IF IT BE POSSIBLE, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not MY will, but THINE be done!* This, in a greater or less degree, is the spirit of every genuine suppliant. He pours forth the fulness of his heart in the affectionate language of a child, and the submissive language of a servant. He is prepared to be accepted, or to be rejected in his petitions. He approaches the mercy-seat with the desire that God would exercise His wisdom and grace in granting or denying his requests.

This is the spirit of prayer; sincere, humble, believing, submissive. Other prayer than this the Bible does not require, God will not accept. This is the spirit of genuine devotion; a spirit which you cannot be conscious of possessing, without the consciousness of your reconciliation to God. *Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying Abba, Father.* If you possess this spirit, though it be in a very imperfect state, you enjoy the high privilege of being adopted into God's family, and of occupying the place, not of strangers, not

of foreigners, not merely of servants, but of children, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ. *When the Spirit bears witness with our spirits that we are the children of God*, how high the pleasure to utter our acknowledgments, to lisp our praise, to breathe forth our complaints toward Heaven! What tongue can express the sweetness of these seasons of refreshing! How is the heart enlarged! *Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty*. No slavish fear perplexes the mind; no frown of divine displeasure guards the throne of mercy. The children of the common Father come near even to His seat. There they taste and see that the Lord is gracious; there, they are assimilated into the likeness of the Holy One; there they see the clearest manifestations of the divine beauty; and *beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord*.

Does the reader possess the spirit of prayer? Is it his meat and his drink to hold communion with God—*through Christ, to have access by one Spirit unto the Father*? Is it his greatest pleasure to be near to God, and his greatest grief to be far from Him? If so, however great his fears, he

may hope. His privilege is the privilege of sons ; his consolations, those hidden joys with which a stranger intermeddleth not ; his seasons of refreshing, foretastes of the river of life, which flows from the throne of God and the Lamb.

It may not be amiss, while we are upon this subject, to spend a few minutes in looking at the question, What evidence does the long continued practice of the *external duty* of prayer afford of the existence of vital religion in the heart? We do not mean, by this statement, necessarily to exclude the spirit from the form of prayer. If we did, the question would be at an end. What evidence does the long continued practice of the *external form* afford of the existence of the *internal spirit*? It is a question of moment.

Men may pray much, and yet not be Christians. They may pray in public, and in their families, and still not be Christians. This they may do to gratify their pride ; to be seen of men ; to maintain the character of Christians in the view of the world. They may pray in secret and not be Christians : But whether men *persevere in the habitual practice of secret prayer* without good evidence

of Christian character, is a question which I dare not answer in the negative. Neither would I venture to answer it unhesitatingly in the affirmative. This much the Bible will surely warrant us to say, *Men who are not Christians will be exceedingly apt to neglect, and in the end, wholly to neglect the practice of secret prayer.* Men do not act without motive. Now what motive can induce a man who is dead in trespasses and sins, whose carnal heart is enmity against God, to persevere in the habitual practice of secret prayer? Is it to silence the clamours of a guilty conscience? To do this, he will pray, and often pray in secret. But will he *always* call upon God? The impenitent are sometimes the subjects of much seriousness; they are convinced of their duty, and alarmed at their danger; and while they remain in this state, they are compelled to admit the truth and importance of religion, and dare not omit the duty of secret prayer. But when they lose their convictions and forget their danger, the duties of the closet gradually become irksome. At length, they are a weariness. Conscience ceases to govern, and almost to accuse. Her monitory voice is silenced; and it becomes less and less difficult to *cast off fear, and restrain prayer* before God.

There is another motive which will induce the impenitent to maintain the practice of secret devotion for a considerable length of time. When once they have wrought themselves into the persuasion that they are Christians, and have cherished the hope that they are interested in the blessings of the gospel salvation, they relinquish the persuasion, and abandon the hope with singular reluctance. They will do much to entertain and defend them. They are too selfish to omit a duty, the omission of which bears in its very face convincing evidence that they are hypocrites. They will rather practise the most self-denying duties, even long after they have lost their borrowed sweetness, for the sake of the testimony which they derive from this source, that they are the children of God. This motive no doubt operates in many instances powerfully, and for some time; but does it operate uniformly, and to the end of life? With persons of this description, the omission of secret prayer is at first occasional; then, more or less frequent as other avocations demand; till, at length, the cares of the world, the temptations of the Adversary, and the allurements of sin so far blind the understanding and stupify the conscience, that the most hardened sinner still cherishes his vain

confidence, while he closes his eyes upon the last glimmering of evidence that that confidence is scriptural.

But though men may pray, and pray sometimes in secret, they will be exceedingly apt to neglect this duty, if they are not Christians. Wherever you find the habitual performance of secret prayer for a long course of years, there is some reason to believe, you find the breathings of the new born soul. There you may hope that there are hungerings and thirstings after righteousness. There you will usually discover a heart that is not in pursuit of hope merely, but grace; not safety only, but holiness. There you will usually, if not always, discover one, not muttering over a few unmeaning sentences, as devoid of life as a loathsome carcass is of the life-giving spirit; but one whom the Spirit of God has taught to pray, because he is weak and needs strength; because he is tempted and needs support; because he is in want and needs supply; because he is a sinner and needs mercy.

If these remarks are just, it is not impertinent to ask the reader, whether he practises the duty of

secret prayer? We do not ask whether he prays in secret now and then; whether he performs this duty on the Sabbath, or some occasional seasons of unusual alarm or solemnity? Is this his *habitual* practice? Has it been his habitual practice ever since he hoped he was brought out of darkness into God's marvellous light? No matter how punctual you are in other duties; no matter what evidence you have of your conversion from any other quarter; if you have not this, you may set all other down for nought. The want of this is decisive evidence against you, even if the possession of it is not decisive evidence in your favour. Prayer has been often styled the "Christian's breath." It is eminently so. A prayerless Christian! No, it cannot be. It is a mark of the highest delusion, of the grossest stupidity, to cherish the hope of having made your peace with God, and at the same time to live in the neglect of secret prayer. Who that has the least pretension to religion, can presume to live without seeking the favour, without deprecating the wrath, and without realizing the presence of Him in whom he lives, and moves, and has his being? To live without prayer, is emphatically, to *live without God in the world.*



Before I conclude this essay, I would give one caution to a certain class of readers. There are not wanting those who live in constant doubt and trembling, because they do not enjoy the constant presence of God, and the uniform fervency of affection in their retirements. Real Christians have seasons of coldness which chill the spirit of devotion. Such is the power of indwelling sin; so great is the influence of the world, the flesh, and the Devil, that even God's own dear children are sometimes carried too far down the current. Yes, to the shame and guilt of God's people, we are constrained to make this affecting acknowledgment. Still, this humiliating truth does not militate against our general principle. Real Christians cannot live in the neglect of prayer; nay, more, those who do not possess the spirit, and live in the habitual performance of the duty, are *in the gall of bitterness, and the bonds of iniquity*. The moment a man begins to live in the neglect of prayer, that moment he should take the alarm.

