

224
E S S A Y
ON THE
C O N N E X I O N

B E T W E E N T H E
D O C T R I N E O F J U S T I F I C A T I O N

B Y T H E

Imputed RIGHTEOUSNESS OF CHRIST,

A N D

H O L I N E S S O F L I F E ;

With some Reflexions upon the Reception which
that Doctrine hath generally met with in the
World.

To which is prefix'd,

A LETTER to the Rev. Mr *JAMES HERVEY*,
Rector of *Weston Favell, Northampton-shire*, Au-
thor of *THERON* and *ASPASIO*.

By *JOHN WITHERSPOON*, M. A.
Minister of the Gospel in *Beith*.

The second Edition.

EDINBURGH:

Printed by *T. LUMSDEN and COMPANY*;
Sold by *GRAY and PETER*, at their Shop in the *Exchange*.
M,DCC,LVI.

T O T H E

Rev. Mr *JAMES HERVEY*, &c.

S I R,

WHEN Christ our Saviour was about to go to his Father, he told his disciples, *If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before. it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.* I am persuaded, that by this, he did not only intend to forewarn the twelve of the offence which that generation would take at the ignominy of the cross, but also to intimate, that the case would be the same in all ages; that his doctrine would meet with great resistance and opposition, and that the temper and character of his real disciples would be very different from the spirit that would generally prevail in the world. This hath been continually verified in experience. For as many in the highest stations, and of highest repute for wisdom in the world, did set themselves against the gospel at its first publication, so even where there is a nominal profession of it, there is still an opposition to its doctrines, in their simplicity

and purity, by the world, that is to say, those who have most sway in it, who are the most passionate admirers of its fashions, and the most assiduous prosecutors of its honours and pleasures.

It may also be observed, that there is sometimes, perhaps even generally, a sovereignty of divine providence in the choice of the instruments employed in spreading the gospel. As, at first, twelve illiterate fishermen were chosen; so, often since that time, the weakest and most unlikely have been pitched upon; *that our faith might not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God*. Hence it frequently happens, that it is not only difficult to make men believe the gospel, but even to persuade them to hear it. They are apt to despise and deride the message, because of the meanness of the messenger, or the homeliness of the terms in which it is delivered. This is particularly the case with the present age. From a certain love of ease, and luxury of mind, they despise and trample upon all instructions, which have not something pleasing and insinuating in their dress and form.

You, Sir, are one of those happy few, who have been willing to consecrate the finest natural talents to the service of Christ in the gospel, and are not ashamed of his cross. You have

been able to procure attention upon some subjects, from many who would hardly have given it to any other writer. This hath made me observe with particular attention, the effect of your last performance; *Theron* and *Aspasio*, the character given to it, and the objections raised against it. And I have always found that the most specious and plausible objection, and that most frequently made, against the doctrine of justification by imputed righteousness, has been in this case, as indeed usually before, that it loosens the obligations to practice. This is what I have particularly applied myself to refute in the following essay, because I have rarely observed it done distinctly, and at full length, in any writer. And I have addressed it to you, as a testimony of my esteem of your excellent and useful writings, as a public declaration of my espousing the same sentiments as to the terms of our acceptance with God, and my ambition of contributing some small assistance to the support of the same glorious cause. It was also no small inducement to it, that thereby it might appear to all, that no external distinctions, or smaller differences, ought to be any hindrance to a cordial esteem and affection among the sincere servants of our common Master.

The greatest part of what follows was first delivered in two sermons ; but it is now thrown into the form of an essay, lest the despised title of a sermon should offend some, and that it might the better admit of several additions, both in the body of the piece, and in the notes, which could not have been so properly delivered from a pulpit. Some of these regard the philosophical principles, which have of late been published among us, of which I propose, in a short time, a much fuller discussion, as there is no way in which the truths of the gospel are more perverted than by what the apostle *Paul* calls *Philosophy and vain deceit, and oppositions of science falsely so called*.

That your useful life may be prolonged, and that you may have the honour of contributing more and more to the conversion of sinners, and the edification and comfort of believers, is the earnest prayer of,

S I R,

Your most obedient humble servant,

J. W.

ESSAY, &c.

