A
BRIEF COMPEND
of
BIBLE TRUTH

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ADVERTISEMENT

At the request of a benevolent friend, the author prepared a brief Compend of Bible Truth, to be inserted in a volume intended for the instruction of the Blind, which contained also Prayers and Hymns to aid their devotions. When this volume was published by the Presbyterian Board of Publication, it was thought this small Compend might be rendered useful to others, as well as the Blind. Accordingly, it was printed in a diminutive volume, which, though it treated on the most vital subjects of theology, might be read from beginning to end in two or three hours. This little volume was published without the author's name. Being however persuaded, that it might with advantage be enlarged, he has added what increases the volume to more than double the size of the original publication; and this, not by adding to the chapters already printed, which are left unaltered, but by introducing other subjects, not treated in the Compend at first prepared.

The volume now given to the public comprises a brief system of theology, and may be found useful to such as may not have the opportunity of studying larger works. As it is not intended for the learned, but for plain, common readers, technical phrases and abstruse disquisitions have been avoided; yet, the author has attempted to establish every doctrine advanced, by solid arguments, derived from reason and Scripture.

Being firmly persuaded, that divine truth is to be the grand instrument for the illumination and reformation of the world, he feels desirous to contribute his humble part towards its universal diffusion.

So far as Bible truth is contained in this brief Compend, may the blessing of God attend it to the benefit of every reader! And if any thing erroneous has been uttered, may it be forgiven, and its evil tendency counter acted!

A. A.

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COMPEND OF BIBLE TRUTH

CHAPTER I

Being of God

Of all conceptions of the human mind, the idea of God is the most sublime. It is not only sublime, but awful. Every thing else appears diminutive while the mind is occupied with this thought. Though the idea of an eternal and infinite being is too great for the grasp of the human intellect, yet it is suited to the human mind. It fills it, and produces a feeling of reverence, which is felt to be a right emotion. If there is no such being, this is the grandest illusion which ever possessed the imagination of man. If it be an error, then error is preferable to truth; for on this supposition, truth in its whole compass has nothing in grandeur to compare with illusion. Remove this idea, and the mind is confounded with an infinite blank. Deprived of this, the intellect has no object to fill it: it is confounded and distressed with the retrospect of the past, and prospect of the future. But it cannot be, that this noblest of all conceptions of the human mind should be false: the capacity of the soul of man to form such a conception is a proof of the existence of a great and good and intelligent First Cause.

God has not left himself without a witness of his being and his perfections. It may well be doubted whether the evidence of a divine existence, the Author of all things, could be clearer and stronger than it is. A display of exquisite skill in every organized body around us is far better evidence than any extraordinary appearance, however glorious, or the uttering of any voice, however tremendous. Such miraculous phenomena would indeed powerfully excite and astonish the mind, and would be a certain proof of the existence of a superior being; but would, in reality, add nothing to the force of the evidence which we already possess, in the innumerable curiously and wisely organized animal bodies by which we are surrounded. And if we were confined to the examination of our own constitution of mind and body, the innumerable instances of manifest wisdom in the contrivance of the several parts, their exact adaptation to one another, and their wonderful correspondence with the elements of the external world without us, the evidence of an intelligent cause is irresistible. If any man surveys the structure of the human body, its bones and joints, its blood-vessels and muscles, its heart and stomach, its nerves and glands, and all these parts put into harmonious action by a vital power, the source of which is not understood—if he surveys the adaptation of light to the eye, or an to the ear and to the lungs, and of food to the stomachs of different animals, and notices the exact correspondence between the appetites of animals, and the power of their stomachs to digest that food and that only which is craved by their appetites respectively; and considers what wonderful provision has been made for the preservation and defence of every species; how much wisdom in their covering, instruments of motion and defence; in the propagation of their respective species, and the nourishment of their young—I say, if any man's mind is so constructed as to see all these things, and yet remain sceptical respecting the existence of an intelligent cause the conclusion must be that such a mind is destitute of reason, or has not the capacity of discerning evidence and feeling its force.

In prosecuting the argument from the evident appearance of wisdom in the structure of animal and vegetable bodies, is not necessary to multiply these cumulative proofs; for as one watch, or one telescope would prove the existence of a skilful artist, so the careful examination of a few specimens of animal or vegetable organization will satisfy the mind, as well as the minute survey of thousands of similar organizations. The attempts of ingenious and scientific men to account for these appearances, so evidently indicative of design, without the supposition of an intelligent Creator, are so replete with folly, that we cannot but think such men abandoned of God to believe a lie, because they liked not to retain the knowledge of God in their thoughts; so that it is still true, that it is the fool who hath said in heart, "there is no God."

If all other arguments for the being of God were wanting, the truth might be inferred with strong probability from our moral feelings. Every man feels himself bound by a moral law; he cannot but see the difference between right and wrong, in many actions. The former he feels to be obligatory the latter not. Whence this binding internal law, so deeply engraven on the heart of every man, that he cannot escape from the feeling of its obligation? Does it not clearly intimate that there is a Lawgiver, who has provided a witness of his right in every bosom? Where there is a moral law there must be a moral governor. As long as conscience exists in the breasts of men, atheism cannot prevail long. In the tumult of the passions, in the glare of false reasonings, God may for a while be forgotten and his very being denied; but, ere long, these moral feelings will bring men back to the acknowledgement of their Creator. There is good reason to think that the preservation of some religion among all nations is more owing to their moral constitution than to any reasoning on the subject. We need not fear, therefore, that atheism will ever prevail very generally, or continue long.

CHAPTER II

Personality and Perfection of God

It is admitted by all who believe that God exists, that he possesses all conceivable perfection; and right reason would lead us to the opinion, that as he is infinite he must possess attributes of which, at present, we can form no conception.

Our ideas of excellence cannot exceed the manifestations of perfection in the creation; but it would be absurd to suppose that any excellence could be in the creatures, which did not exist in a higher degree in the Creator.

As all men who acknowledge a God agree, that all possible perfection belongs to his character, it is unnecessary to adduce any arguments for its proof. Indeed, it seems to be an intuitive truth, that all perfection must reside in the first cause. The very idea of God is that of a being infinitely perfect. Whatever doctrine, therefore, derogates from the perfection of the Supreme Being must be false. It is, therefore, the dictate of reason, that we should remove from our idea of God, every thing which argues any weakness or imperfection. And as our ideas of natural and moral excellence are derived from contemplating the creatures, we must rise to just conceptions of the Deity by ascribing these excellencies to him, in an infinite degree.

Upon this principle, we ascribe to God unity, spirituality, power, knowledge, immensity, eternity, immutability, sovereignty, holiness, justice, goodness and truth. Upon this principle, God must be independent, and perfectly free to act according to his own pleasure.

God is a person, distinct from the universe. Every being who possesses intellect and will, is a person. The execution of any work of design, in which there is an adaptation of means to ends, and a harmonious operation of parts to produce a desirable effect, necessarily involves the exercise both of intellect and will. The idea that the universe is God, or that God is the soul of the world, but not a person distinct from it, is nothing more than a disguised system of atheism. God is distinct from, and independent of all creatures.

CHAPTER III

The Holy Scriptures

The Bible is made up of many books written through a period of more than fifteen hundred years, by men who professed to have received their doctrines from God, and to have committed them to writing by his direction. These Scriptures, then, must contain a revelation from God, or be a vile imposture. On the latter supposition it is marvellous, that the same purpose of deception should be maintained for so long a period, by a succession of impostors, all agreeing in the same sentiments; and that the cheat should never have been discovered.

Again, when we examine the moral character and tendency of these books, it is unaccountable that, throughout, they should inculcate a sublimer theology and purer morality than any other books in the world; that they should condemn every species of vice, and especially, that they should severely reprobate all falsehood, deceit, and fraud; thus, in almost every page, pronouncing their own condemnation. As it cannot be explained what could have made wicked impostors wish to inculcate such doctrines, so it is contrary to all experience, that men of habitually corrupt minds should be able to conceive or write discourses of so much moral purity and surpassing excellence. Read the sermons of Christ. Peruse the epistles of the apostles, and try to believe that these discourses proceeded from men steeped in fraud and corrupt principles. We are ready at once to say—impossible! When we see light, we Know that it must have proceeded from a luminous body. When we see wisdom in creation, we know that there exists a being of incomparable wisdom; and when we read a book of extraordinary power of argument, or replete with sublime imagery, we are sure that such works are the product of gifted minds. What shall we think then, when we behold in the Scriptures moral excellence shining forth in the purest and most comprehensive precepts, and embodied in bright examples of consistent piety and virtue? The character of Jesus Christ, as portrayed by the evangelists, is itself a moral phenomenon, which cannot be accounted for on any other supposition than that the writers were inspired. It is easy in words to ascribe exalted virtues to a hero, and to exaggerate his excellences by heaping up pompous epithets; but to describe a character of perfect virtue by merely relating what he said and did, and to place him often in circumstances where it is not only difficult to do right, but where an extraordinary wisdom is requisite to determine what is right, is not easy. But in this way has the character of Jesus Christ been delineated by the evangelists, without one word of eulogy. And let it be remarked, that they were unlearned men, who had enjoyed none of the advantages of a liberal education. Let any number of common, uneducated men undertake to write a history of some eminent person, and what would be the result, even if their intentions were honest? No honest inquirer can read the Pentateuch, and fail to rise from the perusal, astonished at the wisdom, the majesty, the purity, and the simplicity of the composition. Is it possible then that the five books of Moses are a base forgery? Could an impostor have persuaded a whole nation to adopt a burdensome and expensive code of laws, if he had not been able to give undoubted evidence of his divine mission? And could he have so deluded a whole nation as to induce them to believe that they saw the miraculous judgments of God poured out on the Egyptians, that they saw the sea divided at the word of Moses, that they actually marched through an arm of the sea as on dry land, and that they had been fed with manna rained from the clouds for forty years, and had seen the water gushing from the dry rock upon the touch of the wonder-working rod, if no such events had ever occurred? The history of these miracles is so interwoven with the common events, and with the religious institutions of the Jews, that they cannot be separated.

Let the sceptic tell us what motive could have induced any wicked impostor to write the book of Psalms. Here we have, not merely sublime poetic imagery, but a spirit of fervent elevated devotion, to which there is no parallel in all the heathen writings. He must have been a strange impostor, that could compose such songs, or could have felt any pleasure in such elevated, spiritual exercises. Can the deist now produce any compositions which will bear a comparison with these?

Again, read the book of Proverbs. Do you see any marks of imposture here? Do we not find concentrated more useful maxims of prudence and political economy, and more excellent moral precepts than can be gathered from all the sages of the pagan world?

But, it may be alleged, that men differ in their tastes respecting the internal excellence of literary compositions: and that in a matter of so great importance we ought to possess some more decisive evidence of divine inspiration. Well, what will be considered sufficient evidence that God has made to men a revelation of his will? Will it be satisfactory, if they who profess to be inspired are enabled to do works which are far above the power of man, and which require the almighty power of God? No one will doubt that if God give his attestation to any declaration, it should be received as true, for "He is not a man that he should lie." If then, the apostles actually wrought miracles in the name of Jesus, and in confirmation of their doctrine, it cannot be denied that they were inspired. That such miracles were actually wrought openly and in the presence of watchful and bitter enemies is a matter of record. The four evangelists have testified in the gospels, that Christ gave sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, health to the sick, sound limbs to the cripple, and that in several instances, before a multitude of people, he raised the dead. They testify, that after his crucifixion he rose from the dead; and that forty days after his crucifixion he sent down, as he had promised, the Holy Spirit, on the apostles, bestowing upon them and others various miraculous gifts, which Paul publicly testifies were common in the churches. The truth of Christianity then, rests on this single point, Is the testimony of these miracles true, or a mere fable? That the gospels were written near the time when these things were done is capable of the fullest proof. Indeed, had not these facts been credited fully by the first disciples, they never would have submitted to such sacrifices, and exposed themselves to such dangers, as we know they did. All earthly considerations weighed heavily on the other side. Every convert to Christianity is, therefore, a witness of the truth of these miracles for they had every motive to examine into the truth and the facts were of such a nature that they could not have been deceived.

It does, indeed require, strong evidence to satisfy the mind that there has been a departure from the common course of nature; but testimony may be so strong that it would be unreasonable to doubt of the miracles which it is brought to attest. It is admitted that there have often been false witnesses, and that we may be deceived by trusting to insufficient testimony; but, we know, also, that in many cases our faith in testimony is as strong as in those things which have passed before our eyes. The point of examination then is, whether it is more probable that the testimony is false, or that a miracle has been wrought. If many persons, without any motive to deceive, and without previous concert, agree and stand to it in the midst of threatenings and sufferings, that they have witnessed miracles, it would be folly to disbelieve. And, especially, if such events followed in such immediate and continued succession as can only be accounted for by supposing the miracles to have been performed, the evidence may arise to such a degree of certainty as to assure us that we are not deceived. Now, the conversion of the civilized world to Christianity can never be accounted for on any supposition but the truth of the miracles and supernatural influence accompanying the gospel. And the whole train of succeeding events goes to corroborate the truth of the evangelical history.

Another incontrovertible evidence of the truth of Christianity is the salutary effects which it has produced in the world. The conversion and reformation of sinners has been a standing proof of the divine origin of the Bible; and this evidence is not confined to ancient days. Blessed be God, clear and striking instances of the reformation of wicked men have occurred under our own observation. And the gospel has produced in our own times such a remarkable change in the moral and civil condition of some of the most ignorant, degraded, and vicious tribes of heathen, that if there were no other evidence of its truth, this would go far to satisfy an honest mind. Can any reasonable man believe that preaching a cunningly devised fable would turn men from their sins, to which they had been long habituated?

Hundreds and thousands, also, in Christian lands can testify, that the truth of God has produced a powerful and salutary effect on their own minds, convincing them of their sin and danger, and exciting in them trust in Christ, which has enkindled their love, and brought sweet peace into their troubled breasts. And we see, continually, the power of the gospel to afford consolation in affliction and to buoy up the soul with assured hope, even in the hour of death.

But, if all the convincing proofs, above mentioned, were wanting, the undeniable prophecies which have been literally fulfilled, are a clear demonstration of a divine revelation; for who can predict distant future events but God alone? The prophecies relate to the fortunes of the Jewish people—to the destiny of many great and proud cities and nations; but the most important predictions of the Old Testament relate to the Messiah, which were literally fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. Yet no prophecy of Scripture is more striking and convincing than that of Christ respecting the destruction of Jerusalem, and the ruin and dispersion of the Jews, the fulfilment of which is recorded in the history of Josephus who was not a Christian, but an eye witness of the facts.

CHAPTER IV

Unity of God

The idea of God is forced upon the rational mind, to enable it to account for the innumerable marks of design manifest in the universe; but there is no necessity to suppose more than one great First Cause, to account for every thing. There is, therefore, nothing in reason, or in the works of nature, which would lead to the conclusion that there are more Gods than one. Indeed, the very supposition of more Gods than one shocks and confounds the rational mind. If we were capable of comprehending the subject, it is more than probable that we should see that the existence of two infinite beings is an absurd and impossible conception. There is, however, no need to resort to metaphysical arguments; the harmony of the laws of the universe indicates one mind—one counsel. The existence of evil led some of the ancients to adopt the theory of two eternal beings; but if that were true, we should find two systems of laws in the universe; and a continual interference and collision between them; whereas, the laws of matter, even as far as the planets and stars, are uniform. Between all the parts of creation, there is a beautiful consistency, and mutual relations, which show, that as the Author of the universe is infinite in knowledge and power, so He is One.

And as to the existence of evil, moral and natural, it can be accounted for by the liberty of action with which man and other moral agents were endowed; which liberty is essential to a system in which creatures render a voluntary obedience to their Creator. If there had been no possibility of sinning, there could have been no such thing as virtue, or moral excellence.

But again, what is often called *evil*, arises necessarily from the limited nature of creatures; and especially when the plan includes a scale of being, descending from the highest to the lowest. Every species, as you descend, is less perfect than those above it. Such a gradation involves necessarily the evil of partial defect. But properly speaking, this is no evil; every thing in the universe is good in its kind; but there is no absolute perfection but in God alone—"None is good but God."

We do not assert that the argument for the unity of God from reason is absolutely demonstrative; as it might be alleged, that two or more beings, wise, powerful, and good, might be united in counsel, in the plan of the universe and the works of creation; just as several men might agree upon a plan of a temple or other building; and all the appearances would be the same, as if only one person were concerned. Let this be granted, and yet we may assert, that reason cannot furnish the shadow of an argument in favour of a plurality of Gods. As far as she sees and speaks, her voice is in favour of the divine unity.

We feel less concerned to insist on any thing further as evident from the light of nature, because the doctrine is clearly revealed, and repeatedly taught in the Sacred Scriptures. All that we deem it important to establish on this point is, that reason teaches nothing contrary to the unity of God; and so far as she sheds any light on the subject, it is altogether in favour of the doctrine.

Let us then attend to the clear, unequivocal declarations of the Bible. "Hear O Israel, the Lord thy God is one Lord." Deu_6:4. "The Lord He is God, there is none else beside Him." Deu_4:5. "Thou art the God, even thou alone of all the kingdoms of the earth." 2Ki_19:15. "Thou, even Thou art Lord alone." Neh_9:6. "Thus saith the Lord the King of Israel, and his Redeemer the Lord of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and besides me there is no God." Isa_44:6. "Is there a God besides me? yea, there is no God, I know not any." 8. "And this is eternal life, that they know thee the only true God." Joh_17:3. "But to us there is but one God." 1Co_8:6. "God is one." Gal_3:20. "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well." Jas_2:19.

It would be easy to multiply texts in confirmation of this doctrine, but these are sufficient. Indeed, no one who admits the Bible as authority, can doubt on this subject; and consequently, the fact is, that Jews and Christians have received the Unity of God as a fundamental truth.

CHAPTER V

Spirituality and Simplicity of the Divine Nature

That God is a pure Spirit, reason as well as Scripture requires us to believe. As God is an intelligent being, and the source of all intelligence, he must be a spirit; and as he is a voluntary agent, he must be an intelligent person. Matter is inert, unconscious, and cannot be the subject of thought or volition. Matter is also divisible to an indefinite extent, and the parts of bodies are separate from each other, so that each particle is a separate existence; but unity belongs to mind, therefore the mind cannot be material. Again, all matter is solid and extended, and necessarily excludes all other bodies from occupying the same space: if then God were a material being, as he is omnipresent, he would exclude all other bodies from the universe: or if not everywhere present, there would be some places where there was no God; and if limited to a certain locality, however extended it might be, there would be infinite space, in which God does not exist.

But if the materialist denies that inactivity, solidity, divisibility and extension, are the natural properties of matter, and maintains that all matter consists of monads, which are in their nature active, indivisible, unextended, and that some of these, if not the whole, are endued with consciousness, and are susceptible of all the actions which we ascribe to mind, then there is no such thing as matter in the universe; but every thing that exists must fall under the class of spiritual being; for that substance which is active, indivisible, unextended, and capable of consciousness and other mental acts, is mind or spirit, and we cannot give a better definition of spirit than to deny to it those properties commonly ascribed to matter, and allowing to it the capacity of thought.

Materialists, therefore, in attempting to overthrow the belief of spiritual being, do in fact subvert the doctrine of the existence of matter, by affirming that it does not possess the properties commonly attributed to it, and does possess the powers and capabilities of spiritual existence. And on this theory, the materialist becomes an immaterialist; and when men agree in the properties which belong to any substance, it matters little what name they give it. We leave the atheistical materialist to settle his account with natural philosophers, as to the properties of matter; and according to his own theory, all our arguments derived from the immateriality of the soul, for its incorruptibility or continued existence, stand in full force.

As God is a pure intelligence, and everywhere present, and everywhere active, he is a Spirit.

Some, however, while they admitted this, held that God was the soul of the world, and that the world was to him what our bodies are to us. This is one form of the doctrine of pantheism, which has been revived in our day. It is a monstrous notion to consider all bodies a part of the Supreme Being. It destroys all individuality and all accountableness, and therefore, contradicts some of the clearest intuitions of our minds. Every man is conscious that he is a person, distinct from all other persons; and every man feels that he is capable of acting freely, and of doing good or evil, as a moral agent; and that he is accountable for his actions. All theories and reasonings which contradict self-evident principles of truth, must be false, and deserve no further consideration.

The Holy Scriptures, everywhere, represent God as a being of infinite intelligence, as a being of will and affection; as omnipotent, and ever active; for all things are not only created, but upheld in being by his sustaining hand. Even active beings require his conservative energy to support them in being, and to continue their faculties in existence. Therefore, it is not only said, that he upholdeth all things by his power, but that it is "in him we live, and move, and have our being."

The Holy Scriptures enter into no nice disquisitions respecting matter and spirit, their properties, and differences; but assume as true, those first truths which are known without philosophy, to every man of common sense.

That man is a free and accountable agent, is everywhere, in the Bible, not proved, but assumed as true, and as being as well known as it can be. And the same is the fact in regard to our nature consisting of soul and body; of which every man, who has his reason, is as well convinced as he could be by any revelation.

And, as soon as we know that there is a God, we feel constrained to admit, that he must possess all excellence and every possible perfection, as before stated. And, therefore, as spirit is the most excellent kind of substance, and as God is made known to us as wise and powerful, by the creation, we cannot but believe, that he is a pure spirit, uncompounded, and free from bodily parts and members. And when God is spoken of as having head, hands, face, arms, feet, &c., it is necessary to consider this mode of speech as figurative, and intended to represent those things in the divine character or actions, which bear some distant resemblance to what is found in man. Indeed, when God is said to be a Spirit, it is not to be understood that his essence, which is eternal and immutable, is of the same nature with created spirits; but only, that there is a resemblance. If there were any substance known to us of a nobler nature than spirit, we should of course ascribe that to God; but still with the qualification, that the essence of God is infinitely superior to all creatures. We need not be surprised, therefore, to find, that there is but one text which positively asserts that God is a Spirit, excepting those which relate to the third person of the adorable Trinity; for this truth is every where assumed as known, and as implied in all his attributes. The text referred to is in Joh_4:24. "God is a Spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."