May it then be said of you as it was of Saul of Tarsus, *Behold he prayeth*? If so, then you like him may be a *chosen vessel*. Maintain a constant and uniform intimacy with the throne of grace,

and for the sake of our Great High Priest, God will *put his fear into your hearts, and you shall not depart from him.* Draw nigh unto God, and he will draw nigh unto you. Keep near to the fountain head, and *with joy shall you draw water out of the wells of salvation.*

## ESSAY XII.

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### LOVE TO THE BRETHREN.

THE eminent Dr. Owen, speaking of the primeval state of man, remarks, that “the whole beauty of the creation below consisted in man’s loving God above all, and all other things in Him, and for Him, according as they did participate His glory and properties.” That was a hopeless hour when the golden chain that bound God to man, and man to God and to each other, was broken. *Adam, where art thou?* Adam heard, and was afraid. The earth was cursed, and refused to yield her strength. Sin polluted all the joys of Paradise; apostate man became the heir of misery, and henceforth dwelt in darkness, cherishing the seeds of *malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another.*

Upon this dismal gloom, not a ray has dawned but from the cross of Christ. It is the prerogative of the gospel of Jesus to publish the *glad tidings of great joy*; and while it proclaims, *GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST, to restore peace on earth, and good will to man.* This gospel breathes the spirit of love. Love is the fulfilling of its precepts, the pledge of its joys, and the evidence of its power. *We know*, saith the apostle, *that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.*

The love of the brotherhood is not one of the native affections of the carnal mind. This cold, degenerate soil, bears no such heavenly fruit. The affection which Christians exercise toward each other as Christians, is the offspring of brighter worlds. It is a principle of celestial birth. *Love is of God, and every one that loveth, is born of God, and knoweth God.*

Brotherly love is an affection which is limited to particular characters. There can be no doubt but the children of God are kindly affectioned toward all men. Christian benevolence runs parallel with rational being. Genuine love to

our neighbour is extended to all, according to their character and circumstances. It *blesses those who curse us, and does good to those who hate us*. This, however, is not the distinguishing nature of brotherly love. Brotherly love differs materially from the love of benevolence. It is the love of good men, and for their goodness only. It extends only to the followers of Christ. It is an affection which is directed toward the excellence of religion. It is complacency in holiness.

There is something in the character of every child of God that reflects the image of his heavenly Father. It is this that attracts the eye and wins the heart. There is something which is amiable and lovely. And it is this loveliness that gives a spring to the affections and draws forth the hearts of God's people toward each other, as they are drawn forth toward God Himself. The children of God are partakers of the divine nature. From bearing the *image of the earthly*, they now bear *the image of the heavenly*. God has imparted to them a portion of His own loveliness. He has formed them new creatures. Of his free and distinguishing grace, He has made them, as they are styled by the Wise Man, *more excellent than their neighbours*. Hence they are lovely. They are

*the excellent of the earth.* God loves them; Christ loves them; the Holy Spirit loves them; angels love them; and they love each other. It is around them that the virtues cluster; from them that the graces of heaven are reflected; though shaded, and very often darkened, by the most debasing and reproachful sins.

Love to the brethren is also an affection which rests upon the union which believers sustain with Christ. The Lord Jesus, together with all true believers, forms one mystical body. Christ is the head, and they are the members. From Him *the whole body, fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body* UNTO THE EDIFYING OF ITSELF IN LOVE. This union is represented by the Apostle not only as the foundation of that communion which believers maintain with Christ, but of that which exists between believers themselves. The same bond which unites believers to Christ, binds them to each other. The love which is exercised toward the head, extends to the members. The union itself necessarily involves an union of affection. Those who love Christ, love those who are like Him, and those who are beloved by

Him. Here all distinctions vanish. Name and nation, rank and party, are lost in the common character of believers, the common name of Christian. Jew and Gentile, bond and free, rich and poor, are one in Christ Jesus. They have *one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in them all*. Actuated by the same principles, cherishing the same hopes, animated by the same prospects, labouring under the same discouragements, having the same enemies to encounter, and the same temptations to resist, the same hell to shun, and the same heaven to enjoy ; it is not strange that they should love one another sincerely, and often *with a pure heart fervently*. There is an unity of design, a common interest in the objects of their pursuit, which lays the foundation for mutual friendship, and which cannot fail to excite the "harmony of souls." The glory of God is the grand object which commands their highest affections, and which necessarily makes the interest of the whole the interest of each part, and the interest of each part the interest of the whole. They rejoice in each other's blessedness. There are no conflicting interests, and there need be no jarring passions. In a common cause, in a common cause which in point of importance takes the

place of every other, and all others, the affections of the sanctified heart are one.

Love to the brethren, though in practice not always distinguished, yet in theory is easily distinguishable from all those affections and attachments that are purely natural. Men may love Christians, merely because they imagine that Christians love them. This, like every other affection that is purely selfish, is unworthy of the Christian name. They may love particular Christians, because they are of their party, and imbibe their sentiments. This too is nothing better than that friendship of the world which is enmity with God. They may esteem Christians merely from the force of education and habit. The people of God may not be the objects of contempt or aversion, and still they may not be the objects of complacency. Indeed our consciences may constrain us to respect them ; the habits of early education may lead us often to associate with them ; while we have no affectionate regard for the excellence of their character.

That love which is excited toward Christians, *as Christians*, is a constituted proof of saving grace.



The reader will do well therefore, to examine his own heart, and see whether he is conscious of cherishing love toward the people of God *because they are the people of God*. Does he love them because he discovers in them the amiableness of that divine religion which is altogether lovely? Does he love them not merely because they love him, or have bestowed favours upon him; not because they are of his party; but because they bear the image of his heavenly Father? Is his love active? Is it a principle that lives, that manifests itself by all those methods whereby the good of the brotherhood may be advanced? Does it discover itself in the delight which he takes in the company and conversation of the Lord's people, and in every opportunity which he has to exchange the tokens, and strengthen the bonds of mutual affection? Can he from the heart adopt the resolution of Ruth, *Whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God*. Tell me, reader, do you feel toward the children of God as toward the children of one common Father, and the brethren of one common family? Do you love them because they bear the image of the common Father? And do you love them in propor-

tion to the degree in which they bear the image? Can you bear and forbear with them? Can you forget their infirmities, or do you rejoice to magnify them? Can you cast the mantle of charity over their sins, and pray for them, and watch over them, and pity, and blame, and love them still? And can you feel thus, and act thus, toward the poorest and most despised of the flock, and that because *he is a Christian*? If so, here is your encouragement, *He that loveth is born of God*. Yours is the spirit of a better world. The Paradise you lost by Adam, you shall regain by Christ. Allied to spirits born on high, you shall ascend to purer regions, and breathe a purer air. Far from the tumult of this apostate earth, you shall yet rest beneath the peaceful shades of Eden, where blooms immortal amaranth “fast by the  
“ tree of life.”