ALL the works and ways of God have something in them mysterious, above the comprehension of any finite understanding, And as this is the case with his works of creation and providence, there is no reason to expect it should be otherwise in the astonishing method of the redemption of the world by Jesus Christ. From this their mysterious nature, or rather from the imperfect measure and degree in which they are revealed to us, they are admirably fitted for the trial of our ingenuity, humility and subjection. They are all of them, when seriously and impartially enquired into, holy, just and good; but at the same time, not beyond the cavils and objections of men of prejudiced, perverse and corrupt minds.

The apostle *Paul*, in his epistle to the *Romans*, among whom he had never been in person, at great length establishes the fundamental doctrine of the gospel, that sinners are justified by the free grace of God through the imputed righteousness of a Redeemer. To this doctrine men do by nature make the strongest opposition, and are, with the outmost difficulty, brought to receive and apply it. We may well

say of it in particular, what the same apostle says of the truths of God in general, that *the natural man doth not receive them* *. It is therefore highly necessary to prevent or remove, as far as possible, the objections that may be brought against it by the art or malice of Satan, who will, no doubt, bend the chief force of all his engines against this truth, knowing that the cordial reception of it is a sure and effectual, and indeed the only sure and effectual mean of destroying his power and influence in the heart. Accordingly we find the apostle, in the 6th chapter of the above-named epistle, and 1st verse, supposes an objection made against this doctrine in the following terms, *What shall we say then? shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?* To which he answers, by rejecting the consequence with the outmost abhorrence, and in the strongest manner affirming it to be without any foundation.

From the introduction of this objection by the apostle, we may either infer, that there were, even in these early days, some who branded the doctrine of redemption by the free grace of God with this odious consequence; or that he, by the inspiration of the Almighty, did foresee that there should arise, in some future periods of the Christian church, adversaries who would attempt to load it with this imputation; or that the doctrine is indeed liable, on a superficial view, to be abused to this unhappy purpose, by the deceitful hearts of men, who are wedded to their lusts.

* 1 Cor. ii. 14,

It is probable that all the three observations are just, and the two last render it a peculiarly proper subject for our attention and consideration at this time, and in this age.

It is well known, that there are many enemies of this doctrine, of different characters, and of different principles, who all agree in assaulting it with this objection, That it weakens the obligations to holiness of life, by making our justification before God depend entirely upon the righteousness and merit of another. And so far, I think, we must join with the adversaries of this doctrine, as to lay it down for a principle, That whatever belief or persuasion, by its native and genuine tendency, weakens the obligations to practice, must be false. And I will also assert, in opposition to some modern infidels, (tho' some may think that my cause might avail itself of the contrary opinion) that a man's inward principle, or the persuasion of his mind, hath a necessary and unavoidable influence upon his practice *. So that, if I am not

* That is to say, So far as it can be applied to practice, and so far as it is real or prevalent above its opposite; for there are many truths of a religious nature which men think they believe at sometimes, but which yet their corrupt passions often make them doubt of; and these doubts are nine parts in ten of their lives observant to their minds, as a vindication of their licentious practice: in some sense, such may be said to act in contradiction to their principles; but they are principles either not really believed, or, which is the same thing, not habitually recollected; and none can expect that men will act upon a principle, tho' once ever so firmly believed, if it be forgotten, or at the time of action entirely out of view.

able to shew that Justification thro' the imputed righteousness of Christ, is so far from weakning the obligations to holiness, that, on the contrary, the belief and reception of it, as its necessary consequence, must make men greater lovers of purity and holiness, and fill them with a greater abhorrence of sin, than any other persuasion on the same subject, I am content to give up the cause.

I hope we may be indulged a candid hearing upon this subject, as experience does not seem to be unfavourable to the doctrine I am essaying to defend. If it appeared in fact that its friends, upon a fair and just comparison, were more loose in their practice than their adversaries of any of the opposite opinions, it would be a strong prejudice against it; or rather, if this were always the case, it would be an unquestionable evidence of its falshood. But, doth not the contrary appear upon the very face of the world? Are not the persons who profess to deny their own righteousness, and hope for justification thro' Christ, ordinarily the most tender and fearful of sinning themselves, and the most faithful and diligent in promoting the reformation of others? And do not all careless, profane and sensual livers, almost to a man, profess themselves enemies to this doctrine? I could almost appeal to any one who hath the least experience of, or commerce with the world, whether he would expect to find, upon a strict search and enquiry, the worship of God more constantly attended, the name of God more regularly called upon in families, children and servants

more carefully instructed, and more dutifully governed, a greater freedom from levity, profanity, unchastity, pride, malice, or insincerity of conversation, amongst the friends or enemies of this doctrine? So true is this, that they commonly have the appellation of the stricter sort given them, by which is certainly understood, at least, an apparent strictness of life and manners †.