CHAPTER VI

Character of God

God is the maker of all things. He is therefore almighty. He is also wise. Of this our own frame is evidence enough. We are fearfully and wonderfully made. Our eyes and ears, our hands and feet, our mouths and stomach, and heart and blood-vessels, all attest the wisdom of God. We see it also in the inferior animals. Their bodies are formed with as much wisdom as our own. Every creature has a form and nature, and appetites, and instincts suited to its condition in the world. The birds with their feathers and wings, the fishes with their fins, and the beasts with their feet of various kinds, are proofs of the wisdom of God. The trees, the flowers, and the grass do also show forth the wisdom of Him who gave them being. If we admire the wisdom of man in a watch, or a telescope, or a steam engine, much more should we be filled with adoring wonder, when we contemplate the infinitely superior wisdom of God, displayed in all his works. Wherever we turn our eyes, we are met with the marks of wise design. The sun, which gives us light by day, and diffuses life through all nature, is a wonderful object. The moon and stars are beautiful and glorious works of the great Creator. Day and night, winter and summer, seed time and harvest, speak the wisdom of God. Indeed, the evidences of divine wisdom in every thing within us and around us, are so innumerable, that it is impossible to recount them. We may then, every hour, exclaim, with the royal Psalmist, "How manifold are thy works, in wisdom hast thou made them all:" "The earth is full of thy riches:" or with the wise man, "The Lord by wisdom hath founded the earth, by understanding he hath established the heavens:" or with the prophet, "He hath made the earth by his power, he hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heaven by his understanding."

God is good. His goodness is manifest in every work of his wisdom, for he hath so continued and arranged all things in the best manner, to promote the happiness of his creatures, according to their nature and capacity. Especially, his goodness appears in the capacity of pleasure given to man, all the exercises and operations of whose nature give him pleasure, when indulged in their proper measure. Man is formed with such a nature, that he cannot open his eyes on the beautiful world which he inhabits, without pleasure. The glory of the firmament, the beauty of the landscape, and the sublimity of the lofty mountains and vast ocean, fill the rational mind with pure delight. The various works of nature or of art, perceived by the eye or ear, furnish a feast to the mind. The food which nourishes us is pleasant to the taste, and the water which gushes from the earth, affords a sweet refreshment. The light is pleasant to the eyes, and the air is felt to be invigorating to the lungs. Action is pleasant, and so is repose. Sleep, though it is the image of death, is sweet and refreshing to the labouring man. There are to man, thousands of sources of pleasure. If he were only innocent, even the world as it is, though labouring under a curse for sin, would still furnish many of the delights of paradise. Truly God is good. To Moses he said, "I will make all my goodness to pass before thee." And when he proclaimed to his servant his name, a part of it was, "abundant in goodness and truth." "The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord." O how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee! "The goodness of God endureth continually."

God is holy. Every excellence is his, and without holiness he would not be an object of veneration. The dictates of our own conscience teach us that the Father of our spirits is holy. And in the Bible no attribute of Jehovah is more clearly and frequently brought to view. Holiness is the true ground of that adoration which enters so essentially into the worship of God. "Worship ye at his footstool for he is holy." "But thou art holy, thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel." "The Lord is holy in all his works." Holiness is the sum of all moral excellence. When the heavenly hosts worship Jehovah, they ascribe holiness to him in the most emphatic manner. "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts." And the four symbolical living creatures whom John saw before the throne of the Most High, "rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy lord god almighty, which is and was and is to come." Every thing which has any relation to God, or his worship is holy; his word, his house, his angels, his prophets, his people, his sabbaths, and all the places where he records his name, and all the institutions by which he is worshipped. "There is none holy as the Lord." God is also just and righteous, giving to every one his due. Justice is the rectitude of God's nature. Justice is essential to him as governor of the world. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" "Justice and judgment are the habitation of his throne." "The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works." "He will by no means spare the guilty." The Lord is the righteous Judge. "And I heard the angel say, Thou art righteous, O Lord"—"O Lord, true and righteous are thy judgments."

God is great. "The Lord your God is a great God." "Thou art great, O Lord God, none is like unto thee." When Solomon was engaged in erecting the temple, he said, "The house I build is great, for great is our God." Thus also Nehemiah, in his prayer, (Neh_9:32) calls God, "The great, the mighty, and the terrible God." And Isaiah, "Great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee." (Isa_19:20) And Jeremiah, "Thou art great, and thy name is great in might." (Jer_10:6) Mention is often made in Scripture of God's "great name." "What wilt thou do unto thy great name?" (Jos_7:9.) "Behold, I have sworn by my great name." (Jer_44:9.) "Thou art great, and thy name great." (Jer_10:6.) "My name shall be great among the Gentiles." By the "name" of God we should understand his attributes. God is great in all his perfections; and "his greatness is unsearchable."

God is eternal. He has had no beginning, and he will have no end. This perpetuity of existence is frequently expressed in the Bible, by saying, He is, and was, and is to come. Of his years there is no end: "Before the mountains were brought forth," said Moses, "or ever thou hadst formed the earth or the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God." Eternity is often ascribed to God in Scripture. "Unto the King eternal." "The eternal God is thy refuge." "His eternal power and Godhead." Indeed, the idea of eternity, though incomprehensible, forces itself upon us when we think of the First Cause. He who is the Creator of all things can have no beginning. To suppose the contrary, would involve us in the grossest absurdity. And as God is eternal, so he is unchangeable. He says of himself, "I change not." He is the Father of lights, with whom "there is no variableness nor shadow of turning." His purposes and plans are as unchangeable as his nature. "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure." Any change in the essence or will of Jehovah would argue weakness, or want of perfect knowledge of all contingencies.

God knows all things. "Thou God seest me." "The Lord searcheth the hearts and trieth the reins of the children of men. There is nothing hidden from his sight. All things are naked and open before him with whom we have to do. He seeth the end from the beginning." All the free actions of his creatures are known to him, for he hath most exactly foretold many such actions, as is evident from his predictions respecting the treachery of Judas, the denial of Peter, and the malice and envy of his crucifiers. If the Lord was not omniscient he could not possibly govern the world with wisdom. But no truth is more clearly revealed, and no attribute is more essential to the perfection of Jehovah. "For thou, even thou only knowest the hearts of all the children of men."

God is every where. "Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off?" "If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me." "For his eyes are on the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings." "Behold, I fill heaven and earth." And yet the heaven of heavens cannot contain him. And he is not only present, but active. He sustains all things by the word of his power. He is the living God. "In him we live and move and have our being."

God is incomprehensible. "Who by searching can find him out; who can find out the Almighty to perfection?" "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain to it." His greatness is unsearchable. "There is no searching of his understanding." "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God; how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out." So these are parts of his ways, but how little a portion is heard of him! But the thunder of his power, who can understand? And so it will ever be, for the time can never come when the finite shall comprehend the infinite. Hereafter, much of the darkness which now overspreads the divine character and dispensations, will be dissipated; but new mysteries will be forever rising to the view of the contemplative mind! But if we have all the knowledge of God, of which our finite minds are susceptible, we should desire no more. An increasing knowledge of God will be one of the chief felicities of heaven.

God is merciful and gracious. Unless this attribute of mercy had been clearly revealed, a knowledge of all other attributes would give us little comfort. Even the goodness of God would hold out no consolation to sinners, who had forfeited every claim to divine benefits. When inexorable justice holds criminals in its grasp, of what account is it to them that their king dispenses favours to his obedient subjects? Man, by nature, is justly condemned. Justice cannot be set aside; it must have its demand, or God must change. Then, the only relief is the mercy and grace of God. And mercy can only have room for exercise when justice is satisfied. And this wonderful work has been accomplished by the atonement of the Son of God. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." "Not that we first loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

The chief object of divine revelation was to reveal the mercy of God. That God was good, and would do good to his obedient creatures, reason could teach; and that he was just, and would render to every one his due, was also a dictate of natural religion. But how God could be just and justify the ungodly, was a problem which human reason never could solve. That, however, which is impossible to man is possible with God. "Mercy and truth have met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other." Through the satisfaction made by Christ's atonement to divine justice, the door of mercy has been opened, and a free salvation offered to the guilty. The love of God to sinners, which is the same as his mercy, is much spoken of in the word of God. And indeed it is, at once, the most delightful and wonderful object which can engage the contemplation of any human being. This love has its origin in the divine mind; there was nothing in the character of fallen man to excite it. It is, therefore, sovereign, free, and from everlasting. The depth and height and length and breadth of this love pass all knowledge. The bright evidence of its strength and freeness is found in the gift of his only begotten Son. "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy." "As high as the heaven is above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him." When he proclaimed his name to Moses, it was, "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin." The songs of praise addressed to God in the ancient church, were wont to be concluded with the chorus, "The mercy of the Lord endureth forever." "O give thanks unto the Lord, for his mercy endureth forever." "Let Israel now say, that his mercy endureth forever."

God is a God of truth and faithfulness. Truth is his very nature. All his declarations are true. "Thy word is truth." And as he has consented to enter into covenants with men, and to make great and precious promises to his people, he is faithful in fulfilling whatever he has spoken. No part of the good which he has ever promised has failed, or ever can fail of its accomplishment. "And ye know in all your hearts, and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed, of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you." "Know, therefore, that the Lord thy God he is God, the faithful God, who keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him, and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations." He is therefore styled the "covenant-keeping God."

And as he is faithful in the fulfilment of his promises, so is he true in the execution of his threatenings against impenitent transgressors. To suppose that his denunciations of vengeance against sinners were merely spoken to produce terror, is most dishonouring to the God of truth. "The strength of Israel will not lie." "God is not a man that he should lie." "Hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" "Surely, O Lord, thou wilt slay the wicked." "The Lord will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies." If in any case his threatenings are not executed, it is because a condition was implied, as when God threatens an individual or a nation with destruction, and that individual or nation takes warning and repents, then his wrath is turned away. In all such threats there is an implied condition, that if the guilty will repent, they shall escape the threatened destruction. Indeed, the very end of addressing such threatenings to men, is to bring them to repentance, that they may escape condign punishment.

God is long-suffering and forbearing toward the children of men. "He is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness, but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." "He endureth with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction." This forbearance of the Almighty is often abused by wicked men. "Because judgment is not speedily executed against an evil work, therefore the heart of the children of men is fully set in them to do evil."

God is condescending and compassionate. When we consider the majesty of God, nothing is more wonderful than his condescension. "He humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth." "What is man that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man that thou visitest him? Though the Lord be high he hath respect unto the lowly." "Though heaven be his throne and earth his footstool, yet to this man will he look who is of an humble and contrite spirit and trembleth at his word." "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him."

God is supreme. “His kingdom ruleth over all and he doth according to his will, in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth.” All honour, glory, blessing, and praise should be ascribed to God.

CHAPTER VII

The Holy Trinity

The Scriptural evidence of this doctrine would not be deemed insufficient by any one, were it not for the idea that there is something in the doctrine repugnant to reason; or, which it is very difficult to reconcile to right reason. The only thing then, which reason has to do with the subject is, to examine whether there is any thing in the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, which is manifestly repugnant to any truth clearly ascertained by the use of right reason. It is admitted that this doctrine is not known by the light of nature; for even if there should be found in the material universe, or in the human mind, a resemblance to the Trinity, as some have supposed, this resemblance, if admitted would furnish no conclusive argument in favour of the doctrine. It is not pretended that the doctrine is either made known, or can be proved by reasoning. It is a doctrine of pure revelation. But if its opponents could show that it contradicted any clear and universally acknowledged principles of truth, we should be reduced to the necessity of either rejecting the Bible, which teaches the doctrine, or of so interpreting the Scriptures, as to exclude the absurd opinion. The first course is pursued by deists, who often give this as a sufficient reason for rejecting the Bible, that it contains doctrines contrary to reason. Jews and Mohammedans are found making the same objection. But all Anti-trinitarian Christians adopt the second course. They admit the evidences of divine revelation to be convincing, and they therefore receive the Scriptures as a true revelation. But, as they think that this doctrine is contrary to reason, they determine that it cannot be the doctrine of divine revelation; and in consequence, exert all their force to destroy the authority of such texts as seem to contain it; or so interpret them, that they may speak a different language. It seems necessary, therefore, to inquire, whether, indeed, there is any thing in the doctrine of the Trinity palpably contradictory, or evidently incompatible with evident principles of reason. Here it is important to distinguish between doctrines which are above reason, and those which are contrary to reason. That many things which are certainly true are above reason, must be admitted by every rational man that will consider the subject. That God is without beginning is as certain a truth as any which could be mentioned, and yet it is above reason. Who can comprehend a duration without a beginning? And from this incomprehensible truth, even atheism would give no relief; for the atheist is obliged to admit that something has existed from eternity, unless he choose to say that all existing things originated without cause, which would be still more incomprehensible. That God is every where present is admitted by Unitarians; and yet they must maintain that there can be no diffusion of the divine essence through the parts of space; but that the whole Deity is every where. Is not this above reason? And who can comprehend the divine omniscience? Indeed, as all the attributes of God are infinite, that very term shows that they transcend human reason; for no finite mind can comprehend that which is infinite. There are also facts which relate to our own existence, the truth of which we know certainly, and yet we are utterly unable to comprehend them. Who can explain the true cause of muscular motion in the human body? Nothing is more certain in our experience than that our minds and bodies are intimately united, so that they constantly and reciprocally affect each other. How it is that we perceive by the eye, hear by the ear, distinguish tastes by the tongue, or odours by the smell, are all mysteries. They are truths, but they are above reason. Now it is readily admitted, that the doctrine of a Trinity, in the divine essence, falls into the class of incomprehensible truths. We know it to be a truth, because God, who cannot lie, has plainly declared it; but *how* it is, or how it can be, is above our comprehension, just as some of the fundamental truths of natural religion, which have been mentioned, are above reason.

It is however alleged, that God’s being at the same time one and three is plainly repugnant to reason; the proposition containing a palpable contradiction. This statement Trinitarians utterly deny; and certainly the external evidence is very much against it; for much the greater number of wise and impartial men, who have carefully examined the subject since Christianity was introduced, have believed in the doctrine of the Trinity. But let us examine this objection, and see whether it has any foundation. If Trinitarians asserted that the persons of the Trinity were three and one, in the same sense, there would indeed be an evident contradiction; but this is so far from being the fact, that all writers on the subject are careful to state, that while there are three distinctions, called *persons*, there is but one essence. But it is alleged, that if there be three *persons*, there must be three Gods; for a *person* is a distinct, intelligent and voluntary agent; and if there be three distinct, intelligent, voluntary agents, there must be three Gods. But who can show it to involve any contradiction that three equal intelligences should be united in the possession of a common essence? But the whole force of this objection arises from taking the word *person* in a strict and definite sense, as used when applied to men; whereas, we are under no necessity of retaining this word; it is not found in Scripture, and many Trinitarians have rejected it. There may be three in the divine essence, and yet these may not with much propriety be called persons. Still, in our opinion, there is no need to depart from the terms commonly made use of by Trinitarians. Some term is necessary to designate the three, and there is no objection to the word *person*, which would not exist in full force against any other word; and this term has the sanction of long usage, and is found in almost every writer on the subject. All that is necessary is, as in analogous cases, to explain the sense in which the word is used in application to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And here it should be remembered, that all our language which we use to designate the attributes of God, is necessarily inadequate; and the most common words in application to the Deity have a peculiar meaning. This is the fact when we use the words intellect, will, purpose, love, &c. God’s understanding is infinitely different from ours; the will of God cannot be understood as precisely similar to will in the human mind. And in regard to affections and passions this is so evident, that many, to avoid the ascription of any imperfection to the Supreme Being, have denied to him every kind of affection, as well as passion. But, in the use of such terms, it should be considered that they must not be taken definitely and strictly, as they apply to man, but as representing vaguely and indefinitely something in God which resembles those things in man for which these words stand. And no other rule, in the use of the term *person*, is necessary, when the word is used in relation to the Supreme Being, than what is necessary in many other cases. The word *person* is used merely to mark a distinction evidently made in Scripture, and may, in this indefinite sense, be properly used; because, in relation to Father, Son, and Spirit, personal pronouns are used, and personal acts are ascribed to them.

The question respecting the truth of the Trinity is, however, not to be confounded with the one respecting the propriety of the use of the word *persons*, which some who hold the doctrine of the Trinity firmly, have rejected. And some, who nevertheless believed in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as being divine, have scrupled to use the word Trinity, because it is not found in Holy Scripture. Now, while men receive implicitly all that is taught in Scripture respecting each of these, we need not contend with them about the theological terms which shall be employed.

Though the Trinity is not a doctrine discoverable by reason, yet we find some vestiges of it in nearly all ancient systems of Pagan theology, which seems to indicate that it was handed down by tradition from the earliest ages of the world. But we do not adduce this as a fact likely to have any weight with the anti-trinitarian. Indeed, some have ingeniously founded an argument against the doctrine from its resemblance to Platonism, and other Pagan systems. But still, no more reasonable account of the triad, found in most ancient theories of religion, can be given, than by supposing an early tradition to have been received on this subject. Our appeal, however, must be to the infallible oracles of divine revelation; and although we find many vestiges of a plurality of persons in the Godhead, in the Old Testament, yet as these are not so evident but that they are liable to dispute, it will save time to proceed at once to the testimonies which are found in the New Testament. And our first object will be to show, that three persons are often mentioned together, by three distinct names; and then we will bring convincing arguments to prove that each of these is God; and there being but one God, as we have seen, these three must, in some mysterious way, be united in one essence.

At the baptism of Christ, the Father spake from heaven, saying, “This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased;” and the Holy Ghost descended on Christ in the form of a dove. Here then we have Christ visible in the form of man, the Father speaking of the son in a voice from heaven, and the Holy Ghost, in a visible form, descending on Christ. Whatever may be determined respecting the nature of these persons, they are manifestly three in number. The Holy Ghost did not speak, and the Father did speak, but did not descend in a visible form; and, evidently, the Son was not the person who spoke or descended. This evident manifestation of three persons at the baptism of Christ, led one of the Christian fathers to exclaim, “Let him who would have a proof of the Trinity go to Jordan.”

The clear distinction of the persons of the Father. Son, and Holy Spirit, is again most evidently set forth in Christ’s consolatory discourse to his disciples, before he suffered, recorded in Joh_14:1-31, Joh_15:1-27 and Joh_16:1-33, and also in his intercessory prayer, Joh_17:1-26. “And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that shall abide with you forever; even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him; but ye know him, for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.” Here the Son prays to the Father for the Comforter, the Spirit. That there are three mentioned is too evident to need proof.

Another clear testimony to the truth that there are three distinct persons in the divine essence, is found in the form of Christian baptism, which Christ gave to his apostles, in the commission which he gave them just before his ascension to heaven. “Go,” said he, “teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” These are among the most solemn and important words in the New Testament; they contain the commission under which not only the apostles, but all ministers of the gospel act, and the form of words directed to be used in baptism, was intended to be employed in the administration of this ordinance, through all periods of the church. All persons who have ever been regularly baptized, have had these words pronounced over them, while emblematically, or sacramentally washed from their sins. Into whose name then have all Christians, from the beginning, been baptized? Into the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Undoubtedly Christians are baptized into the name of God; but God is here represented as three. It would indeed be incredible that baptism should be in the name of the Supreme God, of a man or mere creature, and of a divine attribute. The mention of such an interpretation is enough to refute it. Undoubtedly our Lord, in his commission, must have intended by Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, to designate three persons. Whether they are all to be considered as partaking of the divine nature, is not now the immediate object of inquiry, but whether three persons are designated. The divinity of each will be here after proved.

Again, the apostolical benediction, recorded in 2Co_13:14, is another conclusive evidence of the existence of three persons in the Godhead. “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen.” Here grace is implored of the Son, love from God the Father, and communion from the Holy Ghost. It is impossible, by any proper rules of interpretation, to evade the conclusion, that three divine persons are here named. Similar proof we have in Eph_2:18. “For through him (Christ) we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.” Here the same three persons are brought into view, and designated by their appropriate appellatives. Another passage in which the three persons are distinctly mentioned together, is, 1Pe_1:2. “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.” Here, again, we find the same three persons clearly distinguished.

And although the text in 1Jn_5:7, has been disputed, on plausible grounds, and the testimony of existing manuscripts is unfavourable to its authenticity, yet there being positive evidence that ancient manuscripts which contained it, have been destroyed or lost, I think it should not be omitted in a summary of the evidence of the doctrine of the Trinity, as I have a strong persuasion that it is really a precious part of inspired Scripture, which we are not at liberty to abandon, but which was probably insidiously dropped out of the copies, in the days of Arian ascendency. What confirms me in this opinion is, that it is evidently referred to both by Tertullian and Cyprian, who lived long before our oldest extant manuscripts were written. The words are, “There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one.” Here we have our whole doctrine expressed, as clearly as it could be done in words.

The evidence of three distinct persons has now, we think, been established beyond all reasonable contradiction, as the doctrine clearly and repeatedly inculcated in the Scriptures of truth.

CHAPTER VIII

Divinity of Christ

The proof of the Deity of the Son of God is the main point in establishing the doctrine of the Trinity; for if it can be clearly shown that there is a second person in the divine essence, there will be small repugnance to the admission of a third.