## **ESSAY XIII.**

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### **NON-CONFORMITY TO THE WORLD.**

**SAINTS** are expectants of glory. They are born from above, and have no home beneath their native skies. Here they are strangers and pilgrims, and plainly declare that they seek a better country. It is their avowed profession, that their happiness and hopes are neither in, nor from the present world. Their treasure is in Heaven. Much as they are influenced by the spirit, governed by the maxims, awed by the frowns, and seduced by the flattery of the world; they are so far aloof from all its corrupting influence, that between them and the world, there is a distinct line of demarcation. Perfectly aloof from the corruptions of the world, they are not in the present life. But

they are sufficiently so to make their non-conformity a distinguishing trait in their character. They have come out, and are separate. They are on the Lord's side. They are a city set on a hill; so far raised above the common level of the world, that they *cannot be hid*. *They are not of this world, even as Christ was not of this world.* Such is the excellence of their character and the purity of their conduct, that the world is constrained to *take knowledge of them that they have been with Jesus.*

The *spirit* of the world is incompatible with the spirit of the gospel. It is the spirit of pride, and not of humility; of self-indulgence, rather than of self-denial. Riches, honours, and pleasure, form the grand object of pursuit with the men of the world. Worldly men are solicitous to lay up treasures for themselves, and are not rich toward God. Their great inquiry is, "*Who will show us any good? What shall we eat, what shall we drink, or wherewithal shall we be clothed?*" They are *sensual, not having the spirit.* Regardless of every thing but that which is calculated to gratify a carnal mind, they *lift up their souls unto vanity, and pant after the dust of the earth.* Their thoughts and their affections are chained down to

the things of time and sense. In these they seem to be irrecoverably immersed. They seldom think, but they think of the world; they seldom converse, but they converse of the world. The world is the cause of their perplexity, and the source of their enjoyment. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, close every avenue of the soul to the exclusion of every holy desire, I had almost said, every serious reflection.

This spirit, the Christian has mortified. *Now we*, saith the Apostle, *Now we have not received the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God.* The heavenly mind looks down on the things of the world as *lying vanities that cannot profit.* The disciple of Jesus, as he has nobler affections than the worldling, has a higher object and more elevated joys. *What things were gain to him, those he counts loss for Christ, yea, doubtless he counts all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord; for whom he is ready to suffer the loss of all things, and to count them but dung that he may win Christ.* While the wise man glories in his wisdom; while the mighty man glories in his might, and the rich man glories in his riches—it is his privilege to glory in the Lord;

to glory in nothing save *in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified to him, and he to the world.* The character and cause of the Blessed Redeemer lie so near his heart, that, in comparison with these, every thing else vanishes to nothing. He views the world by the eye of faith. He sees it in a light that reflects its intrinsic importance: the light of Eternity. There, the world shrinks to a point. The fashion of it passeth away. *All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field.* Compared with durable riches and righteousness, its highest enjoyments are trifles, light as air. *Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.*

As the spirit of the world is not the spirit of God's people, so the *men* of the world are not their companions. The saints are a peculiar people. The church is uniformly represented as a society that is distinct from the world. *We know that we are of God, saith the apostle, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.* Between the people of God, and the men of the world, there is an essential difference of character. The views, the desires, and the designs of the children of God, are diametrically opposite to the views, the de-

sires, and the designs of the men of the world. The one loves what the other hates. The one pursues what the other shuns. Saints are passing the narrow way which leads to life; sinners the broad way which leads to death. Hence there is no common bond between them. The dissimilarity of character, the diversity in the great objects of pursuit, naturally draw them asunder. If there were no other ground for the expectation, therefore, than the common principles of human nature, we might look for dissention rather than unity, between the disciples of Christ and the men of the world. *How can two walk together, except they be agreed? What fellowship hath light with darkness? Or what communion hath Christ with Belial?* The same principles which prompt the men of the world not to select the people of God for their familiar companions, also induce the people of God to choose other companions than the men of the world. There is an irreconcilable spirit between them. *The friendship of the world is enmity with God.* Many as may be the mutual tokens of respect, civility, and kindness, (and many there should be,) between christians and the men of the world, they are, notwithstanding, two distinct classes of men. Much as Christians esteem the men of the world as good members of civil so-

ciety; much as they regard their happiness, and endeavour to advance it; much as they compassionate their depravity, and deplore their prospects; much as they are conversant with them in the ordinary calls of duty—still, they are not their chosen companions. They cannot court their friendship; because they are afraid of it. *Evil communications corrupt good manners. He that walketh with wise men shall be wise; but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.*

Those who have mortified the spirit, and who stand at a distance from the men of the world, are also in some good degree above its *corrupting influence*. The claim which, from their numbers and strength, the world are apt to consider themselves as warranted to make upon the opinions and practices of God's people, is habitually resisted. Though good men may be often seduced by the smiles, and awed by the frowns of the world, it is no part of their general character to conform either to its pleasure or displeasure. They act from higher motives, and maintain a more consistent character, than to give way to indulgencies merely for the sake of pleasing the world; or to avoid duty, merely through the fear



of offending it. While they regard the fear of God more than the fear of man, they will not dishonour God to please the world. And while they regard the favour of God more than the favour of man, they will not purchase the favour of man at the expense of the favour of God. An habitual regard to the will and the favour of God is an effectual security against the smiles of the world. The great object of the Christian is *duty*; his predominant desire, to obey God. When he can please the world consistently with these, he will do so; otherwise, it is enough for him that God commands; and enough for them that he cannot disobey. The same spirit is also an effectual security against the frowns of the world. Real Christians cannot be more afraid of the displeasure of the world, than of the displeasure of God. While they dread to offend God, they cannot tamely bow to the frowns of men. *Whether it be right to hearken unto men, rather than unto God, judge ye!* This was the spirit of the early disciples; and this will be the spirit of every disciple down to the latest period of time. So far as he manifests the spirit of Christ, wherever he is, whatever he does, the fear of God uniformly predominates over the fear of man, and the love of God, rather than the love of the world,

bears uncontrolled sway over his affections and conduct.