And here it may be observed, that the appellation “Son of God,” is remarkable. A son is always of the same nature with the father who begat him, and possesses the same attributes. It is true, Adam, in Luke’s genealogy of Christ, is called the son of God, by which no more is to be understood but that God was his immediate Creator. But Christ is called not only the Son of God, but His “only begotten Son.” (Joh_1:14.) And angels are called “sons of God,” as being immediately created by him; but the apostle Paul distinguishes the sonship of Christ from that of angels, in that remarkable passage in Heb_1:1-14, where he says, “For unto which of the angels said he at any time, thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son? And again, when he bringeth in the first-begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him. And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire. But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever.” Here we learn that the Son is not one of the angels, for he is clearly distinguished from them all. Not only so, but the angels were commanded to worship him, when he made his first appearance in the world. Now, he whom angels worship, can be no other than God. Was it ever heard of, or any where read, that the angels were commanded to worship one another? No: but they did receive a command to worship the Son. This shows that Christ was not called Son, merely on account of his miraculous birth, or his designation to office, as Mediator, or his resurrection from the dead. All these may serve to show that he is the Son of God; but he was Son from the beginning—by nature a Son—eternally begotten; for as Son, he is to be worshipped by the most exalted angels of heaven. And while he is addressed by the Father as a Son, he is emphatically addressed as God. “Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever.” To which of the angels was ever an address like this made? As these words are a quotation from Psa_45:6, by turning to the passage we find, that the person addressed is called the King, and is addressed as the Most Mighty. There is, moreover, another argument for the eternity of Christ, contained in this pregnant passage, which is of the most conclusive nature. Indeed, it is so cogent, that this being impartially weighed, all further arguments seem to be superfluous. It is derived from the fact, plainly declared by the apostle, and made prominent in several other parts of Scripture, that Christ, here called the Son of God, is the Creator of the universe. Surely he who created all things must be God; or all distinction between God and the creature is obliterated. How do we know that there is a God, but by the creation? The idea that the power of creation may be delegated to a creature, is the same as to suppose that a creature may be rendered omnipotent and infinitely wise; that is, that a creature may be endowed with divine attributes; or that there may be another God.

And as to the notion that Christ was employed in creation as an instrument, it is still less reasonable, for as creation is an instantaneous work of almighty power, what place was there for any instrumentality? Besides, in the passage under consideration, there is no allusion to any instrument. It is simply and plainly declared, “Thou, Lord, in the beginning, hast laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of thy hands.” In the second verse, it is indeed said, “By whom He created the worlds;” but in the order of operation, in the persons of the Trinity, the Son is always represented as acting in conformity with the will of the Father; but still as exercising the same power, and possessing the same knowledge. The very name Father indicates, that he is primary in order of existence and of operation: by some, therefore, he has been called the fountain of the Deity. Thus our Lord says, “For as the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son, to have life in himself.” “All things are delivered to me of my Father, and no man knoweth the Son but the Father, neither knoweth any man the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him.” Here the knowledge of the Father by the Son, is put on a level with the knowledge which the Father has of the Son; and the nature of the Son is represented as incomprehensible to all others but the Father, just as the nature of the Father is incomprehensible to all but the Son. An equality in the possession of divine attributes is here as clearly taught, as is possible. Can it be a mere creature who knows the essence of God, as his essence is known by God? Impossible.

But let us attend more particularly to the argument from the creation of the heavens and the earth, and all which they contain. There are several other testimonies to this fact, which it may be expedient to bring into view. In the first chapter of the gospel of John, Christ, under the name Logos, is not only said to have been in the beginning with God, but to be God; and the evangelist goes on to say, "all things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made that was made." He is also declared to be the source of life and of light. "In him was life, and the life was the light of men"—"That was the true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world." And that there might be no doubt respecting the person denominated Logos, it is said, "And the word (Logos) was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory as the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." It is reported by some of the earliest of the Christian fathers, that John wrote his gospel for the very purpose of refuting the errors of certain heretics, who denied the divinity of the Son. And whether that was the occasion of his writing or not, he could not have asserted the doctrine more clearly and explicitly than he has done. And now do anti-trinitarians evade the force of this passage? The Arians, by maintaining that the Son performed the work of creation by a delegated power, or as an instrument. But this interpretation will not suit the Socinians, and all who deny the existence of Christ before he was born of Mary. They, therefore, have invented a gloss, which certainly no common reader would ever have thought of; and which nothing but dire necessity could ever have induced any one to adopt. It is, that it is meant that Christ was the author of the new dispensation, and disposed of and regulated every thing in the Christian church. When men are driven to such forced interpretations, it is a clear evidence that they cannot maintain their ground, by solid argument: it is a kind of *reductio ad absurdum*; and we should be satisfied to leave the matter there. There is no need of an elaborate refutation of what so plainly refutes itself.

Another remarkable testimony to the fact, that Christ is the creator of all things, is found in the first chapter of Paul's epistle to the Col_1:15-17 : "Who is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature. For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible; whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him and for him; and he is before all things, and by him all things consist."

Here, not only the creation of the visible universe is ascribed to the Son, but also all things invisible; and lest any should be disposed to confine this work to inanimate substances, the whole hierarchy of heaven is declared also to have been created by him. The most exalted of the celestial host are his creatures. And not only so, but all things are continually supported by Him. The expression, "first-born of every creature," has misled many to think that this scripture asserted that Christ was the first formed creature; but the most judicious critics have shown, that this is not the proper meaning of the original term; but the true sense is, "first begotten before all creation;" that is, from eternity. The same idea is expressed, in the last verse cited, "and he is before all things." "From the foundation of the world"—"before the foundation of the world"—"before all things," are the modes of speech by which an eternity past, is expressed in scripture One would think, that none could resort to the forced interpretation which has been put on the passage in John, but what else can the Unitarian do? He has no other refuge from the convincing force of the testimony, unless he should have recourse to the supposition, that the whole passage is spurious; but there is no proof of any such thing. No text in the Bible is more certainly authentic. The Unitarian is therefore obliged, as before, to pretend that the apostle is not speaking of the creation of the world, but of the setting up the gospel kingdom. If absurdity were stamped on the face of this interpretation when applied to the passage in John, what shall we say of it here, where the heavens and the earth are expressly mentioned; and not only so, but things visible and invisible; and finally the glorious hosts of heaven, angels, dominions, principalities and powers, are mentioned among his works. And all these he upholds by his power. Is there any passage in the Bible, where the creation of all things is more expressly and particularly ascribed to the Father, than here to the Son? To attempt to apply the language here used, in the midst of a plain didactic discourse, to the setting up of the Christian church, or introducing a new dispensation, is so unreasonable at first view, that there is really no need of a refutation. What could be meant by the heavens and the earth?—What by things visible and invisible? What by the names of the celestial orders? If such an interpretation could be admitted, then the testimonies of the Holy Scriptures would be utterly useless. No text, on any subject could be brought forward in proof of the unity, or of any of the attributes of God, which might not be turned aside with as much show of reason, as is exhibited in this interpretation. In the text in the gospel of John, they demurred, because the word used for *made*, was not the one commonly used to express a creation out of nothing, but here we have the very word, used by the Seventy to express the work of creation in the first chapter of Genesis. In the former case, the objection had no force, but in this there is no foundation for it. This wild notion, by which, in the foregoing testimonies, they would have us by the creation of all things in heaven and earth, to understand the setting up a new kingdom, or introducing a new dispensation after the advent of Christ, cannot possibly be applied to the text in the first chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews; for there it is declared, that the heaven and earth of which he spake, the creation of which he ascribed to the Son of God, should perish—and that they should wax old as doth a garment, and that as a vesture they should be folded up and changed. But surely this cannot apply to the kingdom of Christ, or the new creation, for this is everlasting.

If there is a doctrine plainly taught in the Bible, this is one, that Christ is the Creator of all things: and if so, he must be truly God: we have no higher idea of God than Creator of heaven and earth. If another besides the true God may be the Creator, then another besides God possesses those attributes by the manifestation of which in the works of nature, we know that there is a God, and by which his almighty power and infinite wisdom are made known.

It seems unnecessary to adduce other arguments, as this is of itself as demonstrative of the deity of Christ, as if we had a thousand. The mind which can resist this would resist any number. If it were necessary, we could adduce hundreds of texts in which the doctrine is expressed or implied. We shall, therefore, conclude by observing, that Christ is called Jehovah—the great God—The mighty God, the true God. And arguments for his divinity might be derived from his miracles—from his glorious work of redemption—from the worship and obedience demanded, and from his being appointed the Judge of the quick and the dead—of angels and of men. But it is deemed unnecessary to deduce arguments from all these topics, as what has been said is sufficient.

CHAPTER IX

Personality of the Holy Spirit

The Divinity of the Holy Spirit may be established by arguments of the same kind as have been adduced in support of the Deity of the Son; but it does not seem necessary to go over the same ground again; especially, as at the present there are none, as far as we know, who maintain that the Holy Spirit is a created being. Anti-trinitarians of the present day, admit that the Spirit is divine, but not a distinct person from the Father. As the spirit of a man is the man himself, so they think that the Spirit of God is God, or the wisdom or power of God. Another reason why it is not necessary now to enter into an elaborate argument to establish the divinity of the Spirit is, that reason makes no greater objection to a Trinity than a duality in the Godhead. If the proofs of the deity of the Son are conclusive, the same kind of evidence will readily be received in favour of a third person. We shall, therefore, occupy the space which can be allotted for this point, to a consideration of the proofs of the distinct personality of the Holy Spirit. And here the reader will recollect the observations made respecting the sense in which the word person is used, when applied to the divine essence. We do not pretend that we are able to form definite and clear conceptions on this subject. Among creatures, where we find an intelligent, voluntary agent, we call that being a person. And such persons are spoken of by proper names, and by personal pronouns, which are used instead of the name. John is possessed of reason and will, and he pursues such objects as are agreeable to his taste. John is a person. Every one who is constituted like John, however he may differ from him in other respects, is also called a person. We find in Scripture three, to whom divine attributes and works are ascribed, and each of whom has an appropriate name, and is frequently represented as acting, feeling, and speaking; and to each of these the pronouns used in reference to persons are often applied. And they are not different names of the same person, because they are, in a number of cases, all mentioned in the same sentence; and they are represented as speaking to each other, and as sending or promising to send another. And there are appropriate acts ascribed to each. It cannot be supposed, that, if the Holy Spirit were not a distinct person, this mode of speaking of him, in the Holy Scriptures, would be kept up whenever he is mentioned Sometimes, by a lively figure, that which is not a person is personified, and introduced as thinking, feeling, seeing, hearing, and speaking; but no one is ever deceived by this liberty of speech; but if this personification were kept up whenever this inanimate, unintelligent being was mentioned, it would tend only to confusion and error But this is never done in regard to such beings as are not possessed of intelligence.

Let it then be kept distinctly in view, that the Holy Spirit is either a person, or a divine attribute, as none now are found maintaining that the Holy Spirit is a creature; and if he were, he would still be a person. What we now wish to establish is, the distinct personality of the Holy Spirit.

The personality of the Paraclete, who is the Holy Ghost, is exceedingly manifest from the words of Christ, where he promises to pray the Father to send the Holy Spirit, (Joh_14:16-17,) where the personal pronoun is used to designate the Holy Ghost, no less than six times, in two verses. "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever: Even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you." And again, in the 26th verse, "But the Comforter, (Paraclete,) which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things," &c. Also, in chap. 16:7–14. "Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged. I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit, when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you." In this last passage, the personal pronoun is applied to the Holy Spirit, nearly a dozen times. And there is a peculiar force in the original, which cannot be preserved in English. The Greek word for *Spirit* is of the neuter gender, but the inspired writer, instead of making use of a pronoun of the corresponding gender, constantly uses the pronoun of the masculine gender. No conceivable reason can be assigned for this, except that the Spirit is really a person, a divine person, and therefore should be represented by the masculine pronoun.

How would it sound to attribute to any divine attribute, or operation, what is ascribed to the Holy Spirit, throughout the Scriptures? "I will pray to the Father, and he will send his wisdom, and he shall teach you all things. He will not speak of himself, but he will take of mine and shew it unto you. And when wisdom is come, he will convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and judgment." "Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie unto Wisdom?" "He that blasphemeth against Wisdom, it shall never be forgiven him, neither in this world, nor in that which is to come." "As Wisdom said by David." "Wisdom said, separate me Barnabas and Saul to the work to which I have appointed them." "I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son, and Wisdom." "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of Wisdom, be with you all." The same incongruity, or rather absurdity, would follow from substituting any other word expressive, not of a person, but an attribute, or an influence, or operation, for the name of Holy Ghost, or Holy Spirit, in all the places where it occurs. We never can receive the Sacred Scriptures as a certain rule of faith, intended to guide all classes of people, without admitting that the Holy Spirit is spoken of as a person. It is true, there are passages in which, if there were no others, we might be led to suppose that the Spirit was a gift, or divine influence shed on the minds of men; but all these texts can be much more easily explained, so as to harmonize with those which ascribe personal acts to the Holy Spirit, than those be reconciled to the hypothesis that the Spirit is an attribute, or an influence. When we read of the Spirit dwelling in us, being given without measure, being quenched, &c., it is easy to understand that the operations and influences of this divine agent are intended.

We conclude then, that, according to a fair interpretation of the Holy Scriptures, there are three persons, each being made known by a distinct name, and to each operations and offices ascribed, which are peculiar; and yet, in all works, there is a perfect concurrence of three distinct agents. And as we have clear evidence, that there is one God, and none beside, and as to each of the three, divine attributes are ascribed in Scripture, these three must be one God, although in what way they are one and three we do not know, and do not pretend to explain. It is, however, no greater mystery than God's eternity, self-existence, and omnipresence. All we need to know is, what God hath declared in his word. Hath Christ said, "I and my Father are one," and shall we not believe it, although we cannot understand not explain how they are one? Christ says, "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father." Here are two, the Father and the Son, and yet they are so identified, that he that hath seen the one, hath seen the other also. Here is a fact plainly stated; this we are bound to believe; but how this can be, or what is the nature of this union, we are not required to understand, or to believe any thing respecting its nature. And if the Father and the Son are one God, the Holy Spirit, to whom divine attributes and works are also ascribed, must be one with the Father and the Son. Indeed, Unitarians admit this now. They agree that the Holy Spirit is God himself. His personality, however, they deny. But we have proved that the Holy Spirit is a person, because he is constantly spoken of as performing the acts which none but a person can perform. Let it be admitted, that the word *person*, in application to the Spirit, must not be taken in the same precise, definite sense, as when applied to men and angels. The Spirit searches—the Spirit understands—the Spirit speaks—the Spirit calls and appoints to the ministry—the Spirit reproves, teaches, guides, comforts, intercedes, inspires, sanctifies—sheds abroad the love of God. The Spirit witnesses with our spirits—the Spirit quickens—the Spirit may be grieved—may be sinned against, distinctly from sins against the Son.

What an adorable being is the Triune God! How gloriously mysterious in his being, attributes, operations, and personal acts! How little are we capable of knowing of this infinite Being. "None by searching can find out the Almighty to perfection." Where the feelings of the heart are right, the incomprehensible nature of the divine existence causes no obstruction to genuine devotion. Indeed, the soul of man is so constituted as to require an incomprehensible Being as the object of worship. Profound adoration is the very feeling which corresponds with this attribute. Were it not so, the angels in heaven would be perplexed and unhappy; for the more is known of God, the more mysteries are perceived in the divine character. "Clouds and darkness are around about him, but justice and judgment are the habitation of his throne." He is also represented as "dwelling in light which is inaccessible," and to which no mortal can approach. How condescending is God to furnish us with an object of worship in our own nature, where the attributes of Deity shine forth in the face of a man like ourselves. This is truly the grand mystery of Godliness; "God manifest in the flesh;" "the fulness of the Godhead dwelling in Christ;" so that he is both God and man in the same person. And perhaps this mode of exhibiting the divine attributes in humanity may be of unspeakable importance to all intelligent creatures in heaven. It may have given them an opportunity of knowing much more of God than they ever knew before, or could know in any other way. The doctrine of redemption is not only useful to the redeemed, but to all the hierarchy of heaven. No creature can know any thing of the nature of God but what he is pleased to reveal; and the method by which he makes himself known, is by his works and dispensations. No creature can penetrate the divine essence, and search the deep things of God. That the Son knows the Father, as he is known by him, furnishes a conclusive argument of his divinity. And that the Spirit searcheth the deep things of God, is also a sure argument of his divinity.

CHAPTER X

Creation

The first information which the Bible gives us, is of the creation of all things out of nothing, in the space of six days. No other book gives any satisfactory account of the creation of the world, or of the origin of the human race. The Bible does not profess to inform us when the substance of the heavens and the earth, was created; but it assures us that it had a beginning, and that God was its creator. When the time arrived for the creation of man upon the earth, the confused and shapeless mass which was covered with darkness, under the forming and creative agency of the Almighty, began to assume a new appearance. And the effects produced were not wrought instantly, but day after day, for six consecutive days. On the first day, light was created, for God said "Let there be light, and there was light." On the second day, God formed the firmament or atmosphere, which separated between the water in the seas, and that held suspended in the clouds, or invisibly in the air. On the third day, the waters were collected into the basin prepared for them, and were separated from the earth or dry land, which now became visible; and on this day, also, the earth was planted with every kind of herb yielding seed, and tree yielding fruit after their kinds respectively, with the power of propagating their species. On the fourth day, the luminaries of heaven were formed, or then began to shine upon the earth; the sun to rule the day, and the moon to rule the night; and also the stars. If it be asked how light could exist and form the day, before the creation of the sun, it must be confessed that our knowledge of the elements of matter is very indistinct and imperfect. The question proceeds on the supposition that light is a substance which comes out of the sun by emanation: but it is much more reasonable to believe, that light is nothing more than a certain condition of a widely diffused fluid, which when excited produces in us the sense of sight; just as another fluid when agitated, by its undulations produces in us the sense of hearing. On this subject we assert nothing, but if the theory mentioned will remove the difficulty, it is a proper answer to the question. But even if the sun were a body of light, the substance of light might have been created before it was conglomerated into one great body; or, the sun might not have been visible till the fourth day. On the fifth day, the water and air were replenished with living inhabitants, with constitutions, instincts, and senses, exactly suited to the element in which they were placed. On the sixth day, the earth was stocked with beasts, and reptiles of every species.

And, finally, a council was, as it were, called in heaven, when the crowning work of creation was about to be produced; that is, the adorable Trinity deliberated, speaking after the manner of men. "And God said, Let us make man in our image, and after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every thing that creepeth on the earth."

As God is a spirit, and has no bodily parts, what is here said of his “image and likeness” must relate to his spiritual and moral nature. As man was created an immortal, intelligent spirit, in this respect, he bears a resemblance to his Creator; but we have stronger evidence for referring these words to the moral image of God. For the apostle Paul, when speaking of the renewal of man in the image of God, makes it to consist in “righteousness and true holiness,” (Eph 4:24.) And, in another place, he makes this image to consist in “knowledge:” “And have put on the new man which is renewed in knowledge, after the image of Him that created him,” in which last words, there is a plain reference to the history of man’s creation, in Genesis.

But, as it was not judged to be good that man should be alone, his Creator, in great kindness, formed for him a suitable companion, a woman taken from his own side, a help meet for him, and the mother of all living. To the man was given the name, Adam, the import of which is “red,” and to the woman the name Eve, which signifies “living.”

God pronounced all that he had created “good,” “very good.” Nothing imperfect ever came from the hands of God. All creatures were not made equal; and in respect to constitution some are more perfect than others; but every thing is perfect in its kind. In creation, as far as it is subjected to our view, there is a beautiful gradation of creatures from the most exalted angel down to the minutest atom; and among animated creatures there is a scale of perfection, according to which one living creature rises above another by almost insensible degrees. And among the creatures there is observable a mutual dependence of one upon another; and in the whole there is an astonishing harmony; or if there should be the appearance of disorder and confusion in some things, it must be attributed to our ignorance; for as far as we can understand the works of God, every thing seems to be in its proper place, and governed by laws adapted to its nature.

CHAPTER XI

Good Angels

Although reason cannot assure us, that there are in the universe creatures of an order superior to man; yet all analogy is favourable to such a doctrine. As we find that below the human race, there is a gradation of animated beings, down to the lowest forms of organized life, it would be strange indeed, if the infinite space above man should be entirely unoccupied. And as the Deity is a pure spirit, without bodily parts, it would seem reasonable to think, that he has made some species of creatures, of a purely spiritual essence. These remarks are made, because Rationalists are generally disposed to deny the real existence of angels; whereas, professing to be guided by reason, they ought readily to receive this doctrine, which is so clearly revealed in the Bible. It may properly be mentioned here, that Jews, Mohammedans, and Pagans, all con cur in believing in a species of creatures of nobler capacities than belong to the human race. This almost universal agreement, is probably derived from ancient tradition; but if from the suggestions of reason, it is still favourable to the doctrine of Scripture, on this subject.

The word translated *angel* properly means, *a messenger*. It is, therefore, frequently applied to human beings, in which cases it is literally translated *messenger*. And not only so, but we have abundant proof, that the word is also used to designate the Son of God, the angel that appeared to Abraham, and is expressly called Jehovah; also, the same that spoke to Moses from the burning bush, and said, I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; who is also called an angel. This is the angel who led the Israelites through the wilderness by a fiery pillar and protecting cloud, and often appeared to them in glory, at the tabernacle. This was the angel, in whom was “the name of Jehovah,” and who is called by Malachi, “the messenger,” or “angel of the Covenant.”

Many theologians have also maintained, that Michael the Archangel was not a created being, but the Son of God; for this opinion, however, the reasons are not conclusive: yet there is no propriety in speaking of archangels, for only one is ever mentioned in the Holy Scriptures.

There can be no doubt that angels are created beings, although we are not informed when they were brought into existence. It is probable, however, that the whole universe, with all the various species of beings, was produced at once, since the whole appears to form one grand system. But we must not pretend to be wise above what is written.

Angels are moral agents and accountable beings, or they could not be holy, and could not have sinned, as many of them have done. They were doubtless, placed when created, in a state of probation, as man was. Indeed, every rational creature, made under a moral law, is naturally in a state of probation; that is, obedience is required of him, and a reward promised, and a penalty threatened in case of disobedience. All creatures are mutable, and, therefore, all creatures, however exalted, are capable of sinning when left to themselves. Unless God, in infinite kindness and condescension, limited the period of probation, it would last forever; as forever, the creature left to himself would be liable to sin: but it has pleased the goodness of God to limit the probation of his moral subjects to a certain period, probably short, after which, those who stand the trial and retain their integrity, are confirmed in a state of immutable holiness and happiness. Those angels who kept their first estate, and resisted the temptation by which many of their companions were seduced from their allegiance, are not only called “holy angels,” but “elect angels.” What proportion of the number fell is not revealed; though the Romanists pretend to determine this and many other points, for which they have no authority from Scripture. The number of good angels, we know, is very great. Christ said, that he could pray to his Father, and he would send to his aid more than twelve legions of angels; which would be more than seventy thousand. And at the birth of our Saviour, there were present with the Shepherds, a great multitude of the heavenly host. And in the book of Daniel and of the Revelation, we read of “thousands of thousands and ten thousand times ten thousand.” And in the 12 chapter of the Hebrews, the apostle speaks of “an innumerable company of angels.”