There would be no difficulty in pointing out the *path of duty* upon this general subject ; but there is some in saying, how far men may swerve from this path, and yet be Christians. One thing is plain : Christians cannot be worldlings. They cannot be lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God. He who fixes his highest affections on wealth, honour, business, sensual pleasures, gay amusements, and the various pursuits of the present scene, cannot fix them supremely on God. *No man can serve two masters ; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.*

Nor is the character of the vast multitude who attempt to make a compromise between God and the world, better than that of the mere worldling. *They are of their father the Devil, and the lusts of their father they will do.* The mere fact that they are for ever balancing between a life of devotion and a life of pleasure ; that they design now to yield the empire to God, and then to the world, decides the question against them.

We must not deny that the children of God are sometimes guilty of awful defection from the standard of Christian Character in their intercourse with the world. But after all, their prevailing feelings and conduct are not those of conformity to the world, but of habitual non-conformity. The principles of the new man are at war with the principles of the world. True believers have *put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and have put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.* This I say then, saith the Apostle, *walk in the Spirit, and ye SHALL NOT fulfil the lusts of the flesh.* We cannot walk after the flesh while we walk after the Spirit. While the love of God is the reigning affection of the heart, it will turn away with disgust from the allurements of the world. The spirit of Christians is a heavenly spirit. They *look not on things that are seen, but on those that are unseen, for the things that are seen are temporal, but the things that are unseen are eternal.* They *set their affections on things above, and not on things on the earth.*

This subject presents a number of solemn questions, to every one who is anxious to ascer-

tain whether his heart is right in the sight of God. It is a great point with all of us to know, Whether we are spiritually-minded, or worldly-minded? Whether we are *conformed to this world, or transformed by the renewing of our minds*? Whether the objects of faith or of sense, things present or to come, have the predominating influence over our hearts?

What shall we say of those, and of those professing Christians too, who exhibit to themselves, and to others, all the traits of character which belong to worldly men? What of those, who pursue worldly things with all that ardour, all that intemperate zeal, which enters into the pursuits of worldly men? Is there not reason to fear, that they are supremely attached to earth, and are as yet aliens from the commonwealth of Israel?

What shall we say of those who love the circles of fashion, more than the associations for prayer? and who court the friendship of the rich, the gay, and the honourable, more than that of the humble disciple of Jesus? What of those *who send forth their little ones like a flock, and their children dance; who take the timbrel and*

*harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ? Was Job uncharitable, when he ranked persons of this character with those who say unto God, Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways?*

What shall we say of those, who are for ever varying from the path of duty, lest it should be unpopular; who never lisp a syllable, or lift a finger for the honour of God, lest they should displease the world? What, but that *they love the praise of men more than the praise of God?*

Conformity to the world, is to be expected from the professed worldling. It is the character of the worldling. But *is it to be expected from the professed disciple of Jesus?* Is it the result of the habitual determinations of a heavenly mind. Is it the character of one who looks on things that are unseen and eternal; of a stranger and sojourner; of one who sets his affections on things above, and not on things on the earth? How many, like the young man in the gospel, exhibit a decent and regular outward profession, who are wholly devoted to the world! Here their affections centre. From this polluted fountain all their joys flow. They had been Christians but

for the world. But the world is the fatal snare. They have plunged down the precipice, and drifted almost beyond the hope of recovery.

*If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.* The expression of the Apostle is not too strong: *To be carnally minded is DEATH.* Show me the men who imbibe the spirit of the world; who choose the company of the world; who imitate the example of the world; conform to the maxims of the world; are swallowed up in the gayety, fashions, and amusements of the world;—*behold these are the ungodly, who are brought into desolation as in a moment!*—*I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not; yea, I sought him, but he could not be found. Surely, thou didst set them in slippery places; thou castest them down into destruction.*

## ESSAY XIV.

### GROWTH IN GRACE.

How beautiful is the light of the morning! Behold it hovering over the distant edge of the horizon, and shedding its cheerful beams upon the hills. It is a *morning without clouds*. But how soon is the prospect overcast! The atmosphere is obscured by vapours, and the sun is darkened by a cloud. Again the mists are fled; the clouds have passed over; and the sun is still advancing in his course. Thus he rises; now, behind the cloud, now, in all the greatness of his strength, *shining brighter and brighter unto the perfect day*. Such is the *path of the just*. In the present world, good men are very imperfect. The best of men have reason to

complain bitterly of the body of sin and death ; and the best of men too, have the most ardent desires that the body of sin and death may be *crucified with Christ*. The highest point of Christian experience is to press forward. It is a distinguishing trait in the character of every good man, that he *grows in grace*.

There are various similitudes used by the inspired writers, that are significantly expressive of the advancement of Christians in knowledge and in piety. The young convert is likened unto one that is newly born. There is a point of time in which he *begins* to live. At first, he is a babe ; then a child, till he finally attains unto the *measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ*. The kingdom of heaven is also compared to *seed which is cast into the ground*. First, cometh up the tender blade ; then, the thriving stalk ; then, the ear ; after that, the full corn in the ear, ripening for the harvest, and preparing for the garner of the husbandman. It is also compared to a *well of water, springing up into everlasting life*. No imagery in nature can more fully illustrate the growth of grace in the heart. *The righteous, saith Job, shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall wax*



*stronger and stronger.* This is the prominent feature in the character of the good man : *he shall hold on his way.* The youth, saith the evangelical prophet, *The youth shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall ; but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength ; they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint.* With inimitable beauty, is the good man described by the Psalmist. *And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season ; his leaf also shall not wither, and whatsoever he doth shall prosper.* Grace in the heart as certainly improves and advances, as a tree thrives in a kindly and well watered soil. “ It flourishes in immortal youth, and blooms for ever in unfading beauty.”

The certainty of the believer's progress, however, rests on a surer foundation, than either the degree or the nature of his religion. *We are not sufficient, says the Apostle, to think any thing as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God.* That the people of God will grow in the divine life, till they reach the stature of perfect men, and *are meet for the inheritance of the saints in light, is*

beyond all controversy. But the reason, and the sole reason, of this is, that it is *God that worketh in them to will and to do of his good pleasure*. Covenanted grace is the support of the believer through every step of his pilgrimage. There is nothing in the nature of holiness that is incapable of corruption. Adam fell; Angels fell. And such is the awful depravity of the human heart, that left to himself, the holiest saint on earth would draw back unto perdition. Still he shall progress in holiness throughout interminable ages. It is the economy of divine grace, where *God has begun a good work, to carry it on*; where he has given one holy exercise of heart, to give another and another, until the subject is ripened for glory.