They are possessed of wisdom and intelligence superior to that of man, and continually contemplate the divine glory as manifested in the work of creation; and especially, in the work of redemption. “Which things,” says Peter, “the angels desire to look into.” And in the Revelation of John, they are represented as encircling the throne of the Almighty, and ascribing unto Him that sitteth on the throne and to the Lamb, “power, and riches, and wisdom, and honour, and glory, and blessing.”

That the angels are guardians of the children of God, is clearly taught in the Holy Scriptures. “The angel of the Lord encampeth around them that fear Him and delivereth them. (Psa 39:7.) “For He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.” (Psa 91:11-12.) And it seems to be intimated by our Saviour that particular angels have the charge of individuals; for when speaking of children that believe, he says, “Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones, for I say unto you, that in heaven, their angels do always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven.” (Mat 18:10.) But whether every saint has an angel to attend him alone, is not revealed, and the thing is not probable: for aught we know, one guardian angel may be sufficient for many individuals. Neither is it necessary to suppose, that guardian angels are always present with their wards: it is sufficient that they frequently visit them. And it would seem clear from Scripture, that all the holy angels are occupied in this service; for, in the epistle to the Hebrews, we read, “Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation?” (Heb 1:14.) The Romanists, indeed, confine this ministry to the very lowest of the nine orders of their celestial hierarchy: but for their doctrine, they have no solid foundation, and it is refuted by the declaration of our Lord, already quoted, that the guardian angels of the little ones who believe, do always behold the face of God in heaven. These must, therefore, be of the highest order; and the word *angels*, in the New Testament, is a general term, comprehending all orders.

This leads us at once to the inquiry, whether there are different ranks and orders of good angels. While we reject the hierarchy of the Romish priests, which has no foundation in Scripture, we cannot but admit, that according to the testimony of Paul, there are several ranks, or orders of angels, but how they differ from one another, we cannot tell. All we know is that the names by which they are designated and distinguished, import high station and great power and dignity. They are called, “thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers;” but exalted as they are, the Son of God is declared to be their Creator.

As the word “angel” signifies a messenger, some are of opinion, that the “spirits of the just made perfect” may be of the number employed in missions to the earth; and especially as guardians. But nothing of this kind can be learned from the Sacred Scriptures.

CHAPTER XII

Bad Angels

There is an evil being, often mentioned in Scripture both in the Old and New Testament, called Satan, the devil, and Beelzebub, and by other significant names. But he is always spoken of as one: the original Greek for devil (Διαβολος) never being found in the plural, to signify devils; though the plural is used in the New Testament for slanderers. It is true, the word devils, in the plural, is often read in our version; but the original thus translated, is an entirely different word, and would more properly be rendered demons. From this some have been disposed to maintain, that these demons were of an entirely different nature from the person called Diabolus and Satan; and some have conjectured that they were the departed spirits of wicked men. But there is little foundation in the Scriptures for these conjectures. Satan is no doubt greatly superior to all the other evil spirits; but whether of a different species we cannot tell. One individual of the same species may be endowed with powers far above the rest. An opinion which has more probability is, that Satan, in a state of innocence, was an archangel, or prince over a large number of the celestial host; and that by his influence, those subject to his authority were seduced from their allegiance, and fell with him in the same transgression. For he is still called “the prince of the devils”—“the god of this world,” “the prince of the power of the air,” “the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience,” “the adversary that goeth about seeking whom he may devour.” And, what comes nearer to the point, we read of hell being originally prepared for “the devil and his angels.” And as we know that evil spirits are very numerous, we may infer, that they are all in subjection to this prince of darkness; whether willingly, or unwillingly, it would be vain to inquire. And this will account for what, to many has appeared difficult to be understood, how Satan can tempt so many persons, all over the world, at once: it would seem, at first view, that he is omnipresent. But if he has at his command thousands of emissaries, or even if this host of evil spirits act independently of him, the difficulty will be removed. It ought, however, to be remembered, that a spirit can pass from place to place more rapidly than the light; and Satan may be carrying on his temptations in America this moment, and the next he may be in Europe, and then in Africa or Asia, and back again, in the twinkling of an eye.

The Scriptures make it certain, that our first parents were seduced by the devil, in the form of the serpent; and that the curse denounced on the serpent related chiefly to him. In the book of Revelation, he is called “that old serpent the devil;” and by our Lord it is declared, that “he was a murderer from the beginning,” and “a liar and the father of it,” which can have no other reference than to the bringing death on our first parents, and their posterity; and to the lie—the first ever told in this world—by which he deceived the woman, when he said, “Thou shalt not surely die.” And for these reasons he is called “a murderer,” and “the father of lies.”

How great his malice is against the people of God, and what injuries he would inflict upon them, if permitted, may be learned from the book of Job.

At the advent of our Saviour, he seems to have been let loose in an unusual manner; for “the Son of God was manifested to destroy the works of the devil,” and therefore the powers of darkness were permitted to exert their malice and cunning, in a degree greater than at any other period. As Christ came to accomplish a salvation which the first Adam had failed to secure, there was a propriety in his being exposed to the temptations of the same adversary who had overcome our first representative. Accordingly Satan made an insidious attack on our Lord, as soon as he came up from the waters of baptism; and he was led into the wilderness by the Spirit for this very purpose. But in this assault, he was completely repulsed; and when our Substitute died on the cross, which Satan had brought about by entering into Judas, the serpent’s head was completely bruised by the Seed of the woman, whilst he could do no more than bruise the heel of the God-man Mediator. In the view of this victory, Christ said, on a certain occasion, “I saw Satan as lightning fall from heaven.” And again, “Now is the prince of this world judged.”

Whilst Christ was on earth many persons were possessed of demons, who, entering into them, agitated and convulsed their bodies in a very hideous manner; and so governed the bodies of the miserable sufferers, that they became mere instruments of the evil spirits, who made use of their tongues to utter what the demons wished. The power of our Saviour was manifested, frequently and triumphantly, in ejecting the unclean spirits from the bodies in which they had taken up their abode. Sometimes, many would take possession of one person. In one case, a certain demoniac, upon being asked his name, answered, “*Legion*, because we are many.” And in another case, seven devils were cast out of one woman, who became eminent for her tender love to her Saviour. And our Lord mentions a case where a demon, for a time, left the person possessed, and wandering about in dry places, and finding no rest, said, “I will return to my house, whence I came out; and taking seven other spirits more wicked than himself, he returned and found his house ready for him, swept and garnished, and they went in and dwelt there; and the last state of that man was worse than the first.”

We are not to suppose that the mere demoniacal possession of a person was a crime; or, that what was said or done by a demoniac, would be charged on the man or woman possessed; but these possessions were probably the punishment of sins which they had committed; or, as in case of the blind man, “that the works of God might be manifest in them.” Because the effects produced on the human body by these possessions greatly resemble certain diseases, such as insanity and epilepsy, to which the human frame is subject, some learned men have maintained that what are called demoniacal possessions in the New Testament, were nothing but incurable diseases, and allege, that the miracle is as real upon this hypothesis, as on the other. This is true; but the objection to this opinion is, that it undermines the truth of the Gospel history. If nothing more was said than that certain demoniacs were healed, this hypothesis might be admitted. For we read, that among others who were healed by our Saviour, were *lunatics*, and yet, no educated man now believes that madness is produced by the moon. But in regard to demoniacal possessions, the evangelists relate conversations which passed between them and our Lord; and, in one instance, where there were many in one man, they entreated that they might not be sent out of the country, but should be permitted to enter into a numerous herd of swine, which were on the mountain, near the lake; and permission being given, the herd of swine ran violently down a precipice into the sea, and were drowned. If all this is to be taken as a mere accommodation to Jewish prejudices, then we can have no certainty of any of the facts related by the evangelists. And, indeed, the censure would fall back on our Saviour himself, who continually speaks of demoniacs as persons really possessed by unclean spirits. And as a further proof of the reality of such possessions, it may be remarked, that the demons acknowledged Christ to be the Son of God; and that in a country where the people knew him not, and begged him to depart from their coasts. It is expressly said, that upon the approach of Jesus, the demon cried out, “What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God, the most high? I adjure thee, by God, that thou torment me not.” And he asked him, “What is thy name?” and he answered, saying, “My name is legion, for we are many. And he besought him much that he would not send them away out of the country. Now there was nigh the mountains a great herd of swine feeding, and all the devils besought him, saying, Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them. And forthwith Jesus gave them leave, and the unclean spirits went out and entered into the swine, and the herd ran violently down a steep place, and perished in the sea.” Now, if any one, upon a careful perusal of this narrative, can persuade himself that these were no real spirits, but that it was simply a case of insanity, and that demons are introduced in accommodation to the common prejudices of the Jews, he will have adopted a principle of interpretation which will go far towards subverting the whole gospel history. For, why may it not be as reasonably supposed, that when Christ speaks of the resurrection of the body, or of a future judgment, he is merely uttering opinions common among the Pharisees, the predominant sect of the Jews? In answer to the allegation, that the symptoms were precisely the same, as of diseases which are still often met with, it may be replied that the demons might be permitted to produce these very diseases, as we know that these malignant spirits are capable of producing diseases of any kind, if permitted without restraint to operate with the power which naturally belongs to them, as we see in the case of Job, and of the woman healed by our Saviour, on the Sabbath day, “whom,” said he, “Satan hath bound, lo! these eighteen years.” And, in some of these diseases, as they now occur, we know too little about their real causes to make it the ground for argument. Physicians are very little acquainted with the causes of diseases of every species. All they can ascertain by the most accurate examination is, the disease itself, or the derangement of some part of the human system. But in many cases, they can acquire no knowledge of the cause of that disorder; and for any thing we know, evil spirits may now, sometimes, have a power over the bodies of men, by permission. We do not assert this as a fact, but only that the thing is not impossible, nor altogether improbable.

But our principal concern with the existence of evil spirits, does not relate to their power to injure the body, but their cunning and malice in tempting men to sin. As Satan tempted our Lord, so he did his disciples. He took complete possession of Judas, by his consent, and induced him to commit the most enormous crime on record. He also tempted Peter, and for a season overcame him, and had he not been preserved from utter apostasy, by the intercession of his Lord, we have reason to think that his case would have been as desperate as that of Judas. Christ says, "Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have you, to sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." And when Ananias and Sapphira were guilty of an enormous crime, in lying to the Holy Ghost, Peter, in his address, said, "Why hath Satan filled thy heart to lie unto the Holy Ghost?" And that true believers have to endure a severe conflict with these powers of darkness is exceedingly evident from what Paul says, in his Epistle to the Ephesians. "Put on he whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil; for we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." He exhorts, "to take the shield of faith to quench the fiery darts of the wicked." It is hence manifest, that Christians are surrounded by a host of spiritual enemies, of whom the devil is the leader; and it would seem that there are the same orders among the fallen, as among the blessed angels. They are described as "principalities, powers, and rulers, and as spiritual wickedness in high places." And in 2Co_2:11, Paul cautions those to whom he wrote, "Lest Satan should get an advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices." And Peter recognizes the existence and malice of the same invisible enemy, in his exhortation to Christians. "Be sober, be vigilant, for your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." And Paul exhorts the Ephesians, "Neither give place to the devil," that is, do not yield to him; resist him. The same exhortation, in substance, is given by James. "Resist the devil and he will flee from you." This doctrine of spiritual enemies watching our path and seeking our destruction, is, at first view, very appalling; until we recollect, that the Captain of our salvation is able to bruise Satan under our feet; yea, has already conquered him, and has him completely under his control, and has promised to his people "that they shall not be tempted above what they are able to bear," and that "with the temptation he will make a way for their escape."

But if the real Christian is thus exposed to the temptations of the evil one, what must be the condition of impenitent men? The Scriptures are also very explicit and full on this point. They are said to be "led captive by the devil at his will." Those who are "dead in trespasses and sins," are described as "walking according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." When the gospel is preached, Satan taketh away the word that was sown in the hearts of the hearers. He is also said to "blind the minds of those who believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ should shine unto them." And when men are converted, they are translated from the power of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son. "He that committeth sin is of the devil, for the devil sinneth from the beginning." "Ye are of your father the devil, and the works of your father ye will do." "When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace." Wretched, indeed, is the condition of those who are under the power of such a malignant spirit. They are willing slaves to the most cruel of masters.

CHAPTER XIII

Providence of God

The providence of God is "his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures and all their actions."

All creatures are necessarily dependent on the Creator for their continued existence. If he should withdraw his supporting hand, they would cease to be. If we admit that God in wisdom made the world, he had some end in view in the works which by his power he produced: it is most certain, therefore, that he will so direct and govern his creatures, that the end designed shall be accomplished. Being perfect in wisdom and power, he is able to order all events, and the actions of all creatures, in such a manner as to attain the end which he purposed to himself in the beginning. To suppose that his purpose failed of its accomplishment, or that the actual state of things in the universe is different from the original plan of the Creator, would be attended with so many absurd consequences, that the idea should not for a moment be admitted. Such an opinion would detract essentially from the wisdom or power of the Creator, and would destroy all confidence in him as the Governor of the world; for if disconcerted and disappointed in the execution of his plan, in one instance, there can be no security that the same will not happen again and again, until every thing shall fall into disorder; so that the end proposed to himself by the Creator, shall be for ever frustrated. The only reason which has induced any to entertain the opinion that the plan of the Almighty has been disconcerted, is the introduction of sin into the world by the actions of free agents. It has been assumed as a principle, that God is not only not the author of sin, which is true, but that, consistently with his holiness, he could not form a purpose, that it should be permitted to exist. Though the motive which has led many to maintain that sin has come into the world in opposition to the purpose of God is good, yet the opinion is utterly untenable, in consistency with the perfections of Jehovah. It would make it necessary to believe, not only that he did not design that evil should exist, but that he did not foresee the event; for if he had foreseen it he could have prevented it, if in no other way yet by omitting to bring into existence a creature capable of frustrating his plan; or by producing a creature who, he foreknew, would not transgress. We must believe, therefore, that the purposes of God cannot fail of their accomplishment, and hence, that he not only foresaw, but determined to suffer his creatures, in the exercise of their freedom, to commit sin. Yet this permission does not imply that he was the author of sin, or that he can look upon it with the least favour or approbation; for sin is ever that abominable thing which God hates. But he permitted free agents to commit sin; that is, he did not interpose to hinder them from acting as they pleased, because he knew that he could make the existence of sin and misery, the occasion of more illustriously displaying his attributes, particularly his justice and his mercy, than could have been done in other circumstances. The reason then, why sin was permitted to exist was, that God might have an opportunity of manifesting his own glory to all intelligent creatures more conspicuously; which is the great end of all his works and dispensations. The providence of God in regard to sin consists, first, in his purpose to permit free agents, in the exercise of their freedom, to commit sin; secondly, in so directing and governing sinful creatures, that their actions may be made subservient to his own wise purposes; and when they would not have this tendency they are restrained, according to that declaration in the Psalms, "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: and the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain." The Holy Scriptures constantly represent the providence of God as concerned in the evil actions of men, not as causing or approving them, but as permitting, governing, and directing them, so that they may promote his own glory. Thus, the envy of Joseph's brethren, which led them to sell him as a slave, was overruled to be the occasion of preserving the whole family from death. The crucifixion of our Lord was by the hands of wicked men, in the free indulgence of their own malice, but it was nevertheless, "by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God." And the same is true of all sinful actions; they are hateful to God, considered in their own nature, and yet his providence is concerned in their permission, and direction, so as to promote a good end. The providence of God, therefore, in its relation to the sins of men, is most holy and wise, and does not interfere in the least with man's free agency. "He worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will:" and his "counsel shall stand." "Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" Amo_3:6.

The providence of God extends to all events, great and small. Both reason and revelation teach this doctrine. For if God governs the world at all, his providence must extend to small things as well as to great, because of the concatenation of events, according to which the great often depend for their existence on the small. And if reason were silent, the Scriptures speak out clearly on this point. "The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposal thereof is of the Lord." "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing, and one of them shall not fall to the ground without your Father." "For the very hairs of your head are all numbered."

The doctrine of a particular superintending providence, as it is a most reasonable, so is a most comfortable truth. If any thing could occur without being included in the plan of the divine government, we never could feel that we are safe. The sure ground of our trust in God is, "that he works all things according to the counsel of his own will." When the dark and cloudy day of adversity comes, and billow after billow rolls over us, and threatens to overwhelm us, our consolation is that our God rideth on the whirlwind and directeth the storm. We may often think with Jacob, "that all these things are against us;" but when we can view every event, however afflictive, as the appointment of our heavenly Father, we can say with Eli, "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good." It is a delightful thought to the true Christian, that all events are under the government of Divine Providence. The book of providence, the leaves of which are successively unfolded day after day, should be carefully studied, and its indications faithfully used in directing us in the path of duty.

CHAPTER XIV

Man's Primeval State

As man was created a free, moral agent, it is not only true that he was capable of being governed by a moral law, but such a law resulted necessarily from his relation to his Creator. It was his duty as it was his delight, to exercise love and every holy affection toward that Being who possesses every perfection. Although man was perfect in holiness, being created in the image of God, yet he was mutable, as being a creature; for immutability properly belongs to God only. All accountable creatures are, therefore, from their very condition, in a state of probation, that is, they are made subject to a law which they are required to obey, but which, in the exercise of their freedom, they may disobey. It cannot be doubted that man was endowed with full power to comply with all the divine requisitions. The law demanded nothing but the faithful exercise of those powers and affections which belong to human nature. The sum of all obedience was to love the Lord his God with all his heart. This was not only easy to an uncorrupted nature, but his highest happiness was connected with it. Man's probation would have continued without limit, unless God, in great condescension and kindness, had been pleased to enter into covenant with him.

The word "covenant" is to be understood in a much more general and comprehensive sense, than the common import of the English term *covenant*. It is a solemn transaction in which God appoints and establishes certain conditions on which man might become partaker of eternal life in heaven, secure from all danger of forfeiting his interest in the favour of God. And as it pleased God that the human kind should come into the world in connexion with the first man, and should proceed from him as his children, it seemed good to infinite wisdom to make him the federal head and representative of all his posterity; so that upon his rendering perfect obedience to the commandments of God, for a certain limited period, eternal life would be secured to himself and to all his natural descendants; and on the other hand, if he transgressed the law given to him, his sin should be considered as the sin of the whole race; or, in other words, should be so imputed to them, as that they should be brought into existence in the same moral condition into which he should fall, and be subject to the same penalties. And in order that there might be a clear and decisive test of the obedience or disobedience of man, under this covenant of works, a particular tree was selected, called on account of its use, "the tree of knowledge of good and evil." Although the fruit of this tree was good for food, and pleasant to the eyes, yet our first parents were forbidden to eat of it, or even to touch it; and thus it became a precise test of obedience or disobedience.

There was also another sacramental tree, called "the tree of life," the fruit of which was to be used to prevent all disease or tendency to death; or, more probably, to be a sign and seal of eternal life to our first parents, when their period of probation should be ended, provided they continued in obedience.

Man, when created out of the dust of the earth, was inspired with a rational and immortal soul, and placed in a pleasant garden, planted with every kind of trees, bearing nutritious fruits; the temperature of which was so mild that no covering for the human body was needed. As he was without experience, all knowledge necessary for the preservation of life and the performance of duty was given to him, and among these gifts was that of speech, without which there could have been no easy interchange of sentiments, nor any considerable progress in knowledge. Man was also made lord of the creation; for God said to his newly formed creature, "Have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth on the earth." And in this respect, also, man was the image of his Creator. It was, therefore, left to Adam to give names to every beast of the field and fowl of the air; and for this purpose they were made to pass before him, "and whatever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof."

It would seem from the tenor of the sacred history, that God conversed freely with his creature man, while he remained in Paradise, either by the ministry of holy angels; or, more probably, by his Son, assuming by anticipation the appearance of man. But, on points where the Sacred Scriptures do not speak decisively, it is our wisdom to be silent.

Here we may contemplate the interesting condition of our first parents. They were holy and happy, and had nothing to fear but sin; yet, considering the natural weakness of creatures, their situation was most critical, and the everlasting interests of unnumbered millions were suspended on the fallible will of our first parents. And soon, alas! all was lost!

Upon a survey of the condition in which man was placed, when created, there are two reflections which force themselves on our minds.

1. The goodness of God to the first man and to the race. Man was indeed fearfully and wonderfully made, as to the structure and constitution of his body, and, also, as to the intellectual endowments of his mind, being enriched with the noble faculties of reason, memory, and imagination. But, above all, the goodness of the Creator is manifest in stamping upon the soul of man his own moral image, and in communicating to him all that knowledge which was requisite for the performance of duty and the enjoyment of happiness. This goodness was also conspicuous in the external provision made for the supply of all his wants, and the gratification of all his innocent desires.

2. Comparing the condition of Adam in innocence with that of man now, we may form some idea of the greatness of our loss. A withering curse has fallen upon the ground itself, man has lost his perfection of life and health, and has forfeited his immortality. But the heaviest part of the curse has lighted on his moral powers. The image of God, which was his beauty and dignity, has been effaced. Corruption and disorder have ensued; and, in the place of happiness, misery, in its multiform kinds, has seized upon him. Alas! the crown has fallen from his head, and the most fine gold has become dim!

CHAPTER XV

Law of God

From the relation which a rational creature sustains to his Creator, arises an obligation to perfect obedience. The right of the Author of our being to what he has made out of nothing, is the completest right of which we can form a conception. And, as God is infinitely excellent and glorious in his own nature, it is reasonable that he should require the supreme love of the rational creature. If we had any thing better than our love and gratitude to give, in return for what we have received from our Creator and Preserver, we should be under obligation to render the best which we possibly could; but since pure love is the best offering of which we are capable, God requires that. But when perfect obedience is rendered, we do not repay our debt; this never can be done. When we have done all, we have only performed our duty, and as it relates to God, are "unprofitable servants." When man was created, he was endowed with the necessary knowledge of God, and his disposition was conformable to his law, which was written on his heart. But when man sinned, the image of God, as far as it consisted in moral likeness, was lost; but some knowledge of duty, and feeling of moral obligation remained. This, however, through ignorance and negligence, was soon so obscured, that except in regard to a few great enormities, men have generally lost sight of the law of God as a rule of duty, reaching not only to the outward actions, but to the thoughts and affections of the heart. It became very necessary, therefore, that there should be a new revelation of the moral law, and such a specification of particular duties, as was suited to the people of Israel, to whom the revelation was made. This revelation was communicated by God himself from mount Horeb, in the midst of thunderings and lightnings and darkness and tempest, in a voice of tremendous majesty: and the Decalogue which contained the specifications of this moral law, was written by the finger of God on two tables of stone, after having been uttered in a voice of thunder from the midst of the fiery mountain.

The sum and substance of the moral law, as it relates to the inner man, is comprehended in two commandments, which are recognized by our Saviour as still in force, and as containing summarily all moral duty. The first of these is, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord, and thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And the second is like unto it, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two hang all the law and the prophets."

As to the dispositions and affections of heart, required by this law, they are the same to all persons, and under all dispensations; but as to the external acts required, they vary according to the relations in which men are placed. While, therefore, the principles of moral obedience are simple, the acts which may be incumbent on moral agents, may be infinitely diversified. All, however, in every situation, are bound externally to reverence and worship God, and to exercise justice and mercy in their intercourse with their fellow men. And there are also moral duties which have respect to ourselves. It is the duty of all, by lawful means, to seek their own welfare—the improvement of their minds, and the health and purity of their bodies; and to avoid every thing which has any tendency to injure themselves. The exhortation, "Do thyself no harm," is of general application, and is a moral duty of great importance.

It has been common to divide moral duties into three classes; such as we owe to God, to our neighbour, and to ourselves. From what has been said, it is evident, that there is some foundation, in the nature of the case, for this threefold distinction. But it seems scarcely correct to speak of owing duties to our fellow creatures, or to ourselves, as though we had more sovereigns than one. There is, strictly, but one Sovereign and one Judge, to whom we owe allegiance. We are bound to love our neighbour, because God enjoins it; and to promote our own welfare, for the same reason. We are under one moral law which is binding, because it is made known to us to be the will of God. It is obvious, that when all internal holiness is comprehended in love, this word must be taken in a generic sense, to include all right affections toward God, and toward our fellow creatures, such as reverence, trust, gratitude, &c.; and a like latitude should be given to it, in relation to our fellow men.

The law of God is perfect. It has been justly called a transcript of the moral perfections of God. It is the highest standard of moral dignity and excellence, of which the creature is capable. It is also the measure of man's supreme happiness. We see then, not only that it is just in God to require perfect obedience to the law, and that to require less would be a derogation from his holiness; but that his goodness is equally manifest in the requisition of all the love and obedience of which the nature of man is susceptible; for it is that very state of mind, in which man's purest and sublimest happiness consists. And if we should, for a moment, suppose, that a less degree of love and obedience should be required, either as to intensity or constancy, where would we fix this degree? It is evident, that in proportion as man falls short of perfect love, or that degree of love to his Creator, of which he is constitutionally capable, so far he sinks in moral dignity and excellence. And no man can fix any other measure of love, which might not be, on the same principle, lowered more and more, until nothing was left.

But the law of God is also just, for it requires no more than what the creature, as he came from the hands of his Creator, had full power to render. In the case of all creatures, in innocence, the maxim is correct, that duty and ability must be commensurate. Accordingly, God does not require man to love or obey, with the powers of an angel, but to love the Lord his God with all his heart, mind, and strength. But this maxim cannot with propriety be applied to the case of those who by their own fault have lost the ability of rendering perfect obedience. The law of God cannot lower its demands in proportion to the inability of man, brought on by transgression. That blindness of mind, and that hardness of heart, and perversity of will, produced by sinning, are in themselves sinful, and cannot, therefore, furnish any excuse. In fact, these things constitute the root and core of our depravity, and are the very things for which man shall chiefly be condemned. The same is true of inveterate habits of sin, and errors which are the fruit of sin. These things cannot excuse, or there would be no blame any where. No moral change, however, affects the essence of the soul; its faculties remain the same under all moral conditions. Sin destroys no constitutional faculty, and regeneration produces no new faculty. Man, in all stages of his existence, continues to be a free moral agent. If this were not the case, he could not be the subject of a moral government. Whatever the law requires, therefore, man has the mental faculties which are sufficient for its performance, if they were under the direction and government of right dispositions of heart. These things being rightly understood, the difficulty and perplexity often experienced in regard to man's being required to perform what he has no power to perform, will be removed.

Besides those duties which arise out of our natural relations, and which are called moral, God may prescribe other actions, commanding the creature to perform acts, or abstain from acts, which in themselves are indifferent, that is, destitute of a moral character; and these acts when commanded or forbidden, are as really binding on the conscience as those dictated by reason, for, whatever is known to be the will of God, is law, and obligatory. The only difference between duties of this class, and others, is, that the obligation rests simply on the revealed will of God; and having nothing of a holy or sinful nature considered in themselves, they may be changed or abolished at the pleasure of the Sovereign. But moral duties are, in the same relations, and under the same circumstances, immutable; they cannot be dispensed with. This lays a foundation for the distinction between moral and positive precepts. The first God must require, or cease to be holy; the last are binding when commanded, but may be changed or abolished by the Lawgiver, according to his wisdom and pleasure. It is not to be understood, however, that ceremonial, or positive precepts have nothing of a moral nature. The difference between moral and positive duties is merely in the external act; but as to the motive and end, there is no difference whatever. God's commands must be obeyed from love to him, and with a view to his glory, of whatever kind they be.

The decalogue, or Ten Commandments, should be considered as a general specification of the duties arising out of the usual relations in which men stand; and not intended to express every particular species of duty, or every conceivable kind of sin. Such a law, thus carried out in minute detail, would be useless by its bulk, and by the multiplicity of particulars would distract, rather than direct. The method chosen, is by far more consonant with wisdom, where the principles of moral duty are clearly laid down, and such a number of specifications given, as will enable the conscientious reader or hearer to form a correct judgment respecting similar cases.

The following rules have been given as useful in the explanation of the Decalogue.

1. The law is spiritual, and extends not only to the external acts of the body, but to the thoughts, desires, and purposes of the heart or mind. Paul, in Rom_7:14. testifies that the law is spiritual. "For we know that the law is spiritual." Rom_7:7. "For I had not known sin, unless the law had said, Thou shalt not covet." The same thing may be conclusively argued from the character of the Lawgiver, who is holy, and whose prerogative it is, to search the heart. And in the common judgment of mankind, the good or evil of an act must be traced to the motive and the purpose of the agent. Civil rulers can only take cognizance of overt acts, but God judgeth the heart. Hence it often happens, that that which is highly esteemed among men, is an abomination in the sight of God; because man looketh on the outward appearance, but God looketh on the heart. And this is strongly confirmed and illustrated in our Saviour's exposition of the true nature of the law, where he represents malice to possess the guilt of murder, and a wanton eye that of adultery.

2. In affirmative precepts, negative must be considered as included; and *vice versa*, negative in affirmative.

In many passages of Scripture much more is meant, than is explicitly expressed. But in the application of this rule, caution and sound judgment are requisite, lest we make the law a mere Lesbian rule, a nose of wax, which can be bent into any shape—a vague and indefinite thing, which every one may understand in that sense which suits him. We must inquire accurately and profoundly, into the mind of the Legislator as elsewhere expressed, and pay strict attention to the context, and to the occasion on which any precept was spoken.

It is plain, however, that a precept enjoining something good, cannot be obeyed without avoiding the contrary evil. It is also evident, that when any particular sin is forbidden, obedience cannot be rendered, without cultivating and practising the contrary virtue. Thus, when it is said, "Thou shalt not kill," it is evident that it is implied, that we should not only refrain from injuring our neighbour, but should do what we can to promote his welfare. And the command, not to steal, includes an obligation to advance, as far as it may be in our power, our neighbour's property and outward estate. And every one sees, that the command to honour our parents, includes a prohibition to dishonour or injure them.

3. In each of the commandments it is necessary to suppose, that, for brevity's sake, a part is put for the whole; a specimen which may be said to represent all duties or sins of the same class: and the prohibition of any sin, includes all things which would tend toward it, and all inclinations leading to its commission. Thus, when it is said, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," all impure conduct is forbidden, as sodomy, incest, fornication, and all lascivious actions; also all unchaste thoughts, imaginations and desires which lead to the commission of the crimes that belong to this class.

4. The cause must be considered as included in the effect, the genus in the species, and the correlative in the relative. Thus, in the prohibition of stealing, covetousness, its cause, is forbidden. In the prohibition of murder, cherished anger is included. Under the head of theft, every species of fraud and injustice is included. Under the sin of "taking the name of the Lord in vain" is included all profaneness, and want of due reverence for any thing relating to God, as all trifling and jesting with his word; and all ridicule or contempt of the worship and ordinances of his house.

So also, when the duty of children to parents is enjoined, the correlative duties of parents to their children must be considered as required. And the mention of one class of relative duties, must be considered as a specimen of all relative duties. It is right, therefore, under the fifth commandment, to comprehend the duties of magistrates and subjects, of masters and servants, of pastors and their flocks, of husbands and wives, and of every relation which lawfully exists among men.

There are two rules laid down by theologians on this subject, which though generally true, cannot be considered as universally applicable.

5. The one is, that the duties of the first table, or those which have God for their object, should have preference above those of the second table, which have our fellow men for their object. But, if a man be in danger of perishing, and we can save his life, by omitting prayer, or the worship of God, it is obviously our duty to give preference to the duty of saving the life of a fellow creature. Many other cases might be supposed.

6. The second rule, commonly laid down, and which is not of universal application, is, that moral duties take the preference over positive; mercy must be preferred to sacrifice. For this we have the authority of the prophets and our Saviour himself: "I will have mercy and not sacrifice."

Neither must this rule be considered as universally applicable. Indeed, we cannot in any case, determine our duty by it, without regard to the nature and circumstances of the duties which may come into competition; for where there is no inconsistency in performing the duties, both kinds are obligatory, though some may be much more important than others. The Pharisees who neglected the weightier matters of the law, and were scrupulous in observing the payment of tithes, even on the herbs of the garden, are not blamed for tithing mint, anise, and cummin, but for neglecting much more important duties; as appears by the words of our Saviour, "These ought ye to have done, and not leave the others undone."

But when moral and positive duties interfere, the question is, whether the moral must in all cases have the precedence. That mercy should be preferred to sacrifice, is clearly revealed, but that in every case, a divinely appointed ordinance must give way to every species of moral duty, cannot properly be inferred from this text. Suppose a believer to be so situated that he has the opportunity of receiving Christian baptism, or attending on the Lord's supper, and to be under the necessity of going on a tedious voyage to sea, would it be his duty to neglect either of these holy sacraments for the sake of performing some moral act not of the first importance, which could not be performed, unless he would omit these positive duties? For example, suppose that just when about to attend on the Lord's supper, he should be sent for, to visit a sick person at a distance, would he be bound to neglect the only opportunity he might ever have, to receive either of the sacraments of the Christian church? I think not. Indeed, to Christians, as commonly situated, it would not be proper to absent themselves from the table of the Lord, in order to pull an ox or sheep out of a pit, into which it had fallen; though this is a moral duty, when not called to the performance of other duties, which are more important.

Why the ceremonies of religion are sometimes spoken of in a disparaging way, was on account of the total defect of spirituality. As Isaiah says, "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord, I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts, and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of rams, or of he-goats. When you come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hands to tread my courts?" And again, "He that killeth an ox, is as if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, is 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." The reason why appointed rites are thus spoken of, as services condemned and spurned by the Almighty, is not because the right performance of the ceremonial law was not acceptable, but because the people utterly neglected the moral and spiritual part of worship, which is its essence, and depended entirely on the performance of external rites, while they indulged without restraint their wicked inclinations; vainly trusting that these observances would be a compensation for all moral defects.

7. Another rule which has been given for the interpretation of the moral law is, "That affirmative precepts are always obligatory, but do not require a constant performance; whereas negative precepts are not only always obligatory, but must be constantly observed." This rule, though true, is of very little use, as the direction contained in it, is obvious to the reason of every reflecting man. The duty of prayer is always obligatory, but not a duty to be performed at all times; but the negative precept, forbidding us to take the name of the Lord in vain, binds us always, and is always to be observed.

The moral law will be better understood by considering the nature of the obedience which it demands; and this may be comprehended in the following particulars.

I. The law reaches to the whole of man; to the soul with all its faculties, and to the body with all its members.
II. A fourfold perfection is required by the law.

1. It must be cordial or from the heart.
2. Universal, both as to its object and its parts.
3. In the degree of its intensity—with all the heart, &c.
4. In its duration; it must never cease.
5. The beginning, middle and end of obedience, is love out of a pure heart, and faith unfeigned. But under the term love is comprehended as was said before, every virtuous feeling and holy purpose and emotion. When the word is thus taken, "love is the fulfilling of the law." The two commandments in which all others are included are love to God and love to our neighbour. As on these hang all the law and the prophets, that is, all incumbent duties, in them must be included all holy affections toward God, and all right dispositions toward our fellow creatures, according to our relation to them and our opportunity of doing them good, "for love worketh no ill to his neighbour."

CHAPTER XVI

Fall of Man

How long our first parents continued in innocence we are not informed, and it would be in vain to conjecture; but the common opinion has been that the time was short.

Already an enemy of God existed; a fallen spirit, who had led a multitude of his fellow angels into rebellion, who were cast out of their celestial habitations, but had liberty, for a season, to roam about he universe of God. Satan, the prince of the devils, envying the happiness of man, formed the design of seducing him from his allegiance, and bringing him into the same degraded and wretched condition with himself. He, therefore, watched his opportunity, and knowing the woman to be the "weaker vessel," he resolved to make his first assault on her. She seems to have been curiously gazing on the beautiful fruit of the forbidden tree, when the arch-fiend, making use of the body of the serpent, which was the wisest of the animal tribes, and had originally an erect and pleasing form, "said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: for God doth know, that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened; and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise; she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat; and gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat." Here the positive commandment of God was violated, the covenant of life broken, and the curse of death incurred, not only for himself, but for all his posterity. Philosophically to explain how a perfectly holy creature could sin, is not easy; but as a practical matter the thing is not difficult. The mind of man was incapable of thinking of many things at once; to his constitution belong many natural desires and appetites. The objects suited to these might so occupy the mind, for a season, as to exclude higher and nobler ideas; and, in a moment of inadvertency the lower propensities, which act with a blind force, might prevail with persons, before innocent, to do an act which God had forbidden; especially, when by an impudent falsehood the danger of the act was positively denied, and when it was confidently alleged that great good would be the result.

Whether the man was influenced to eat, by the same motives which prevailed with the woman, is a matter of uncertainty. Many suppose that he was led by love to his wife to determine to perish with her, rather than be for ever separated from her. It matters little what were his motives; the fact was, that he deliberately transgressed the law of God, and thus involved a world in ruin.

The immediate consequences of the fatal transgression were, a new set of feelings, of guilt, shame, and fear, which caused our first parents to cover themselves with fig-leaves, and to hide themselves among the thick trees of the garden; and when questioned by their Maker they attempted to excuse themselves, and to charge their fault upon another. They were now driven from the garden, and flaming cherubim stationed at the entrance to prevent their return. The ground was cursed for their sake, and doomed thenceforth to bring forth thorns and briars; so that man would have to eat his bread by the sweat of his brow. The sentence of death was also confirmed, "Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return." It may be asked, how the threatening, "In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," was executed, since Adam continued to live upon earth for more than nine hundred years? "Let God be true, but every man a liar." This threatening was executed, or began to be executed, that very day; for, from the moment of man's eating the forbidden fruit, he became mortal; death already began to work. Again, in death, as threatened in the penalty, every kind of evil is included. Temporal death, consisting of a separation of soul and body, was not the principal thing; but spiritual death, which consists in a separation from God, a loss of his favour, and image, and which perpetuated, is eternal death, commenced on the very day on which man sinned. While man, after the fall, retained all his physical powers of soul and body, and continued still to be a moral and accountable creature, he entirely lost that clothing of moral excellence, which was the beauty and glory of his nature. He was now dead in law, and dead in trespasses and sins; and from being a holy being, became totally depraved; that is, destitute of any principle of true holiness; but capable of unlimited increase in wickedness.

That the posterity of Adam "sinned in him, and fell with him in his first transgression," is evident from the fact that they have all become mortal, and are subjected to all the temporal evils which fell upon him. They are all excluded from paradise, and are forced to till the earth with the sweat of their brow, which still groans under the curse, and spontaneously brings forth noxious weeds instead of useful grains and fruits. Woman is still, all over the world, subject to the same pains in parturition, which were threatened to Eve. But more than this, men come into the world destitute of that holiness, or original righteousness, in which Adam was created. By nature all are children of wrath. All go astray from their earliest years. "There is none that doeth good, no not one. There is no fear of God before their eyes, and the way of peace have they not known." This state of corruption is not confined to idolatrous Gentiles, but belongs also to the Jews, who were in external covenant with God. "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." And these streams of iniquity David traces up to the polluted fountain, when he cries out, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me."

That the universality of death in the human race, is owing to the transgression of Adam, is clearly evinced from the express declarations of Holy Scripture. "As in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive." "As by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; so death hath passed on all men, because that (or in whom) all have sinned." "As by the disobedience of one, many were made sinners." "By one man's offence, death reigned by one." "Through the offence of one many are dead." "By the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation." And the facts, known by universal experience, are in exact accordance with these declarations of the Bible. All men die. And that this is on account of the imputation of Adam's sin, is evident from this, that death reigns over "those who have not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression;" that is, over infants who have not been guilty of any actual violation of the law of God.

Whether it was just in God to constitute Adam the representative of all his posterity, and suspend their salvation on his obedience, is not a question for us to discuss. Whatever God does is just, and not only just, but wise; and though darkness may rest on this transaction, this is owing to our ignorance and prejudice. We need not fear that the Judge of all the earth will not be able to vindicate his own dispensations to the whole universe.

Some have thought to evade or lessen the apparent hardship of the case, by denying the imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity, and maintaining that children were only punished for the depraved nature derived from Adam. But how came they to inherit this depraved nature? Is not this the principal part of the curse? And it goes a very little way to relieve the mind which labours, to say that infants are punished for latent depravity, instead of suffering for the sin of Adam.

Instead of cavilling and complaining of the dispensations of the Almighty, by which we have become miserable sinners, let us not cease to bewail the deep corruption of our nature; and let us, instead of perplexing ourselves with fruitless inquiries about the principles of the divine government, by which we have been involved in this ruin, earnestly seek to know what that gracious remedy is, which God has provided for our recovery. The fact is certain, that we are in a depraved and miserable state, and unless we are redeemed from it, we must be forever in a state of degradation and misery. When it is asserted, that man is totally depraved, the meaning is not that he is as wicked as he is capable of being; or, that all men are sinners in an equal degree; but, that all men are by nature destitute of any principle of true holiness; all love the creature supremely, and their carnal hearts are at enmity with God, and not subject unto his law, neither, indeed, can be. It is evident from what has been said, that man is in a sinful, miserable, and helpless condition.

CHAPTER XVII

Covenant of Grace; or, Plan of Redemption

In this treatise, the word "covenant" is used in a wide sense, to correspond with the latitude which belongs to the original terms, of which this is a translation. Without attempting to give a very exact, or logical definition of the phrase "covenant of grace," I would say, that by it is meant the whole plan of redemption, from its commencement to its consummation; or, that gracious method of bestowing salvation on elect sinners, which is revealed in the holy Scriptures.

The fall of man, by which God's chief work on earth was ruined, was not an unexpected event which took the omniscient God by surprise; nor could it disconcert that scheme which had been originally conceived in the eternal mind. "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world," (Act_15:18.) Although God is not the author of sin, and can never look upon evil but with the strongest disapprobation; yet, having created man a free, accountable creature, and having endowed him with full ability to obey the law under which he was placed, he chose to leave him to the freedom of his own will, without exerting any direct influence on him, either to preserve him in obedience, or to cause him to fall. And, although he knew that man would fall into sin and ruin, yet he purposed to permit this, that is, not to hinder it; because he knew that he could make it the occasion of a more illustrious display of his attributes, especially of his justice and mercy, than could be made under other circumstances.

It is essential to just views of the covenant of grace, to assume it as an undoubted truth, that the condemnation of mankind, under the covenant of works, was just, and that the Ruler of the universe was not under any obligations to devise any plan of recovery for fallen man, any more than for fallen angels; for if it would not have been just to leave men under the curse which they had incurred, then that covenant or law, under which man was placed, was not a righteous constitution; and if it would not have been just to leave the human race in the ruin in which they were involved, then their deliverance would not be a matter of grace, but of justice. A difference of opinion may exist among the orthodox, as to the kind and degree of punishment to which the human race would have been subjected, if the law had been executed fully upon them, but there can be but one opinion respecting the justice of their punishment, by all who entertain correct opinions respecting the character and dispensations of the Governor of the universe. God was not bound to provide a Redeemer; this was a matter of mere grace and favour.