The hypocrite, when once he imagines himself to be a Christian, views his work as done. He is satisfied. *He is rich, and increased in goods*. But it is otherwise with the true Christian. Conversion is but his first step. His work is all before him. His graces are increasingly constant and increasingly vigorous. The more he loves God, the more he desires to love him. The more he knows of His character, does he contemplate the manifestations of his glory with rising de-

light. *As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so doth his soul pant after God.* Having once tasted that the Lord is gracious, is not enough to satisfy him. He will ever remain unsatisfied till he reaches the fountain-head, and drinks to the full of *the river of life, which flows from the throne of God and the Lamb.* The more he sees of the evil of sin, the more he desires to see. The more he hates it, the more he desires to hate it. The more he sees of himself, the more he abhors himself, and the more does he desire to abhor himself. The more he is emptied of himself, the more does he desire to be emptied of himself; the more he desires to become poor in spirit, to feel that he is cut off from every hope, and to rest on Christ alone. The more he is engaged in duty, the more delight he finds in performing it. The more severe his conflict with the enemy, the harder he presses it, and the more vigorous his resolution to maintain it to the last.

There are some things in which the increase of grace is more visible, both to the world and the subject, than others. Particularly have the people of God less and less confidence in themselves. They cherish an increasing sense of their dependence. They have been so often disappointed in

their false confidences, that they have in some good measure become weaned from them. They know, by bitter experience, the folly of trusting to themselves. They have learned that *the way of man is not in himself*; that *it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps*. The independent, self-sufficient spirit of the carnal heart is broken down. They *walk by faith, and not by sight*. They daily taste the sweetness of that heavenly precept, *In all thy ways acknowledge God, and he shall direct thy paths: Cast all your care on the Lord, for He careth for you*.

They are more and more patient in sufferings. The more they are accustomed to the yoke, the less do they repine under the weight of it.

They are also more and more charitable in their opinions of others. Young Christians are too often very uncharitable and censorious. They are more apt to take notice of the infirmities of their brethren, than their graces, and the infirmities of others, than their own. But the more they know of themselves, the more reason do they see to exercise charity toward others. They fear *to judge*, lest they themselves

*should be also judged. They walk with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love.*

They have also the more full government of their passions. They are *slow to wrath*.

They are more and more punctual in the performance of the relative duties. Young Christians are apt to neglect them. They suffer the duties they owe immediately to God, to swallow up those that belong to their neighbour. But as they advance in the divine life, they become more uniform in the exercise of grace, and more punctual in the discharge of all duty. They do not love God less, but they love their fellow men more. As they grow more fervent and more constant in their devotional exercises, so they become more circumspect, and unexceptionable in their intercourse with the world.

Perhaps there is no one point in which growth in grace is more visible, than in that *harmony and consistency of character*, which are too often wanting in young Christians, but which shine with so much beauty in those who are advanced in the Christian course.

In every thing that belongs to the excellence of real religion, the true believer is in a state of progression. He seeks and strives, he wrestles and fights. He is ever aiming at the prize. View him in the early part of the divine life; follow him through the various stages of his progress; and you will find, that notwithstanding all his doubts and declensions, he makes a gradual advance. He does not feel, he does not act *as though he had already attained, either were already perfect; but he follows after, if he may apprehend that for which also he is apprehended of Christ Jesus.*

*This ONE THING I do, says Paul, forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth to those that are before, I press toward the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.* Where is the Christian, that does not make the spirit of the Apostle his own? Tell me, ye who have just begun the heavenly race; tell me, ye who are verging toward the goal; was there ever a Christian, that felt satisfied with present attainments? Is not the unvarying voice, both of early and long-tried piety, responsive to the language of Paul? Yes, reader, it is both the highest point of Christian experience, and the clearest evidence of Christian Character, to

**PRESS FORWARD.** The disciple of Jesus desires to be perfect; to be more and more conformed to the image of Christ. He presses after this. It is his grand inquiry, how to be, and how to live, more like a child of God.

*Mark the way of the upright.* As you trace his steps through this dreary pilgrimage, sometimes he wanders from the path; sometimes he halts and tires. His progress is far from being uniformly rapid, and often far from being perceptible, either by himself or others. Sometimes his motion is retrograde. There are seasons when, instead of advancing, he is the subject of great defection. Still it is true, that *on the whole*, he advances. If you compare his present state and character with what they were a considerable length of time past, you will find that he has made gradual progress. I know there are seasons—dark and gloomy seasons, seasons of guilt and declension—when the real Christian will make this comparison at the expense of his hopes. Be it so. Seasons of guilt and declension, ought to be seasons of darkness. I know too that there are seasons, when he is liable to discouragement, because he does not always experience that light and joy which crowned the

day of his espousals. This is a serious error. There is a glow of affection, a flush of joy, which is felt by the young convert, as he is just ushered into the world of grace, which perhaps may not be felt at any future period of his life. And you cannot from this draw the inference that he has made no advance. All this may be true, while there is a power of feeling, a strength of affection, in the saint who has passed through the wilderness and knows the trials of the way, to which the young convert is a stranger. As he ascends the mount, his eye is fixed; his step is more vigorous; and his path brighter and brighter. He remembers his devious steps, and how he traced them back with tears. But the trials of the way are forgotten. He is rising to that brightness of purity, which "sheds the lustre of eternity" on his character, and aiming at the crown of righteousness which fadeth not away.

Here then is another test of the genuineness of your religion. I am aware that it is a severe one. But it is one which bears the seal of truth; and we must not shrink from it. Professing Christians are apt to place too much confidence on their past experience, and think little of the present; to think much on what they imagine



to have been their conversion, their first work, and then give up the business of self-examination, and allow themselves to droop and decline. But the question is, *what is your present character?* "Grace is the evidence of grace." I know it is true, that he who is once a Christian is always a Christian; but it is also true, that he who is not *now* a Christian *never was* a Christian. *Examine yourself, therefore, and see whether you be in the faith.* The best evidence in the world that you are, is that you grow in grace.

Now apply the principle. Have you, *on the whole*, since you first began to hope that you were united to the Lord Jesus Christ, been growing in grace? The question is plain and decisive.

Do you never *hunger and thirst after righteousness?* Do you never see the seasons when you are conscious of the most sensible desires after increasing conformity to God?

Do you never feel the burden of remaining corruption, and ardently desire to be delivered from its power? Do you never find your heart drawn out in fervent supplication for sanctifying grace, as well as pardoning mercy?

Do you now desire to *press forward*, to renounce every thing, and to take God for *all* your portion? Do you strive to live nearer to Him, and are you resolved to persevere to the end, in a life of faith in Him *who loved you and gave himself for you*?

If you can ingenuously answer these questions in the affirmative, you are not destitute of evidence, that *you have passed from death unto life*. But if you know nothing of all this, cast away your vain confidence. No man living in spiritual sloth, and making no new advances, ought to flatter himself that he is interested in the blessings of the great salvation. The man who is satisfied, because he thinks he is safe; who feels that he has religion enough, because he thinks he has enough to save him from hell; is as ignorant of the power, as he is a stranger to the consolation, of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

## ESSAY XV.

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### PRACTICAL OBEDIENCE.