The origin of the covenant of grace was the unparalled, incomprehensible love of God to sinners of the human race. The obstacles in the way of accomplishing the salvation of those whose death was demanded by law and justice, were apparently insuperable. It may be presumed, that if the problem, how God could be just and yet justify the ungodly, had been proposed to a conclave of the brightest angels in heaven, they could not have worked out a satisfactory answer: it would have baffled their utmost intellectual efforts. That God cannot cease to treat his creatures according to the principles of eternal justice is most evident; and that justice required that the sinner should suffer, according to his demerit, is equally evident. Where, then, is there any foundation for hope in regard to those who have once transgressed? And not only the justice, but the truth of God stood in the way of the sinner's salvation. God had threatened the penalty of death, interminable death; and the Ruler of the universe must maintain the truth of his word, as it respects his threatenings as well as his promises: "God is not a man that he should lie; nor the son of man, that he should repent." (Num_29:13.) But that which could not be discovered by the wisdom of creatures, was devised by the infinite wisdom of God. In the counsels of the adorable Trinity the plan was agreed upon. Between the Father and the Son, a transaction took place, which may strictly be termed a covenant, for, speaking after the manner of men, there were mutual stipulations entered into between the high contracting parties. The Father, as Legislator and Governor of the universe, appoints the Son to the office of Mediator, and, on certain conditions, gives to him a chosen people, elected from the common mass of fallen man, "according to his own good purpose." The Son willingly accepts the arduous office, and engages to comply with the proposed conditions; and the Holy Spirit consents to perform his part in the execution and consummation of the glorious plan. But, contriving and planning was not all that was requisite; the Mediator, in order to redeem man, must obey and suffer in his place; and this rendered it necessary, that he should descend to earth and be born of a woman, and made under the law. And this stoop of humiliation was not enough; the Son of God must suffer and die, in the room of the creature man. And, in order that he might exhaust the penalty due to man for sin, the Redeemer must not only die, but his death must be of the most bitter and accursed kind. To all this he consented, and covenanted on behalf of his chosen, to meet all the demands of law and justice against them.

If any should ask, what evidence we have of this covenant of redemption, we answer, in the words of the Mediator, "I appoint," or, as the original word imports, "I give by covenant, unto you, a kingdom, as the Father hath given by covenant unto me." Luk_22:29. Again, "As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him." Joh_17:2. "I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world; thine they were and thou gavest them me." (Joh_17:6.) "I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou gavest me." (Joh_17:9.) "Keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me." And the solemn declaration in the eighty-ninth Psalm, "I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant," has always, by the church, been referred to the Messiah, to the spiritual David, David's Lord, and David's Son.

But why was this salvation confined to a certain favoured number, called the elect of God? This doctrine of the sovereignty of divine grace, has, from the beginning, been offensive to human reason. The selection of men, and not of angels, as the object of redemption, can be borne with; but that, out of the same mass, some should be taken, confessedly no better than others by nature; and that many should be reprobated or left, no worse than those elected, has ever been a stumbling-block to multitudes; and hence, however plainly the doctrine be revealed, they will not receive it; and frequently manifest great hostility to all who maintain and preach it, as did the Jews when our Lord inculcated it by reference to certain facts in the sacred history. But however offensive this doctrine is to human reason, since it is clearly revealed, and often expressed in the word of God, we are not at liberty to relinquish or conceal it. If God might justly have left all men to perish in their sin, certainly he may justly leave a part in that state of ruin into which they have fallen. As all men are by nature children of wrath, the redemption of a part cannot alter or affect the condition of the rest. Because the pardoning power in the State releases certain persons from the penalty of the law, this does not render it unjust to punish others who are under a sentence of condemnation.

The justice of God in this case is easily vindicated; but it is not so easy to reconcile this proceeding with his benevolence. If God could as easily have saved all as a part, why did he not manifest his goodness in doing so? To which it may be answered, that we do not know the reasons of the divine conduct, in this matter. He, as an absolute Sovereign, has a right to do as seemeth good with his own. He constantly refers election to his own good pleasure, to the counsel of his own will. He has infinitely good reasons; but as he has not revealed them, we have no right to inquire into them.

The manifestation of God's gracious purpose, in the covenant of grace, began to be made immediately after the fall; first, in the sentence pronounced on the serpent, in which it was declared that the seed of the woman should bruise the head of the serpent, that is, of "the old serpent, which is the devil;" and next by the institution of bloody sacrifices, and accepting the offerings of this kind made in faith, as in the case of Abel; and by various communications to the saints, until the time of Abraham, with whom God entered into a special covenant, and to whom he made many gracious promises, and granted peculiar privileges to his descendants, and separated the chosen race from all the world, and placed the seal of his covenant in their flesh.

But when the seed of Jacob had grown to be a great nation in Egypt, where they were held in abject and cruel bondage, God appeared unto Moses at mount Horeb, in the burning bush, and commissioned him to deliver his people, and by a series of wonderful miracles, to conduct them to Canaan, which land four hundred years before he had promised to Abraham. While in the wilderness, at the foot of mount Sinai, God appeared in dreadful majesty to all the people, and uttered his holy law in ten commandments, in the midst of thunder and lightning, and the sound of a trumpet, while the whole mountain burned with fire.

The moral law was binding on man by nature, but it had become so much obliterated, that it became necessary to republish it, that the people having the true standard of duty before them, might be convinced of their sins, and driven to seek refuge in the atoning blood, so copiously shed on the Jewish altar.

Besides the moral law, which was not only proclaimed by the voice of God, but engraved by the finger of God on two tables of stone, he gave many ritual laws to be observed, instituted a priesthood, and consecrated the family of Aaron to this service, and directed Moses to erect a tabernacle for worship, exactly according to a pattern showed him on the mount, where he remained in the presence of God forty days, without eating or drinking, at two different times. All these institutions, of a ceremonial kind, were intended to be a shadow of good things to come.

This dispensation, administered by sacrifices, by types, and prophecies, continued, without essential change, until it was superseded by the more glorious dispensation of the gospel, introduced after the advent of the Messiah; who being the Mediator of the new covenant, and having answered all the types and fulfilled all the prophecies, brought that dispensation to an end. And the New Testament dispensation, with clearer light, greater liberty, more of the spirit of adoption, and a spiritual worship not confined to any particular place, nor burdened with external forms and rites, it is believed, will continue until the second advent of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER XVIII

The Incarnation

Christ did not come into the world until about four thousand years from the creation had elapsed. By this delay it clearly appeared how deep was the depravity of fallen man, as all nations, the Israelites only excepted, departed from God, and lost the knowledge of his true character. And having apostatized from the worship and service of their Creator, they universally, with the exception already mentioned, addicted themselves to the most abominable idolatries, and to every species of degrading vice.

This apostasy was not owing to any defect of external light, for, as Paul teaches, “that which may be known of God is manifest in them, for God hath showed it unto them. For the invisible things of him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead, so that they are without excuse. Because when they knew God they glorified him not as God, neither were they thankful; but they became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four footed beasts, and creeping things.” It was proper that the world should have the opportunity of making trial of their own wisdom before the device of infinite wisdom should be manifested. Opportunity had also been thus afforded to prepare the way for the advent of the Mediator, by a system of types and prophecies, which clearly designated his person and offices, and thus furnished indubitable evidence of his being indeed the Christ of God. The time selected for the advent of the Saviour was also suitable, because the world was then full of inhabitants; the human mind had been highly cultivated, and the intellectual faculties had attained their utmost vigour, and all the civilized world were subject to one government; and the Latin and Greek languages were understood through the whole extent of the Roman empire. And although in the previous age civil discord and desolating wars disturbed the empire, all was now reduced to peace under Augustus Cæsar, so that a favourable opportunity was afforded for propagating the gospel among the nations. Besides, the time of Messiah’s advent had been fixed in the distinct enunciations of prophecy. Shiloh was to come before the sceptre had entirely departed from Judah, which was now far on the wane. He was to fill the temple of Zerubbabel with his glory, which was soon after this destroyed. And the specified weeks of Daniel, when the Messiah should be cut off, were drawing to a close. The “fulness of time” was therefore come, when “God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law.”

It had been predicted by Isaiah, that “a virgin should conceive and bring forth a Son, and that his name should be Emmanuel, God with us.” It was also foretold by the same prophet, that “a child should be born, who should be the Mighty God.” There was, therefore, a general expectation among the Jews, that the advent of the Messiah was at hand; and this expectation was increased, when John the Baptist began to preach in the wilderness, saying, “the kingdom of heaven is at hand;” thus fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah; “The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God;” (Isa_40:3,) and also the prediction of Malachi, “Behold, I will send my Messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me;” and again, “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.” (Mal_3:1; Mal_4:5.)

The place of the Messiah’s birth had been explicitly named by the prophet Micah; so that when the wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, and inquired where he was to be born who was King of the Jews, Herod the king called together a convention of all the priests and scribes, to determine this question, which they appear to have agreed upon unanimously, for they immediately answered, “in Bethlehem of Judea,” and referred to the prophecy of Micah. The providence of God in bringing about the fulfilment of this prophecy was remarkable, for Mary and her husband resided at Nazareth. But it had been so ordered by an imperial edict, that every person should resort to the town to which his family properly belonged, to be registered, with a view to a general taxation; and thus the mother of our Lord was brought to Bethlehem at the very time when she was to be delivered of the child, conceived in her womb by the power of the Holy Spirit. And as there was not found room for them in the inn, the Son of God was born in a stable, and laid in a manger.

This glorious event for our lost world, was not suffered to take place without suitable notice: for however inattentive the great men of this world might be to this humble, but miraculous birth, the angels of God had their attention directed to it as the most important event which had ever occurred in our world. One of the heavenly host, probably Gabriel, appeared to a company of shepherds in the vicinity, who were watching their flocks by night, and said, “Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people, for unto you is born, this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.” And as soon as he had delivered his message, “a multitude of the heavenly host was with the angel, praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, and good will to men.”

Until Christ was about thirty years of age, he lived in retirement at Nazareth. When John, his forerunner, had been for some time engaged in his public ministry preaching repentance, and baptizing the people, Jesus came forth, and was baptized in the river Jordan. Having voluntarily placed himself under the law, it was proper that he should comply with not only the moral precepts, but with all the ceremonial institutions then in force. For although he could not attend on these institutions as one who needed forgiveness, or purification, or repentance, yet as he came to take the sinner’s place, he obeyed all the laws then obligatory on the people; for in infancy, he was circumcised, when grown up, he attended the Jewish worship at the temple, partook of the passover, joined in the worship of the synagogue, and, as John was commissioned of God to preach and baptize, he submitted to his baptism. John at first forbade him, saying, “I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?” But Jesus answered, and said, “Suffer it to be so now;” and assigned as a reason, “for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.”

By the incarnation the divine and human natures were mysteriously united. “The word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.” “God was manifest in the flesh.” “He that was in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God, made himself of no reputation, but took on him the form of a servant, and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death.”

CHAPTER XIX

The Expiatory Sufferings of Christ; or, The Atonement

An atonement is that which expiates sin; which reconciles an offended party; which makes satisfaction for offences committed.

The reason why an atonement was necessary, was the inflexible nature of divine justice. This attribute leads the Ruler of the universe to render to every one his due; to treat every one according to his character. The justice of God was manifested in giving to man a righteous law, and annexing a penalty exactly proportioned to the demerit of every transgression. Such a penalty being annexed to the law, it is evident that to execute it is a righteous thing; and when this penalty is incurred by transgression, the Judge of all the earth, acting justly, must inflict it. He cannot deny himself. “He is not a man that he should lie, or the son of man that he should repent.” If the penalty of the law might be set aside in one instance, it might in all, and then government would be at an end. Indeed, no reason can be assigned for a difference; if one sinner is exempted from punishment, the same treatment should be extended to all; for, in the administration of law and justice, there should be uniformity; though that principle does not apply to me dispensation of grace.

How then can any sinner be saved? This is a problem, which we are persuaded no finite intelligence could have solved. But, what created wisdom could not discover, the wisdom of the Triune God was able to accomplish. The principle of an adequate atonement by a qualified Surety, was the one adopted. But who is sufficient to make the requisite satisfaction to law and justice? for, upon the principles already stated, such a satisfaction was necessary. No mere creature could be the substitute; for, beside, that such an one would owe obedience for himself to the full extent of his powers, the actions and sufferings of a mere creature could not possess that merit which could be accepted, to answer the demands of the law against millions. Neither could any person of the Godhead perform the work of redemption. The Deity can neither suffer nor obey. This mighty difficulty can only be overcome by the constitution of a *person*, in whom both natures shall be united; that is, by the second person in the glorious Trinity assuming human nature into such intimate union with himself, that the actions and sufferings of this nature shall be the actions and sufferings of the person of the Son of God. That such a substitution was admissible depended on the wisdom and will of God. Among men, there would exist strong reasons against permitting the innocent to die for the guilty; but when we inquire what these reasons are, we find, that not one of them applies to the redemption of Christ. He has a complete right to dispose of himself, and the power to qualify himself for the arduous work; and by admitting the substitution of Christ in the room of his chosen people, no injury is sustained in any quarter; for, though the Redeemer must endure an inconceivable weight of sorrow for a season, for this he will reap a glorious and endless reward. And though the guilty escape, yet the plan provides for their complete reformation; and the mercy of God is illustriously displayed, and placed in a light in which it never could have been, if this plan had not been revealed.

And not only is mercy and condescension exhibited in a bright and peculiar light, which gives to all the intelligent creation new discoveries of the divine character; but justice, which would have appeared glorious in the punishment of the guilty in exact proportion to their demerit, yet shines forth with a far brighter lustre in the sufferings of the only begotten Son of God, than in the condign punishment of a world of guilty sinners. Here, then, we see what the nature of an atonement must be. It must remove those obstacles which stood in the way of the sinner’s salvation. These arose from the law and justice of God, which demanded the life of the transgressor. The Redeemer, therefore, must make a full satisfaction to law and justice, or the sinner cannot be saved. He must render a meritorious obedience to the law which men had broken, and receive the punishment of their sins in his own person. The sufferings of Christ were, therefore, of a strictly vicarious nature. “He bare our sins in his own body, on the tree.” “He died, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God.” “He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities.” “Our iniquities were laid upon him.” No doubt he set us a glorious example of perfect patience and fortitude, in enduring so much pain and ignominy; but example was not the main end of these sufferings, which would place them on the same level with those of other martyrs. And, it is not disputed that the death of Christ is calculated to produce a moral impression on all intelligent minds, but even this was not the direct end of Christ’s sufferings, according to the Scriptures; but he died as an expiatory victim, a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, as atonement for all the sins of his chosen, as a ransom to redeem them from their bondage; yea, as a curse, to redeem them that were under the curse. And this view of the atonement is vital to the Christian system. It is plainly the doctrine of the Old as well as the New Testament; and it ever has been the doctrine of every sound part of the Christian church; and it would be easy to show, that the objections to it are either frivolous, or they are such as subvert the gospel of Christ, and bring in another gospel, which exposes the abettors of it to the anathema of Paul. Gal_1:8.

All the sufferings of Christ should be considered as expiatory, and as constituting the atonement which he undertook to make for his people; and, indeed, his whole state of humiliation, should be considered as belonging to his expiation. When he first felt the pangs incident to infancy, when he went about from day to day, “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief,”—when reproached, slandered, and reviled—when hungry, thirsty, and weary—when filled with grief at the hardness and perverseness of the people, which drew tears from his eyes—when bathed in his own blood in Gethsemane—when betrayed, bound, dragged to trial—when falsely accused, and condemned—when mocked and reviled—when scourged—when crowned with thorns—when fainting under the cross—when nailed to the tree—when exposed to the profane gaze of the multitude denuded of his garments—when exhausted with pain and thirst—and above all, when forsaken of God—and when he breathed out his soul in death, he was enduring the penalty of the law. And after he was taken from the cross and laid in the sepulchre, though he suffered no positive pain, yet he was still bearing the curse or penalty of the law, which was death. And if it be asked for whom did the Redeemer bear all this, he has given the answer, “I lay down my life for the sheep.” He loved his church and gave himself for it. But his atonement, considered in its intrinst value and suitableness, is infinite, and sufficient in applied, to save the whole world.

The sufferings of Christ, being those of a divine person, have an infinite value; it follows, therefore, that although the punishment of the sinner was everlasting, yet Christ could exhaust the penalty of the law in a limited time; that is, his sufferings and death, though limited to a short period, were more than an equivalent for the eternal sufferings of those for whom he laid down his life. And in making this vicarious atonement, it was not at all necessary that the Mediator should be the subject of remorse and despair; for these are not essential to the penalty of the law, but merely incidental, arising from the circumstances and moral character of the sufferer. But it was necessary that our substitute should suffer a painful and accursed death, for this was specifically threatened. Some have supposed that Christ endured something of the torments of the damned after his death, as the creed says, “he descended into hell;” but the word *hell* here signifies no more than the place of departed spirits, or the grave. Christ’s sufferings were finished on the cross; and on that very day his spirit entered into paradise. Luk_23:43. It cannot be reasonably doubted, but that all those for whom Christ offered himself a sacrifice, will eventually be saved.

CHAPTER XX

Resurrection and Ascension of Christ

The blessed Redeemer, having been three days in the grave, according to his own oft repeated prediction; that is, a part of three days, which, according to the usual method of computing time, was reckoned for three days, rose from the dead, and during forty days, which he remained upon the earth, appeared a number of times to his disciples, and gave them not only ocular but palpable evidence of the reality of his resurrection. And that there might remain no doubt of his identity, he showed them his hands and his feet, and even condescended to permit them to put their fingers into the print of the nails, and to thrust their hands into the opening made in his side by the soldier’s spear, after his death. And, on one occasion, he appeared to above five hundred of his disciples convened in Galilee, on a mountain, where he had promised before his crucifixion to meet them. As the disciples had not understood his predictions respecting his death and resurrection, they were very slow to believe even their own senses. On this account, the risen Saviour took pains to remove every shadow of doubt, and in several instances ate and drank in their presence, just as before his death. This time was also improved to give the Apostles all needful instructions respecting their ministry, after he should leave them.

At the expiration of the forty days, he led his disciples out to mount Olivet, where he blessed them, and was parted from them, and carried up to heaven, in the midst of thousands of angels, according to what the Holy Ghost says, in the sixty-eighth Psalm, “The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels. The Lord is among them as in Sinai, in the holy place. Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive. Thou hast received gifts for men, yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them;” which passage Paul expressly applies to Christ. (Eph_4:8-9.)

Until the time of his ascension, as far as appears, Christ's body remained the same as before his death; but as a body of flesh and blood, though free from every stain, is not suited to the heavenly state, it is reasonable to suppose, that Christ's body now underwent such a sudden change, as we are informed will pass on the bodies of the saints who shall be found alive upon earth when Christ shall make his second appearance. Before his ascension, he had flesh and bones, which could be handled and felt; but now he assumed that glorious body in which he appears in heaven, and in which every eye shall behold him when he shall come in the clouds of heaven, with all his holy angels, to judge the world.

That Christ appeared, after his resurrection, in the same body which was nailed to the cross, and laid in the sepulchre, is as evident from the sacred Scriptures, as words can make it. Luke gives the following explicit testimony: "Jesus himself stood in the midst of them and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Handle me and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have. And when he had thus spoken, he showed them his hands and his feet." And though the fact is not mentioned, we may certainly infer, that Christ's body underwent a change before he entered heaven; for we are assured that "flesh and blood do not inherit the kingdom of heaven;" and as this is true in regard to believers, it is equally so respecting Christ. Still it is the self same body which is now in heaven at the right hand of God, which suffered on the cross—but glorified.

CHAPTER XXI

Mediatorial Offices of Christ

The offices of Christ have long been divided into three; the prophetical, sacerdotal, and regal; and this is not an arbitrary distinction, but is founded in the wants of men; for he who undertakes to save sinners must be qualified to deliver them from their ignorance, from their guilt, and from their depravity; and he must have power to protect them from all their enemies, and raise them from death and the grave, and bring them to the possession of eternal life. When Christ was upon earth, most of his time, during his public ministry, was spent in teaching. And in the exercise of this office, "He taught with authority, and not as the scribes." Even in the judgment of his enemies, "never man spake like this man." But, when about to leave the world, he promised to his disciples another teacher, who should remain with them, and lead them into all truth, and who should bring to their remembrance whatever he had said to them. Thus, he now exercises the office of a prophet by his word and Spirit, by which agency all the children of God are taught of him; and through faith in the holy Scriptures, are made wise unto salvation. By the law they obtain the knowledge of sin; by the gospel they are made acquainted with the only remedy; and by the influence of the Holy Spirit are enabled "to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ." As Moses prophesied that the Lord should raise up a prophet like unto him; that is, one who should be the author of a new dispensation; so, the same glorious person is predicted in the Psalms, as a priest, not after the order of Aaron, but after the order of Melchizedek; a priest who should have no predecessor nor successor, but should possess in himself an everlasting priesthood; and who, by the sacrifice of himself, should be able to accomplish what the Levitical priests never could. What they performed and exhibited in shadows, he executed in substance. As their sacrifices and oblations were to remove ceremonial guilt and uncleanness, he, by the one offering of himself, obtained eternal redemption for us. And as the mgh priest, on the great day of atonement, after slaying the sin-offering, both for himself and the people carried the blood into the most holy place, and sprinkled it on the mercy seat; so Christ, the High Priest of our profession, having offered himself as a sacrifice on the cross, has entered into the most holy place, not made with hands, where he appears before God, to present, as it were, the "blood which cleanseth from all sin." "For Christ is not entered into the holy places, made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us." "For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified," (Heb 9:24; Heb 10:14.) Two things belong to the office of priesthood: first, oblation, or the offering a sacrifice; secondly, the sprinkling the blood, or the presentment of the oblation before God. This, in Scripture, is called intercession; because, on the ground of having complied with the stipulated conditions in the covenant of redemption, the Mediator has a right to claim the deliverance of those for whom he undertook. This, therefore, is a very necessary part of the mediatorial work. It is the moving cause of all that is done in the application of the purchased redemption. Therefore it is written, "that he is able to save to the uttermost all that come to God by him; seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." And here we see the reason why the true believer never comes again into condemnation, notwithstanding all his sins and infirmities; because he has an Advocate with the Father, who is the propitiation for his sins. As fast as he contracts guilt, his sins are blotted out; or, rather, as he has the righteousness of Christ set down to his account, he cannot come into condemnation. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" "It is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? Shall Christ, that died, or rather is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us?"

The Christian then, in all his trials, under all his burdens, when tempted to despond or despair, should have recourse to the cross, and should look for comfort to the prevalent intercessions of his great High Priest.

In the second Psalm it is written, "I will set my king upon my holy hill of Zion." And Jesus Christ was born a king. He was lineally descended from David, to whose family the regal authority was promised for ever. When Pilate interrogated him, whether he was a king, he did not deny it, but admitted and asserted it, saying, "Thou sayest that I am a king. For this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth." After his resurrection, he declared to his disciples, "all power in heaven, and in earth, is given unto me." And we read, "that angels and principalities are subject to him." He is made "head over all things for his church, which is his body." He is therefore called "the King of kings and Lord of lords." "For he must reign until he hath put all enemies under his feet." In the exercise of his regal office, he governs all providential events and revolutions, so as to promote the ultimate glory and triumph of his kingdom. He holds under restraint all those enemies, who would otherwise destroy his sheep. Over these he watches with a shepherd's care. In the exercise of his regal office he will judge the world in righteousness. "We must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ." "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit on the throne of his glory. Then shall the King say to those on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

CHAPTER XXII

Justification

Correct ideas on the subject of a sinner's justification are exceedingly important; because this is a cardinal point in the Christian system. A mistake here will be apt to extend its pernicious influence to every other important doctrine. There is in human nature a strong tendency to build on a false foundation; because man, when created, was placed under a covenant of works; and, by nature, he knows no other way, than "do and live." Human reason and the dictates of conscience, urge men to seek the favour of God by obeying his will. If we were able to render to the law such an obedience as would secure justification, this would still be the right way, and no other need be sought. "If there had been a law," says Paul, "which could have given life, verily righteousness (or justification) should have been by the law." "But what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit."

In most cases we should think it unnecessary and inexpedient to contend about the meaning of a word, when they who used it, explained the sense in which they take it; but, here it is exceedingly important, to ascertain the scriptural meaning of the word *justification*; for this is the point from which men's opinions are most apt to diverge from the dictates of divine revelation. And if we put a wrong sense on the word, it will be sure to favour the dangerous doctrine of human merit.

We would, therefore, lay it down as a truth, capable of the clearest proof, that justification, as used in Scripture, does not mean any change wrought within us, but a change of our relation or standing under the law. As condemnation does not signify the making a man wicked, but declaring him guilty; so justification, which is the very opposite of condemnation, does not mean the infusion of holiness or justice into the hearts of men; but, it is the sentence of a judge, declaring that the person to whom it appertains, is acquitted from every charge, and stands right in the view of the law. It is then the act of the Judge of the universe, by which it is declared, that all condemnation is removed, and that the sinful man is accepted as righteous in the eye of the law. It is evident, that there can be no justification by any law, unless the person accused can plead a perfect righteousness; for if he has sinned but once, that one sin will prevent his justification as certainly as a thousand. After Adam had committed the first sin, it was impossible he should ever be justified by his own works. And thus the word is used in regard to human laws. If a man is arraigned before any just tribunal, and it is proved that he has committed one felonious act, the judge cannot justify him. And hence it appears evident to reason, and the same thing is repeatedly and emphatically taught in Scripture, "that by the deeds of the law no man can be justified in the sight of God." And the reason simply is, that no man's obedience to the law is perfect. The idea entertained by some, that a sinner's imperfect obedience may be the ground of justification, is, therefore, evidently absurd. And the opinion, that the moral law is changed, and so relaxed as to be level to the capacity of sinful creatures, is false and unscriptural, and tends to introduce another gospel, entirely subversive of the true system of salvation. Man's sincere obedience, though imperfect, may be an evidence that he is in a justified state, but never can be the ground of the sentence of the Judge.

The question then returns, "How can any man be just with God, since all have sinned and come short of the glory of God?" To which we answer, that a man under the gospel is justified by faith, without the deeds of the law; that is, he is justified by the perfect righteousness of Christ, received by faith. This righteousness is imputed to the believing sinner; that is, God treats him as if he himself had wrought it out.

God, the Judge, views the sinner, considered in his own character, as he is, chargeable with innumerable transgressions of his holy law; but, when this ungodly man truly believes and becomes united to Christ, he imputes to him the perfect righteousness of his Surety, who has, in his stead, obeyed the precept and suffered the penalty of the law; and thus rendered a complete satisfaction to both law and justice. He can, therefore, be just, while he justifies the ungodly; for the sentence is not pronounced on the ground of any righteousness which the believing sinner has of his own, but entirely on the ground of the perfect righteousness of the Mediator, which is accepted, as though it had been rendered by himself. And in this transaction there is no erroneous judgment; for the Judge sees every thing as it is, and pardons the sinner and accepts his person, because he is viewed, "not having his own righteousness, which is of the law, but the righteousness which is of the faith of Christ; even the righteousness which is of God by faith."

Some are willing to admit that the forgiveness of sin is on account of the atonement of Christ; but they are strongly opposed to the idea, that Christ's actual obedience to the law should be the ground of the believer's being adjudged to eternal life. But, if this be excluded, then the believer's own obedience must be the ground on which he receives life. But, here again, its imperfection renders it impossible that it should entitle him to any reward, much less to the reward of eternal life. The Scriptures, however, settle this dispute. Paul says, "As by the disobedience of one, many were made sinners; so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." Christ is, by the prophet, emphatically called, "The Lord our righteousness."

This is charged upon the Jews as their fatal mistake, "that they went about to establish a righteousness of their own, and did not submit unto the righteousness of God." And it is then declared, that "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth."

As it is said, "that faith is imputed for righteousness," many have adopted the opinion, that the act of faith is graciously accepted, instead of a legal righteousness. But this would be inconsistent with the scope of the apostle, whose main object is to show that justification is entirely gratuitous, on account of Christ's merit; but faith is as much our act and our work, as any thing else; and, if a man is justified by his own faith, then boasting is no more excluded, than when he seeks justification by many good acts. Besides, the Judge of all cannot declare, that the mere act of faith answers all the demands of the law. Therefore, when it is said, that faith is imputed for righteousness, it must relate to the object of faith, even the perfect righteousness of Christ. If a condemned criminal should be pardoned by his prince, on account of the intercession of his own son, when the pardon is offered, the man gladly accepts it. This act of acceptance may be said to save him from death; but, the true ground of his deliverance is the intercession of the prince. In this way, as a mere instrument, faith justifies the sinner, and is imputed for righteousness, because it lays hold of and appropriates the righteousness of God, by which the law of God has been completely satisfied.

Others, considering faith as the root of every Christian virtue, and the spring of all good works, adopt the opinion, that to be justified by faith is the same as to be justified by our whole evangelical obedience, and that the works excluded by Paul, are either ceremonial observances, or "dead works," not proceeding from faith. To this theory the same objection lies, as has been already urged; namely, that this righteousness is imperfect, and no imperfect righteousness can justify. And another objection, which is fatal to this theory, is, that the sinner is justified completely when he first believes; "There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus;" "being justified freely by his grace;" "being justified by faith." But, if evangelical obedience is the ground of justification, no man can be justified in this life, for he will be engaged in working out this righteousness all his life. This consequence being inevitable, a learned commentator maintains, that there is no justification till the day of judgment.

There is nothing more difficult than to bring men off from dependence, in some form, on their own righteousness. Therefore, the advocates of human merit, and justification by works, have seized with avidity upon the words of the apostle James, who declares that "a man is justified by works and not by faith alone." If he used the words "faith" and "justification" in the same sense as that in which they are used by Paul, there would be a flat contradiction between these two apostles. Thus Luther viewed the matter, at first, and, therefore, for a while, rejected the epistle of James. But, when the scope of this apostle is considered, and the whole discourse impartially weighed, it will be found, that in doctrine he and Paul did not disagree, though they employ the terms mentioned in a somewhat different sense. James was engaged in refuting the opinion of certain professors, who held that all that was necessary to justification was a speculative assent to the truth. He shows that such a faith, being dead, could not justify. His doctrine is, that a living, operative faith, is necessary; and, that our faith must be shown by our works; and this is the same thing which Paul taught. Moreover, he uses the word justification, in the passage referred to, not for a sinner's acceptance with God, at first, but by it he means that which showed his sincerity; those good works which the saints perform justify them in the eyes of men; and this is evident from the example of Abraham, for he asks, Was not Abraham justified by works, when he offered up his son? But the pious act of offering up Isaac, took place many years after God had accepted Abraham, and entered into covenant with him. This act, therefore, could not have been the ground of his justification in the sight of God; but it justified the sincerity of his profession, and showed that he was indeed a true believer. These apostles, therefore, do not differ, but essentially agree in their doctrine.

By an impartial consideration of all the schemes of justification which have been devised, there is none which gives due honour to the divine law, except that which represents the righteousness of Christ imputed and received by faith, as the only ground of a sinner's pardon and acceptance. And, if God could have been just, and could have justified the sinner on any other ground, the whole Mediatorial work of Christ might have been dispensed with.

A common objection to this doctrine of gratuitous justification is, that it tends to negligence and licentiousness. This objection is as old as the time of Paul, for he states it distinctly and answers it effectually. "Do we make void the law through faith? nay we establish the law." "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid! how shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?" The faith which justifies, works by love and purifies the heart, therefore the justified person cannot be negligent of good works. And, if an appeal be made to facts, it will be found that those who maintain this doctrine, are not deficient in obedience, on a comparison with those who hold a different doctrine.

CHAPTER XXIII

Regeneration and Conversion

The necessity of a change of moral character in man, arises from the fact, that by nature all men are “dead in trespasses and sins,” and, therefore, if any of the human race are ever saved, they must be regenerated; for, even if a man could be justified and yet remain under the power of sin, he could not be happy, because sin contains in itself the seeds of misery, and such an one would certainly be incapable of participating in the joys of heaven, which require a holy nature to perceive or relish them. Therefore, our Lord said to Nicodemus, “except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

It is not necessary to be very exact in distinguishing between regeneration and conversion, especially as the Scriptures appear to speak of both together. But, it may not be amiss to remark, that regeneration, which is the communication of spiritual life, is the act of God; conversion, which is a turning from sin to God, is our act, in consequence of the divine influence exerted on our minds.

That God is the author of regeneration is evident from Scripture, and from the nature of the case. The same power that caused light to shine out of darkness must shine into our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of God. “Who are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” And, as this work in the economy of salvation belongs to the Holy Spirit, it is said, “Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” That man cannot regenerate himself is too evident to need a remark. Life, in all cases, is the gift of God. If spiritual life be extinct in man, none but the power of God is adequate to rekindle it. It would be as reasonable to suppose that the human body, when deprived of animal life, could restore itself to activity and animation, as that a soul dead in sin should be able to perform the acts which appertain to spiritual life.

It is said that we are “born again by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever,” and, that God, of his own will, “begets us again by the word of truth.” But the word, in this case, must be considered as an instrument in the hands of the Spirit; it can have no saving efficacy without a divine energy accompanying it. But how is the word a means of regeneration? To this two answers may be given, accordingly as we use the word regeneration in a stricter or wider sense. As the operation of God in the communication of life to the soul is an instantaneous act, there is no place for any instrumentality in producing the effect; and, as the word only produces a saving effect, when the heart is prepared by grace, the word is the means of regeneration only as God has connected the influences of the Spirit with the preaching and reading of the word. But, if we take the new birth in a wider sense, to include not merely the operation of God on the soul, but also the effects produced in the changed views and feelings of the soul, then we can easily understand how the word is a means of giving knowledge to the mind, and of exciting those exercises and affections, in which the spiritual life essentially consists. The word, alone, can never generate a true faith; but, when the Spirit of God has operated on the blind mind, the glorious truths of the gospel begin to appear in their true light, and become the object of a saving faith. So, also, when the beauty of holiness is perceived by means of the word, love is excited; and, when sin is viewed as exhibited in the word of God, as odious and abominable, true repentance is enkindled; and thus of every other exercise of the renewed nature. It may, therefore, be truly said, that in every act of the spiritual life, the word of truth is concerned; it presents the proper object and supplies the persuasive motive. Indeed, if the mind were in a state free from blindness and corruption, the mere objective presentation of the truth, without any supernatural influences, would bring into exercise all holy acts and affections.

In regeneration there is no new faculty created, understanding by the word *faculty* some constituent power of the soul; for, as by the fall man did not cease to be a moral agent, but retained all the faculties which belonged to him as man; so in regeneration, no new faculty is produced. The loss was not of any physical power, but of the moral excellence in which man was created. The same soul may be in ignorance, or filled with knowledge; actuated by holy desires and affections, or the contrary. The moral character is a kind of clothing of the soul, which may be essentially changed, while the essence of the soul, and its natural faculties, remain unchanged.

Although Almighty power is exerted in the regeneration of a sinner, yet man is only conscious of the effects, as they appear in the exercises of the renewed mind. And as the end accomplished in this change is the partial restoration of the lost image of God, or “knowledge” and “true holiness,” the evidences of regeneration are the same as the evidences of a holy nature. And as spiritual or holy exercises are specifically different from all others, there would be no difficulty in discerning the characteristics of piety in ourselves, were it not for the feebleness of these exercises, and the sad mixture of feelings of an opposite nature. The best way, therefore, to obtain a comfortable assurance that we are regenerated, is, to press on with assiduity and alacrity in the divine life. That which is obscure in itself will not become clear by poring over it ever so long; but, if we emerge from our darkness, and come forth into the light, we shall be able to discern clearly, what was before involved in obscurity. If we would know whether our faith and love and hope are genuine, we must seek to bring these graces into lively exercise, and then we cannot avoid perceiving their true character. But as faith is really the apprehension and reception of offered mercy, it is by directly believing in Christ, or actually rolling our burdens on him, that we experience peace and confidence. Where a good work is begun, it will be carried on. None but they who persevere to the end shall be saved. In concluding this article, we may adopt the language of the beloved disciple, “Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God! Beloved, now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.”

CHAPTER XXIV

Repentance Toward God and Faith in Our Lord Jesus Christ

Paul gives “repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ,” as a summary of his preaching, during his two years’ ministry at Ephesus; and, as comprehending the whole counsel of God, and as including whatever was profitable to the people.

Repentance literally signifies a change of mind for the better; but, in our Shorter Catechism, it is defined to be, “A saving grace, whereby a sinner out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of and endeavour after new obedience.” And in the same place, faith is defined to be, “A saving grace, whereby we receive and rest upon him (Jesus Christ) for salvation as he is freely offered in the gospel.” Whatever difference of opinion there may be as to the precise meaning of these scriptural terms, all sound Christians will admit, that for popular and practical use, no language could be selected which would more perspicuously and properly convey to the reader a true notion of these fundamental graces. And, as to the precedence of one before the other, it is a question as impertinent, as whether a whole precedes one of its parts, or is preceded by it. No man can give a sound definition of evangelical repentance which will not include faith. But, if the word repentance be used in a more restricted sense, for godly sorrow for sin and hatred of it, it must be preceded by a true faith, for seeing in a rational mind goes before feeling. There must be a perception of the holiness of the divine law, before the turpitude of sin can be so seen as to occasion hatred of it, and grief on account of it. But, if by faith be meant that cordial reception of Christ, which is mentioned in the words cited from the Catechism, then, certainly, there must be some true sense of sin, before we can appreciate Christ as a Saviour from sin. But, it is altogether wrong to perplex the minds of serious Christians with useless questions of this sort. Let the schoolmen discuss such matters to their heart’s content, but let the humble Christian rest in the plain and obvious meaning of the words of Scripture. The effect of divine truth on the heart is produced by general views, and not by nice and metaphysical distinctions.

Both faith and repentance must be proved to be genuine by their fruits. “Faith works by love and purifies the heart.” “Faith overcomes the world.” James says, “show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works.” Repentance is itself a turning from sin unto God. It is the commencement of a reformation from all sin. John the Baptist, when he inculcated repentance, at the same time called upon the people “to bring forth fruits meet for repentance.” Repentance is no atonement for sin; but it is indissolubly connected with the pardon of sin. Therefore it was said, “Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.”

CHAPTER XXV

Sanctification; or Growth in Grace

In regeneration, spiritual life is communicated; but this incipient principle is in its infancy, when first implanted. The vigour of spiritual life seems to be analogous to natural life, very different in different subjects. But in all it is imperfect, and needs to be assiduously cherished and nurtured, that it may daily gain strength, and gradually rise to maturity. There are various means of divine appointment conducive to this end, in the use of which growth is as certain as in the body when supplied with nutriment. In the former as well as in the latter, there may be seasons of decay, arising from various untoward causes; but, it may be assumed as a fact, that where the principle of piety is really radicated in the soul, there will be growth; the steady tendency will be to a state of maturity. And, although perfection is never attained in this life, yet there is in all true Christians a sincere desire after it, and there may be a constant approximation toward it, as long as they live. And such a state of piety may be attained, as, comparatively, may be termed a state of perfection, and is so termed in Scripture. From what has been said, it will be apparent, that sanctification does not differ specifically from regeneration; the one is the commencement, the other the continuance and increase of the same principle.

Two things are commonly intended by the word sanctification. The first is, the mortification of sin, the last, the increase of the vigour and constancy of the exercises of piety. But, although these may be distinguished, yet there is no need to treat of them separately, because the advancement of the one cannot but be accompanied with progress in the other. Like the two scales of a balance, when one is depressed the other rises. Just so in the divine life in the soul, if pride is humbled, humility is of necessity increased; if the undue love of the creature is mortified, the love of God will be strengthened; and so of every other grace. Indeed, when we examine the subject accurately, we shall find, that all real mortification of sin is by the exercise of faith, and those holy affections which flow from it. By legal striving, however earnest, or by ascetic discipline, however rigid, very little headway is made against the stream of inherent corruption. It is right, indeed, to keep the body under, lest its blind appetites and impulses should hinder the exercises of religion; and occasional fasting, when free from superstition, does greatly aid the spiritual progress of the true Christian; and this is especially the fact, when he is in conflict with some fleshly lust, or easily besetting sin. A pampered body will ever be an enemy to growth in grace.

It must not be forgotten, that we are as dependent on the Holy Spirit for every holy act and exercise, as for the ability to put forth the first act of faith, when regenerated. We have no strength in ourselves, in consequence of our justification and conversion. Christ has said, “Without me ye can do nothing.” He is the vine, and believers are the branches. “As the branch cannot bear fruit except it abide in the vine, neither can ye except ye abide in me.” Yet this does not take away or diminish our motives for exertion; so far from it, that it affords the only encouragement which we have for diligence in the use of means. For though the power is of God, that power is exerted through the means of divine appointment. Therefore, in Scripture, divine aid and human agency are constantly united. When Christians are exhorted “to work out their salvation,” the reason assigned is, “for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do, of his own good pleasure.”

Where two opposite principles exist in the same person, there must be a conflict. When the whole current of the affections runs toward the world, there being no opposing principle, no conflict is experienced, except that which arises from the remonstrances of conscience; or from the discordant craving of conflicting desires of a sinful kind. But, in the true believer, “the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; so that he cannot do the things that he would.” And often the spiritual man is made to groan in agony, and to cry out, “O, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” Although, in this warfare, the principle of grace is generally victorious, for it is written, “sin shall not have dominion over you;” yet, sometimes, by the power of temptation, and negligence in watchfulness, the man of God is cast down and degraded, and unless raised up by the hand of the Captain of his salvation, he would rise no more. But, as the work of grace was begun without any merit or co-operation of the believer, the same love which at first effectually called him away from his sins and from the world, still pursues him, and will not suffer the enemy ultimately to triumph over him. Satan shall never have the opportunity of boasting that he has accomplished the ruin of one whom God purposed to save, and to save whom Christ died, and who has been effectually called by the Holy Spirit. He may fall, but he shall rise again, for God hath said, “My grace is sufficient for thee,” and, “I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.” And not unfrequently, the very falls of the children of God are overruled for their more rapid progress in future. Nothing more tends to humble the soul, and destroy self-confidence, than being overtaken by such faults.

The means of sanctification may be comprehended under two general heads, the word of God and prayer. The first is the food which is provided for the nourishment of the soul, and by which it lives. Christ himself is indeed the bread of life—the manna that came down from heaven; but it is only in the word, that we can find Christ: there he is revealed—there his dignity and glory are manifested—there we behold his holy life, his miracles, his sufferings, his death, his resurrection, ascension, and intercession. The whole object of faith, and love, and hope, is found in the word of God. Therefore, it is by the assiduous study of the word, and meditation on its truths, that we are to expect an increase of faith, and a real growth in grace.

The other principal means of growth is prayer; especially, prayer for the influences of the Holy Spirit. Without the Spirit, as we have seen, there can be no progress; but this sum of blessings is graciously promised in answer to prayer. And these two means are harmonious; for the word is the “sword of the Spirit.” The Spirit operates only by the word. Therefore, though we read that sanctification is of the Spirit, we also read that effectual prayer of Jesus Christ, “Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth.”

Although all the means of sanctification may be comprehended under the word of God and prayer, yet there are many subordinate means, which have a powerful efficacy in giving application and force to these. In this light may be considered the ministry, the reading of good books, attendance on the sacraments, and fasting. There is one means of grace of this class which we are not required to resort to, but which is often employed by our heavenly Father with great effect, in promoting the sanctification of his children; I mean the chastisements of his rod. The benefit of affliction is often celebrated in Scripture; and almost every child of God can, after a few years’ experience, adopt the language of the royal Psalmist, and say, “It was good for me that I was afflicted.” And Paul testifies, that though “no chastisement for the present is joyous but grievous, yet afterwards it worketh the peaceable fruits of righteousness in them who are exercised thereby.” Afflictions are often used as the means of recovering the children of God from a state of backsliding; as says David, “Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now I keep thy testimonies.”

Though Christians do not arrive at sinless perfection in this life, yet it is a state to which every humble child of God shall attain at death. Christ will present his whole body before his Father’s throne, “without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.” “We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”

CHAPTER XXVI

Good Works; or, Christian Duties

“Truth is in order to goodness;” and the great touchstone of truth, is, its tendency to promote holiness, according to the Saviour’s rule, “By their fruits shall ye know them.”

Good works are such as the law of God requires to be performed by all persons, according to the relations in which they stand, and the positive precepts which he has enjoined, and which are in force at the time. They have been commonly divided into three classes, the duties which we owe to God, to our neighbour, and to ourselves; but in strict propriety of speech, all our duties, whoever may be the object, are due to God. He is our Lawgiver, and we are under the moral government of no other.