You have no right to call me, *Lord, Lord*, saith the Saviour, *unless you do the things which I say. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love, even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.* You cannot claim the character, you cannot share the privileges of my people, without yielding a cordial, an habitual and persevering obedience to the divine commandments.

After all that can be said of the nature of the Christian graces ; after every effort to discriminate between true religion and false ; the spirit of obedience to the Divine commands is the grand test of the genuineness of our faith. *By their fruits ye shall know them.* The plain and decisive

question, which should be often pressed upon the reader's conscience, is this, *Is the spirit of the gospel expressed in my habitual deportment?*

There is a wide difference between that obedience which the gospel requires, and that which is practised by the most advanced Christian that ever lived\*. That obedience which, through the

\* We are aware of the efforts that have been made, and are still making in one form or another, both by the wise and the unwise, to pervert, if not to destroy, the moral law. Some tell us, that it is abated; others, that it is not binding since the apostacy; and others, that it is not binding till after the gospel is embraced! Sometimes, we are consoled with the notion, that "God does not require perfect obedience of His people in this fallen state!" At others, we are quieted in our rebellion by the argument, that "the commandment is not grievous, because it is not the rule of justification!" The truth is, the law is founded in the character of God, and the relation which all intelligent creatures bear to Him. Hence, while this character and relation remain the same, the law will remain, under all possible circumstances, immutably and everlastingly binding. That obedience to the law which the gospel requires, is identified with the requisitions of the decalogue. *Do we make void the law through faith? Yea, we establish the law.* Is the law so unholy, that it requires abatement? Is the commandment so unjust, that it could not righteously have been the rule of justification? Is God unrighteous—or is every precept of his law, under all the sanction of eternal death, of the same binding force now, that it was when first proclaimed from the sacred hill?

grace of God, the believer is enabled to attain in the present life, and which may be viewed as conclusive evidence of Christian Character, is,

In the first place, *cordial*. It flows from the heart. *God be thanked*, says the Apostle to the Romans, *that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed FROM THE HEART that form of doctrine which was delivered you*. Evangelical obedience expresses not merely the form, but the power of godliness. Every thing short of that obedience which proceeds from the heart, is disobedience. God neither requires, nor will accept of obedience which does not spontaneously flow from supreme love to Himself. The moral quality of all actions lies in the disposition of heart with which they are performed. Actions that are apparently good may flow from a very bad heart, and in the sight of God, are as corrupt as the heart from which they flow.

We read of those who followed our Lord with great zeal for a time; but who at length *went back and walked no more with Him*. And what was the reason? *The love of God was not in them*. Their hearts, like that of the young man in the

gospel, did not enter into the spirit of the duties which they practised. They did not love the duties themselves, nor desire to glorify God in them. Men often practise the duties of piety from some mercenary end. False motives entwine themselves into all the external duties of the hypocrite. Not so the obedience of the true Christian. That is deep and thorough. It proceeds from the inmost soul. There is a purity of design in all. *This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments ARE NOT GRIEVOUS.* It is no task to the Christian to obey the commandments of God. It is his highest pleasure. He delights in being devoted to the service of a being whom he supremely loves. *It is his meat and his drink to do the will of Him that sent him, and to finish His work.* It is with heartfelt pleasure, that he consecrates his time, his talents, and his privileges, to the delightful work of glorifying God. The glory of God is the great end of his being. The honour of His name is a motive, paramount to every other principle; the precepts of His law a guide, paramount to every other rule of duty. *The love of Christ constrains him.* When he contemplates his duty; he feels the spirit of holy enterprise; when he looks at the work which God has given him to do;

he is animated with pious zeal, and is constrained to exclaim, *I delight to do thy will, O God, yea, thy law is WITHIN MY HEART!* He, therefore, who obeys God at all, obeys Him from the heart. He obeys internally, as well as externally. His is *cordial* obedience.

But the obedience of God's people, is also *habitual*. There are some passages of scripture which at first view appear to inculcate the idea, that the obedience of the new man is *universal*. Caleb and Joshua are said to have *WHOLLY followed the Lord*. Job is called *a PERFECT and upright man*. Zacharias and Anna are said to have been *righteous before God, walking in ALL the commandments and ordinances of the Lord BLAMELESS*. *Whosoever abideth in Christ, saith John, SINNETH NOT*. And again, *Whosoever is born of God, DOTH NOT COMMIT SIN; for his seed remaineth in him, and he CANNOT SIN, because he is born of God*. And thus our Saviour, *Then are ye my friends, if ye do WHATSOEVER I command you*. But if we would make the Bible consistent with itself, we must give these passages some latitude of meaning. The experience of the world, and the declarations of eternal truth, assure us, that *There is not a just man upon earth, that sinneth not*. We must not

root out all religion from the earth, because we do not find perfection in men. Moses sinned; Samuel sinned; Paul sinned; Peter sinned; and yet they were all fervently pious. The melancholy fact is, that the best of men do sin greatly. They are sometimes the subjects of the most awful defection.

It is needless to conceal the truth, that the sins of good men are of an aggravated character. It is in vain to say, that they do not sin *knowingly*. They are indeed often surprised into the commission of sin; but they often commit it with calmness and deliberation. They often commit it in defiance to the sober dictates of reason, and in defiance to the most powerful conviction of their consciences.

It is in vain to say, that they do not sin *voluntarily*. No man was ever constrained to sin. Sin cannot be forced upon men contrary to their own inclination. The children of God often complain, that their hearts prompt them to sin, but their hearts never constrain them to act contrary to their choice. Seriously considered, it is impossible to sin without acting voluntarily.



The divine law requires nothing but voluntary obedience, and forbids nothing but voluntary disobedience. As men cannot sin without acting, nor act without choosing to act; so they must act voluntarily in sinning.

The children of God therefore do sin; they sin knowingly; they sin voluntarily; but *they do not sin habitually*. It is not the *prevailing habit* of their lives to disobey the commandments of God. This cannot be. *Sin does not REIGN in their mortal bodies, that they should obey it in the lusts thereof*. Between the old man and the new, there is an unceasing conflict. *The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other, so that they cannot do the things that they would*. Still, in the new born soul, the flesh has not the ascendancy. *The old man is crucified with Christ, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin*. This is most surely true of every believer. It is the prevailing habit of his life, to obey the commands of God. He is solicitous to perform whatever God requires, and watchful to avoid whatever He forbids. No true Christian can be habitually more engaged in the

service of the world and of sin, than in the service of God. His obedience, though not perfect, is habitual.

It may also be added, that, that conformity to the precepts of God's word upon which we may safely rely as a test of character, is *persevering*. The disciple of Jesus Christ perseveres in his course to the end of life. *He holds on his way*. It is the characteristic, as well as the blessedness of those who *trust in the Lord, that they are as Mount Zion which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever*.

The Apostle John speaks of a class of professing Christians, that were somewhat multiplied even in those early days of the Christian Church. He says, *They went out from us, but they were not of us ; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us ; but they went out that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us*. The true disciple *endures to the end*. Though he foresees that his path is beset with obstructions on every side, still he goes forward. Though dangers may threaten, and trials discourage him ; leaning upon the Beloved, he goes forward. His

most vigorous resolutions terminate upon his duty. He goes forward with a firm and vigorous step. No matter how rough the way, with an eye fixed on the *Author and Finisher of his faith*, he goes forward with unabated ardour, leaving the earth behind him, and animated with the prospect of Heaven and glory before him. He is aiming at *the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*. No difficulties are so great, no fatigue so severe, as to divert him from his design. Perfection is his object. He cherishes no present intention to disobey at all. From the heart, he desires and intends to yield a compliance, not merely to this, or that requisition, but to all the divine requirements, without distinction, and without exception.

We have the highest warrant to believe, that obedience thus cordial, habitual, and persevering, is conclusive evidence of our good estate. There are none but real Christians, who thus persevere in the sincere and habitual practice of godliness. *The ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them, but the transgressors shall fall therein.* The way of the Lord is an *high way* ; it is called *the way of holiness, and the unclean shall not pass over it.*

The scriptures uniformly represent a life of practical godliness as a decisive test of Christian character. A holy life is the grand mark of distinction between the children of God and the children of the devil. *In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: Whosoever doth not righteousness is not of God. Little children, saith the same Apostle, let no man deceive you, he that doth righteousness is righteous; he that committeth sin is of the devil. And again, Hereby do we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.*

It is difficult to conceive how it can be otherwise. There is an inseparable connexion between a holy heart and a holy life. A holy life can no more proceed from an unholy heart, than a pure stream can flow from an impure fountain. Wherever we find cordial, habitual, persevering obedience to the divine commands, there we have reason to believe, the love of God dwells in the heart. Show me a man who makes the law of God the rule, and the glory of God the end of his conduct; who is habitually devoted to the duties of piety and charity; and I will show you one whose heart has been sanctified by the

Spirit of grace. On the other hand, show me a man who, in the general course of his life, pays no regard either to the divine law, or the divine glory; who neither denies himself, nor exerts himself for the honour of God, and the good of his fellow men; and I will show you a man who, notwithstanding all his hopes and his professions, has never felt the power, nor tasted the sweetness of genuine religion. The truth is, men sincerely and habitually act as they love to act. In forming a judgment concerning our own character, we have no right to view our practice better than our principles, nor our principles better than our practice.

At the future Judgment, there will be a public trial of human character. The grand question then to be decided, will be, Are you a child of God? Are you a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ? This question will be decided by evidence. And the evidence which the Righteous Judge will view as conclusive, will be a life of practical godliness. *The Father, without respect of persons, will judge* ACCORDING TO EVERY MAN'S WORK. When John, in the vision of Patmos, *saw the sea give up the dead which were in it, and Death and Hell give up the dead which were in them; they*

*were judged every man* ACCORDING TO HIS WORK. In looking forward to the process of that day, the reader may anticipate this grand rule of trial. If he leads a life of evangelical obedience, though that obedience is not the ground of his acceptance, it is evidence that he is accepted. And this is evidence that comes without looking for it. A life of humble, holy, Christ-like obedience, carries hope, and faith, and comfort, along with it. It is conclusive evidence that the *love of Christ constraineth you*, and is not long maintained without filling the heart with light and joy.

Come then, and try your heart by the same rule whereby God tries it. God has given, or he will give you, a fair opportunity of proving your religion, by bringing it into action. He proved Abraham, and the trial issued in the clearest evidence of Abraham's religion. He proved the young man in the gospel, and the result of the trial was, that he loved the world more than God. What is the issue of the trial in your case? Frames, and experiences, and professions, and hopes, are nothing without lives of practical godliness. *He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me.*

The plain question which was stated at the beginning of this essay, is a very important one, *Does your religion express itself in your habitual deportment?*—In prosperity, in adversity, in the family, in the world, among friends and foes? Remember, *he that hath the hope of the gospel, purifieth himself even as Christ is pure.* Does your love to God prompt you to a devout attendance upon all His institutions? Does it animate you with increasing attachment to His word and His service? Does your love to man lead you to *do justice and love mercy, to live in peace with all men?* Does it make you the better husband, or the better wife; the better parent, or the better child; the better master, or the better servant; the better magistrate, or the better subject; the better friend, or the better citizen?

The religion of Jesus Christ is not a system of empty speculations, designed to have no practical influence. It is not the offspring of wild enthusiasm, that exhausts all its force in feeling, and leaves none for action. *A good man out of the good treasure of the heart, necessarily bringeth forth good things.* Experience without practice is nothing; and practice without experience is no more. Experimental religion

consists in the reality of the Christian graces, and in their due effect upon the life and conversation. If you are an experienced Christian, you feel the power of religion in your heart, and exhibit it in your life. *The life of Jesus is made manifest in some good degree in your mortal flesh.* You feel and act in some measure as Christ felt and acted. You discover His spirit; you imitate His example; you exhibit a firm and bold attachment to His cause.

But, reader, with all thy short-comings, with all thy gross violations of duty, is such the habitual course of *thy* life? Is thine a life of devotion, of meekness, and humility; of supreme attachment to heavenly and divine things; of self-denial, and of universal benevolence? Try your heart by your practice, and your practice by your heart. If, after candid examination, you find reason to hope that you are one of God's dear children—washed with the blood, sanctified by the Spirit, clothed with the righteousness of the Well Beloved; cherish that hope as the gift of heaven. Dismiss your fears; bind yourself to be the Lord's in an everlasting covenant; think less of yourself, and more and more of the name, the cross, the glory of your



Redeemer. Henceforth *let your light SHINE. Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all things shall be added unto you.* Or, in other words, do you serve God, and God will take care of you. Submit to His will; trust in His grace, and resign yourself into His hands, with the assurance that *The Lord is WELL PLEASED with those who HOPE IN HIS MERCY.*

## CONCLUSION.

LET the reader review the preceding pages in the fear of God. The subject is of eternal moment. A mistake here, is a mistake for eternity. Under a deep sense of his need of the searching influences of the Divine Spirit, let him, as he reflects upon what he has read, adopt the language of the Psalmist, *Search me, O God, and know my heart ; try me, and know my thoughts ; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*

*He that is not with me*, saith the Saviour, *is against me.* There is no principle within the whole compass of morals, that admits of more strict demonstration than this, that there can be but two moral characters that are essentially different. There must be necessarily in every intelligent being, a conformity to the will of God, or the want of it. It is as impossible that a man should be neither right nor wrong, as it is that a portion of matter, at any given period, should be neither at rest nor in motion. It is absurd to sup-

pose, that he is neither a saint nor a sinner ; neither penitent nor impenitent ; neither a believer nor an unbeliever. So long as men possess any moral character, they must view themselves, and be viewed by others, either for God or against Him. In the great contest which enlists the feelings and the power of three worlds, it is impossible that there should be a neutral. One side or the other will claim every intelligent being in heaven, on earth, and in hell. And it is right they should do so. If the line should now be drawn by the invisible hand of the Great Searcher of hearts ; on the one side would be the friends of God, on the other, His enemies.