Though Christ fulfilled the preceptive part of the law in the room of God’s chosen people, yet he did not thereby free them from the obligation of obedience to the moral law. Such a release from moral obligation is inconceivable; for it is impossible that a creature should not be under obligations to love and honour his Creator; but if such exemption from law were possible, it would be no blessing but a curse; for our happiness consists in conformity to the law of God. “In keeping thy commandments, there is a great reward.”

As the obligation to obedience cannot be removed, so neither can the requisitions of the law, as some suppose, be lowered. Man must ever be as much bound to love God with the whole heart, as to love him at all. If man had fulfilled the condition of the first covenant, which required perfect obedience during his probation, he would not have been free from moral obligation to obedience, in consequence of his justification. Angels, who are supposed to be now confirmed in happiness, are as much under obligation to love God as ever. Indeed, as has been hinted, holiness and happiness are inseparable. The Holy Scriptures abound in exhortations to Christians to be diligent, zealous, and persevering in the performance of the respective duties of their stations; in the performance of which, divine aid may be asked, and confidently expected.

Some duties are incumbent on all classes of people; such as the worship of God, doing good to men, and abstaining from every thing which would have a tendency to dishonour Christ, to injure our neighbour, or hinder our own usefulness and improvement. Two things especially are incumbent on all, in relation to their fellow-creatures residing on the earth with them. The first is, the communication of saving knowledge to such as are so unfortunate as to be destitute of this precious treasure. This is a duty of universal obligation, though the means proper to be used by different persons will vary, according to the variety of the circumstances in which they are placed. It is the duty of all Christians to "let their conversation be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that it may minister grace to the hearers." It is also made their duty to exhort and admonish one another, and that daily, lest any be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. All Christians are bound also to teach by example as well as by precept, by exhibiting to the view of all who see them a holy life. "Let,' says Paul, "your conversation be such as becometh the gospel." And our blessed Lord in his sermon on the mount, commands: "Let your light so shine, that others seeing your good works, may glorify your Father who is in heaven." It is evident from the very nature of this duty, which arises from our obligation to love our neighbour as ourselves, that all Christians are bound to send the gospel to those who are destitute of this necessary means of salvation; for, "how can they hear without a preacher, and how can they preach except they be sent?" All, therefore, according to their ability, should contribute toward this object, by supporting missionaries, aiding in the printing and circulation of Bibles and evangelical tracts, and maintaining institutions of learning for the training of ministers. But this duty of diffusing abroad the precious seed of divine truth, devolves especially on those who have been called to the holy ministry, who have been ordained for this very purpose, to publish to every creature the gospel of the grace of God. When a dispensation of the gospel is committed to any one, he will incur a fearful load of guilt if he turn aside to any secular employment. This may be learned from many things left on record by the apostle Paul. He calls God to witness that he was free from the blood of all men at Ephesus, because he had not ceased to declare unto them repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ; evidently intimating, that if he had not been thus faithful and diligent, he would have incurred the guilt of their destruction; which is exactly in accordance with what is said respecting the unfaithful watchman in Ezekiel. The duty of preaching, to those who are called and have undertaken the office, is not optional, which is evident from what Paul says, in another place, "Wo is me, if I preach not the gospel."

Others, who have the instruction of youth committed to them, are under peculiar obligations to instil into their opening minds the doctrines of God's holy word. Parents, guardians of orphans, masters of servants or apprentices, and teachers of schools of every kind, are bound by this obligation, from which no human laws can exempt them.

Another duty of universal obligation is, to pray to God for his blessing on all the nations of the earth; and especially on kings and all that are in authority, not only that they may obtain salvation, but that Christians under a wise and equitable administration of law, "may lead quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and honesty." All are bound to join cordially and fervently in the public prayers of the church, and not to neglect the assembling themselves together, as the manner of some is. We have encouragement also to agree together in smaller associations for prayer; and are assured that Christ will be present in such meetings, and that the concordant prayers there offered, will be graciously answered. And who can doubt, that, as we are commanded "to pray without ceasing," and "to pray every where, lifting up holy hands." family prayer is an incumbent duty? But in addition to all these, "we should enter into our closets, and shut the door, and pray to our Father in secret; and our Father who seeth in secret will reward us openly."

Among the prescribed duties of Christians, there is none which is more solemnly and emphatically inculcated, than a compassionate regard to the poor and afflicted. Indeed, the phrase "good works," is most commonly employed in Scripture, in relation to this single thing. In this we follow the example of Christ, "who went about doing good," by preaching the gospel to the poor, and by relieving the distresses of the afflicted. And it is the assiduous performance of this duty which recommends the gospel to the judgment and conscience of men, more than any thing else. "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father, is to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." Nothing more is necessary to convince us of the importance of this duty, than the representation given by our Saviour, of the process of the judgment recorded in Mat_25:1-46, where the destiny of the assembled race of men is made to turn upon the kindness shown to the disciples of Christ. "Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me." And, in answer to their inquiry, when they had done any of these things to him? he said, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." And to the wicked, the neglect of this duty is alone mentioned as the ground of condemnation.

Among the good works which Christians are required to perform, relative duties hold a very conspicuous place. These, indeed, in number, greatly exceed all other Christian duties, and no day passes in which every one has not duties of this kind to perform. But, as the relations of men are very much diversified by their condition in life, and standing in society, these duties are not the same to all persons. One is a parent, another a child; one is a magistrate, another a citizen; one is a pastor, another a member of his flock; one is a master, another a servant; one is a husband, another a wife. Besides these, there are particular professions and occupations in life; or offices in the church and state, all which relations give rise to duties, which are incumbent on all who sustain these various relations. It behoves the Christian to be conscientious and faithful in the discharge of all relative duties. And, as there is a necessity for intercourse and commerce among men, the virtues of justice and veracity should be constantly practised, "doing unto others as we would have them do unto us." And, in social intercourse, to promote good fellowship, there should be real kindness, respectfulness, candour, and courtesy, assiduously cultivated. The standing rule should be, to do nothing and say nothing which would tend to the injury of our neighbour; but continually to seek to promote his best interests.

Man is utterly unable to perform works of supererogation. When he has done all that is commanded, he must acknowledge himself to be an unprofitable servant; having done no more than it was his duty to do.

CHAPTER XXVII

Prayer

Prayer is a duty dictated by reason. If a child is hungry and wants bread, nature impels it to go to its parent for a supply; and the natural affections of parents to their offspring render them prompt to answer such requests. And, even if they intended beforehand to give the necessary food, in proper season; it is nevertheless pleasing to them that the child should feel Its dependence, and come and ask for what it needs. And if this is seen by all to be reasonable and becoming in children toward earthly parents, how much more reasonable and becoming that we should feel our dependence for every good thing on our heavenly Father, and should go to him and ask him to grant to us such things as are necessary for our present and eternal welfare. And on this very principle does our Lord urge upon his disciples the duty of praying for the Holy Spirit, in which gift all spiritual blessings are comprehended. His words are, "And I say unto you, ask and it shall be given you, seek and ye shall find, knock, and it shall be opened unto you, for every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? or if he shall ask an egg will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?"

Prayer is no more inconsistent with the unchangeable purposes of God, than the use of any other means; for God in forming his purposes had respect to all appropriate means of producing the intended ends, and among these prayer has an important place.

It is a low idea of the efficacy of prayer, to confine it to the good effect which it is adapted to produce on the feelings of the person who offers it. Indeed, if this were believed to be the whole benefit derived from prayer, a great part of the good impression which it makes on the petitioner would be lost. As we obtain the things which we need from earthly parents, by asking; so also, we receive the blessings which we need from our heavenly Father, by praying for them.

In how many instances did Moses, by his prayers, avert the judgments of God from the Israelites. The prophet Samuel also, by prayer, obtained a signal victory for the people of Israel over their enemies. But no single instance of the efficacy of prayer, recorded in Scripture, is more remarkable, than that of the prophet Elijah. This case is referred to, by the apostle James, in the following manner. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain, and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months; and he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit."

In prayer may be properly comprehended all devotional acts of the mind, and the suitable expression of these sentiments in external gestures and words.

Adoration is one of the most suitable and solemn feelings of which a creature is capable, when he comes into the presence of the august majesty of Heaven.

Godly fear, or reverence is another feeling which must be experienced when any just idea is entertained of the Almighty power, terrible majesty, and awful holiness of the Creator. Penitent confession is so appropriate to sinners, in their approaches to God, that no one can have any sense of the divine character and presence, without falling down before him, under a deep impression of entire unworthiness. Even the holiest men, such as Isaiah, Daniel, and the apostle John, were overwhelmed with a feeling of unworthiness, when God manifested himself to them, with something of his majesty and glory.

Praise and thanksgiving are exercises of devotion which must be excited into lively exercise, in every pious mind, by the consideration of the wonderful works and munificent dispensations of our heavenly Father; and especially our praise and thanksgiving are due for redeeming love. This part of our devotional exercises will be continued through eternity. The song begun here, will rise to its noblest strains, when the saints in heaven, redeemed by the blood of Christ, and saved by his power, shall, in one grand chorus, sing, "Unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father, to Him be glory and dominion, forever and ever, amen."

But, that which is more properly denominated prayer, is petition. We approach the throne of grace to ask for such things as we need—Prayer has therefore, been very correctly defined to be "the offering up of our desires unto God, in the name of Christ, for things agreeable to his will." Desire itself is not prayer, but the expression of our desires to God, is the essence of prayer. In this there are several things to be considered.

When there is strong desire, there is a feeling of want. Man has nothing for which he is not dependent. He needs many things for the welfare and comfort of his body. These wants are supplied by the beneficent dispensations of divine providence. For these blessings he is permitted to ask: "Give us day by day our daily bread." As to the extent of earthly blessings, he should ask only for what is necessary, and may be for his own good, and the glory of God. When deprived of health or other temporal blessings, he may seek for deliverance and for a restoration of such favours as have been withheld; but as it is good to be afflicted, he should rather pray to have his sufferings sanctified, than removed.

But our prayers should be chiefly offered for spiritual blessings, for ourselves and others. Here, we cannot be too importunate. We are taught, indeed, that it is importunity in prayer, which secures the blessing. This includes earnestness and perseverance. We should pray and not faint; be instant in prayer; yea, pray without ceasing. Prayer, to the spiritual life, is like breathing to the life of the body. We cannot live without prayer. Our prayers should not be confined to ourselves and our immediate connexions. These may properly hold a first place in our petitions; but we are bound to pray for rulers, and for all that are in authority, and for all sorts of men, that God would be merciful to them, and show them his salvation.

Prayer should be in the name of Christ. Faith is absolutely necessary in acceptable prayer, and faith always has respect to the Mediator. The humble penitent feels that he is unworthy to approach the throne of God in his own name, for he is defiled with sin. He can only come with liberty and confidence, when he beholds his great High Priest standing between him and the divine Majesty. The prayers of believers are rendered acceptable and efficacious, only through the intercession of Jesus Christ our advocate This is the precious incense, which is offered with the prayers of all saints.

But faith has respect also to the promises of God. On these it firmly relies, believing that what He hath said, he will faithfully perform. The person who prays in faith, confidently expects to receive whatever God has promised to give, in answer to prayer. Christians should therefore watch for the answer to their petitions. They should be attentive to the providences of God, by which prayer is often answered.

Prayer was never intended to supersede the use of other means; effort should always follow our prayers. The more faithfully we labour, the better reason have we to expect an answer to prayer.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Assurance of Salvation

We read in the Epistle to the Hebrews, both of the "assurance of faith," and the "assurance of hope." As faith is itself a belief of the truth, the assurance of faith can signify nothing else than a strong faith, an undoubting conviction of the truth. And, as hope is an expectation of future good, which may be more or less strong, as the evidence that the good hoped for shall be ours, the assurance of hope is a full persuasion that in due time we shall realize the blessing which we desire. According to this interpretation, the assurance of hope does not differ from the assurance of salvation.

The relation between the assurance of faith and the assurance of hope, is hence manifest. The former is the necessary foundation of the latter. Unless we are fully persuaded that there is a full and suitable salvation in Christ, it is impossible that we should be assured that we shall obtain salvation through Him. But as God promises eternal life to every one who believes in Christ, when we do sincerely believe, and when our faith is strong, it is easy to draw the inference, that the salvation of the gospel is ours. The thing stands thus. God says, "he that believeth shall be saved." I am conscious that I believe, therefore, I know that I shall be saved. The strength of this conclusion, or the assurance that I shall obtain salvation, depends first on the assurance which I have that there is salvation in Christ for every one that believes. If I receive this declaration with some degree of dubiety, then there being no assurance of faith, of course, there can be no assurance of salvation. But if this truth be received, without any wavering, then there is a solid foundation on which the assurance of hope may rest.

In the next place, having believed in the promise of God, I must know certainly that I have believed, and that my faith is genuine. For although I believe ever so certainly in the truth of God's promise of eternal life to him that believeth, yet, if I doubt whether I have believed, or am uncertain whether my faith is of that kind to which the promise is made, I cannot possess assurance of salvation. And there seems to be some ground for a doubt of this kind, as we read of several kinds of faith which were not connected with salvation. And one species of faith which was not saving, is represented as being accompanied with joy and every appearance of being genuine, until being put to the trial, it was found to be deficient.

Again, it ought to be remarked here, that many persons have entertained a strong persuasion that they were the heirs of salvation, and yet their confidence was founded in error or delusion. Therefore, although at first view, it would seem the easiest thing in the world, for a true believer to arrive at assurance of salvation, yet, when we take into view the deceitfulness of the heart, and the power of Satan to transform himself into an angel of light, and also the numerous cases of actual deception which have occurred, we are so far from thinking it easy to arrive at assurance, that we are disposed to believe that an infallible, unwavering assurance, on solid scriptural grounds, can be acquired by no one, without the special witness of the Holy Spirit. Most Christians, at least in our day, do not possess an assurance of salvation which excludes all doubt and fear, as to their future destiny. They have attained to a comfortable hope, but not to the assurance of hope; except at some favoured moments, when the love of God is shed abroad in their heart, by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. Then the Spirit witnesses with their spirits, that they are the children of God.

How this witness is given, is a matter concerning which there are different opinions. But as there are spurious joys which may be very extatic, it is safest to believe, that this assurance is commonly given, by bringing into lively exercise, faith, love, and joy; so that there can be no doubt of the existence of these exercises, as there can be none, that they are feelings peculiar to the children of God. The Spirit not only enlightens the mind to discern the beauty of holiness in the word, but to discern also, the image of the truth made on the heart, so that by his illumination, the believer is enabled to look back on his past experience, and to see, that, from time to time, he has exercised true faith, love, &c.; or, that he now actually is in the exercise of these graces. I do not, however, see any reason to doubt that God may sometimes, without any examination or comparison of its exercises with the marks of his word, fill the soul of the believer with a joyful persuasion of his love, and may so pour into it the spirit of adoption, that it shall be enabled, with filial confidence, to cry, Abba, Father. Many testimonies to this purpose might be collected from the experience of saints.

But alas! many serious, conscientious persons are always more or less under a cloud of doubt and uncertainty, respecting their spiritual condition. These broken reeds must not be crushed, nor this smoking flax quenched, by any doctrine of ours; for often among these are found the truly contrite and humble spirits with whom Jehovah delights to take up his abode. Where doubting does not arise from any want of confidence in the truth of God's word, but altogether from diffidence of the genuineness of our own faith, it does not partake of the nature of unbelief; for there is so much reason to distrust our own hearts, that this timidity and uncertainty is often rather an evidence of self-knowledge and humility, than of unbelief. Still, such persons are deprived of much comfort, which Christians ought to enjoy. These doubts are very distressing, and do not qualify the person to exhibit the bright side of religion to those around him. No person should be contented to remain under this dark cloud which so obscures his future prospects. Assurance of salvation is attainable by all true believers who assiduously seek it. Let all then strive to obtain this inestimable blessing.

The true doctrine of assurance is taught in the Westminster Larger Catechism, and is clearly expressed in the following words, "Such as truly believe in Christ, and endeavour to walk in all good conscience before Him, may, without extraordinary revelation, by faith grounded on the truth of God's promises, and by the Spirit enabling them to discern in themselves those graces to which the promises of life are made, and bearing witness with their spirits that they are the children of God, be infallibly assured that they are in a state of grace, and shall persevere therein unto salvation."

Again, "Assurance of grace and salvation, not being of the essence of faith, true believers may wait long before they obtain it; and after the enjoyment hereof, may have it weakened and intermitted through manifold distempers, sins, temptations and desertions; yet are they never left without such a presence and support of the Spirit of God, as keeps them from sinking into utter despair."

That assurance of salvation is attainable in this life, is very evident from the Scriptures, both of the Old and New Testaments. Indeed, all the saints, of whom any expression of their spiritual state is recorded, appear to have possessed a full sense of their reconciliation and acceptance with God. The only doubt is, whether they owed their assurance to that supernatural inspiration which they possessed, or to clear evelations to them personally, that they were the adopted and beloved children of God. We know, that in some cases such communications were made to individual saints, as to Abel, Noah, Abraham, Isaiah, and Daniel: but the mere possession of miraculous gifts furnished no decisive evidence of the spiritual state of the persons who had received these gifts. We know that Balaam, who loved the wages of unrighteousness, prophesied by the inspiration of God; and Judas, the traitor, received the same commission, to heal the sick, to cast out devils, and to raise the dead, as the other disciples. Moreover, our Lord assures us, that at the last day, some will make this a plea for admittance into his heavenly kingdom, that, in his name, they had cast out devils, and done many wonderful works; but He will say unto them, "Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity, I never knew you."

Paul's strong assurance seems to have been the effect of that faith which he possessed in common with other Christians. And he felt it to be necessary to work out his salvation with fear and trembling, and to keep his body under, lest after preaching to others, he himself should become a castaway. His assurance of a crown of life at the appearing of Christ, was founded on the consciousness of having fought a good fight and kept the faith. The faith of the apostles was of the same kind with that of Christians at the present time: the only difference was in its strength. And as the apostles had nothing but what they had gratuitously received, there is no reason known to us, why God may not grant as great grace to some persons, in modern times, as was bestowed on the primitive Christians, or even on the apostles.

From the view of assurance which has been given above, it may be inferred, that the true reason why so many sincere Christians, in our day, live without assurance, is the feebleness of their faith. They need, therefore, to be exhorted, in the language of the apostle Peter, "Wherefore, the rather, brethren, give all diligence to make your calling and election sure." The apostle John teaches us how we may obtain this precious grace of assurance. "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." "If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God." "My little children let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him."

Some exercised Christians fail to obtain assurance by mistaking the evidences of true piety; or rather by supposing that the working of inward corruption, of which they are conscious, is inconsistent with a state of grace. A correct knowledge of the marks and evidences of true religion, is of great importance, in order to our obtaining a settled assurance. And some humble Christians possess the blessing without giving it its proper name. The writer recollects a conversation which passed in his presence, between an eminent minister of the gospel, and an old lady who had been converted under the ministry of the Rev. Samuel Davies. This old lady had given indubitable evidence of eminent piety for more than half a century; but she aid to the clergyman who was conversing with her, "I have never attained to the faith of assurance—mine is only the faith of reliance." To which the clergyman answered, "if you know you have the faith of reliance, you have the faith of assurance."

Some persons seem to expect assurance in some extraordinary way, by an immediate divine revelation, or by a voice from heaven. But this is enthusiasm. Mr. Flavel makes mention of a young man who most earnestly sought for some extraordinary evidence of his acceptance with God; and as he walked in the fields vainly hoped, that the very stones would speak, that he might know whether he was a child of God. But afterwards, convinced of his error, he sought this blessing in the way of self-examination, reading the Scriptures and other appointed means, and was not disappointed; for, in the use of instituted means, he attained to a settled and comfortable assurance of his interest in Christ. It may be remarked here, that assurance is not always accompanied with joy. There may be a scriptural conviction, that a work of divine grace has been experienced; and at the same time there may be no high raised affections; nor any very vigorous actings of faith, at the moment. This may be called habitual assurance. But there is in the experience of many, at times, a joyful persuasion of the mercy and favour of God. This is probably what is meant by having "the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven." Such seasons are very precious, but never last long.

It is a sad case, when assurance for a while enjoyed, is through sin or carelessness lost. This is often experienced by backsliders. Assurance can never be enjoyed by those who depart from God, even although the root of the matter be in them. And when a comfortable sense of the divine favour is lost, it is hard to be recovered. Such Christians often walk mourn fully, with their heads bowed down as a bulrush, to the close of life. David after his woful lapse, cries, "Cast me not away from thy presence, nor take thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joys of thy salvation, and uphold me by thy free Spirit."—"Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice."

Many pious souls, there is reason to believe, are depressed, and their evidences beclouded, by a melancholy temperament. Physical causes necessarily have a powerful effect on the exercises of the mind; and this is felt in religion, as well as in other things

CHAPTER XXIX

Perseverance of the Saints

This subject is intimately connected with the assurance of salvation. For if true believers may lose their faith, and totally and finally fall away, then, manifestly, there can be no such thing as assurance of salvation. A person may know assuredly that he is a child of God, and at present free from all condemnation; but upon this hypothesis, he cannot possibly be assured that he will continue in this happy state. In the exercise of his own free will, he may depart from God, renounce Christ and become a reprobate. If this doctrine be admitted, that all saints are liable to apostatize, and that there is no such thing promised as the grace of perseverance, then Paul's declarations, in which he expresses the fullest confidence that he should possess a crown of life, must be understood conditionally; provided he should persevere to the end. And in the same manner we must construe those triumphant expressions at the close of the eighth chapter of his epistle to the Romans. "For I am persuaded, that neither life nor death, 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." According to this theory, we must understand the apostle to mean, that if he continued in the faith, none of these things should be able to separate him from the love of God in Christ Jesus. But who knows, whether Paul did persevere to the end? Who knows, but that his faith failed in the last extremity? We have no account, in the New Testament, of the circumstances of his death. Indeed, if the standing of believers depends on themselves, it would not be surprising, that any one should be overcome by temptation, and should finally fall from a state of grace. It is possible, then, that all the apostles might have fallen away in the time of persecution; for although Christ promises to go and prepare a place for them, and that they should sit on thrones in his kingdom, yet all this must be understood on condition they persevered to the end!

Those who maintain, that all true believers