Suffer me, then, beloved reader, before I take leave of you, plainly, solemnly, and affectionately, to ask the question, **ON WHICH SIDE DO YOU STAND ?** If you possess nothing more than mere visible morality ; nothing more than the naked form of religion ; nothing more than a speculative knowledge of the system of revealed truth ; nothing more than simple conviction for sin ; nothing more than a vain confidence of your own good estate, connected with some apparent zeal for the cause of God, and a few transient and spurious affections : how can you be one of the

children of the Everlasting Father? If you are a stranger to love to God; to repentance for sin; to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; to evangelical humility; to genuine self-denial—how can you cherish the hope that you are a Christian? If you know nothing of the spirit of prayer; nothing of the love of the brotherhood; nothing of mortifying the spirit of the world; nothing of growth in grace; of cordial, habitual, persevering obedience to the divine commands—how can it be, that you have been *brought nigh by the blood of Christ*? If these things are so, *thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter, for thy heart is not right in the sight of God.*

Does this agitate you? The writer of these pages takes no pleasure in exciting needless alarm. But how can he raise the unhallowed cry, *Peace, Peace*, when the Eternal God saith, *There is no peace*? How can he raise the unhallowed cry, when every note of the syren song would only lull the hypocrite into a more death-like security, and every sentence prove the blow to sink him deeper into the eternal pit? Poor, self-deceived man! who vainly imaginest that thou art in the way to heaven, while thou art in the way to hell, rather than amuse thee with tame,

smooth, pretty things, O that I could raise a voice that would make thee “ tremble, even in “ the grave” of trespasses and sins! Be entreated to dismiss thy deceptions ; to give up thy delusive confidence. Cast not the anchor of hope upon a shore so yielding that the final blast will break its hold. However hard the struggle, despair of mercy without being washed in the blood of Jesus. Cherish not a delusion which the King of terrors will tear from thy heart!

But shall I presume that all my readers are hypocrites? No ; many of them, I trust, are the dear people of God. Some of them may be weak in faith, and weak in hope. Beloved Christian, I would not lisp a syllable to rob thee of thy confidence. Though weak and trembling, there is every thing to encourage and strengthen thee. It cannot discourage you to examine closely whether the foundation of your hope be firm ; whether your confidence is built upon the sand, or whether it rest on the Rock of Ages. Feeble Christians are called upon to mourn over their weakness. Their want of strength is their sin. Their graces may be well compared to the “ dimly smoaking flax.” They emit little that warms and enlightens, Their love is cold ; their

joys barren and poor. *God hides his face, and they are troubled.* Tossed, like Peter, upon the tempestuous sea, they have hardly faith even to cry, *Lord, save, or I perish!* Still, they may rejoice. The Angel of the everlasting covenant lives. That precious covenant itself recognizes the heart-reviving principle, *Redemption through the blood of Jesus, forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace.* Well then, believer, mayest thou rejoice, even in the midst of trembling. What, though thou art bowed down under the weight of guilt; what, though poor in spirit, filled with apprehension and almost hopeless; what, though thou art like the *bruised reed*—frailty itself still more frail, ready to fall by the gentlest breeze! *A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench.* No, never. It shall not be broken, but supported—cherished; yea, by a hand that is omnipotent, transplanted to the garden of the Lord, and flourish in the courts of our God. The Great Head will never disregard the feeblest members of His own body.

There is a peculiar adaptedness in the character of our Lord Jesus Christ, to the weakness and fears of His people. Early was He designated as

one who should *bear our griefs, and carry our sorrows*; commissioned to *bind up the broken hearted*, and to *comfort all that mourn*. The man Christ Jesus is *touched with the feeling of our infirmities*; *He knoweth our frame*; *He remembereth that we are but dust*. The Shepherd of Israel *will gather the lambs in His arms, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those that are with young*. It is He that *giveth power to the faint*; and to them that have no might, *He increaseth strength*.

O believers! that we all might learn to fasten our affections, to rivet our hopes, on the cross of Christ! Here is our comfort. We must *think much, and make much of Christ*. In Him, all fulness dwells. *He*, is the Captain of your salvation. *He*, is a fountain for your uncleanness, and a light for your way. *It is He*, that is of God made unto His people, wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and complete redemption. No matter how great your guilt; rest on Him, and He will be increasingly precious; precious in life, precious in death, precious for ever. While your *life is hid with Christ in God*; however languid the throb, it shall never expire.

Come, then, *lift up the hands that hang down, and confirm the feeble knees.* The heavens and the earth shall sooner crumble into their native nothing, than the feeblest Lamb of the Shepherd's fold stumble and finally fall. *Loose thyself, therefore, from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion!* If thou hast seasons of trial, be not alarmed; if thou hast moments of despondency and weakness, be not dismayed. *Fear not, thou worm Jacob, for thou shalt thrash the mountains and beat them small. Thy Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel. He will strengthen thee; yea, He will help thee; yea, He will uphold thee by the right hand of His righteousness.* Say, is it not enough? *Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift!*

I close these Essays, then, by beseeching the reader to devote himself unreservedly to the Lord. *What! know ye not that ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price; wherefore glorify God in your souls and your bodies, which are His. Render unto God the things that are God's.* What higher delight, what greater privilege can you enjoy, than to consecrate all that you are, and all that you possess, to God! Come then, and make a voluntary surrender of every



thing to Him, and choose His service as your highest delight.

Henceforth let it be your greatest care to honour the Lord, who has bought you. *As you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him—ROOTED and BUILT UP in Him—and ESTABLISHED in the faith, AS YOU HAVE BEEN TAUGHT, abounding therein with thanksgiving.* Yes, blessed Redeemer! *Other Lords besides Thee have had dominion over us ; but by Thee only will we make mention of thy name.* O Thou Eternal, Incarnate, God! I am thine—doubly thine—wholly thine—thine for ever. AMEN.

FINIS.