As therefore experience doth not hinder, or rather warrants us to affirm, that those who expect justification by free grace are, of all others, the most holy in their lives; I propose to shew, that it must be so, and that this is but the native fruit, and necessary consequence of their principles. What has induced me to this attempt, is not only the calumnies of enemies, but the weakness or treachery of professed friends. These last injure the truth often, in two different ways.

† I am not ignorant, that it is the usual refuge of those who are evidently dissolute in their own lives, to alledge, that there is indeed an appearance of this, but that it is no more than appearance, being all hypocrisy. It would be going out of the way to enter upon a large refutation of this slander. Therefore acknowledging, that, no doubt, whatever number of hypocrites there are in the world, and there are too many, they must herd amongst, or attach themselves to the society of the best part of it: I observe, that the general charge of hypocrisy is only thrown out at a venture, is a judging of the heart, and by the very supposition, contrary to appearances, justified, for the most part, by a steady perseverance. Whereas, usually the whole merit of those who bring the accusation, is that of being uniformly wicked, and not so much as professing what it was their indispensable duty both to have professed and practised.

Some speak in such a manner as to confirm and harden enemies in their opposition to it; they use such rash and uncautious expressions, as do indeed justify the objection which the apostle rejects with such abhorrence; and, in the heat of their zeal against the self-righteous legalist, seem to state themselves as enemies, in every respect, to the law of God, which is holy, just and good. Others, on the contrary, defend it, in such a manner, as to destroy the doctrine itself, and give such interpretations of the word of God, as, if they were just, and known to be so, the objection would have never been made, because there would not have been so much as an occasion given to it*.

But of all pretended Christians, one sort are worthy of the highest contempt, who, acknowledging the truth of this doctrine, call it dangerous, and are backward to teach or publish it, lest it should be abused. Would such weak, half-thinking mortals, be wiser than God? Hath he published it, and shall we throw a veil over it, to remedy the rashness of his proceeding? Do the Scriptures reveal, and are we backward

* I have often thought, that there cannot be a stronger argument, that the explication commonly given by Calvinists, of the passages of Scripture on this subject, is just, than the apostle's supposition of an objection of this nature arising from it. For if the explication of some others, were supposed to be the obvious meaning of the text, and were substituted in its room, as all just definitions may be without inconvenience, the apostle's words, *What shall we say then? shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?* would be quite unnatural and absurd.

to testify the gospel of the grace of God? All the works of God are capable of being abused; that this may be so likewise the apostle supposes. It is, however, not the less useful or important; only let us endeavour to vindicate it from the false charge of favouring or encouraging licentiousness of life. This I would willingly do in such a manner as to assert while I defend it; to maintain the doctrine itself, while I shew not only its innocence, but its usefulness in practice.

The words of the inspired apostle are, *God forbid, how shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?* In which he affirms, that the grace of God abounding in the gospel, is so far from being an encouragement to sin, that it destroys the power of sin, and removes the inclination to it, so far as it prevails. The language is very strong, *We that are dead to sin.*—It seems to put us in mind of the total effectual breach of relation between a dead man, and the objects with which he was formerly connected in life: they are nothing to him, nor he to them; he neither loves them, needs them, nor uses them. So, in proportion as the grace of God offered thro' Christ in the gospel is received and applied, sin is mortified in the heart; thus says the apostle *Paul* elsewhere, *God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world* *. This, which is indeed the language of the Scripture throughout, is not mere-

B

* Gal. vi. 14.

ly denying the accusation, but establishing the contrary truth, the influence of this doctrine upon purity of heart and life, which we find the apostle also asserting in the middle of his reasoning upon the point, *Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid; yea, we establish the law* †.

In the prosecution of this subject, it will be necessary, first, in a few words, to state that doctrine against which the objection is made. It may be delivered in Scripture-language thus, *That all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.—That every mouth must be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God.—Therefore by the deeds of the law, there shall be no flesh justified in his sight.—But we are justified freely by his grace, thro' the redemption that is in Christ Jesus :—Whom God hath set forth as a propitiation, thro' faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.—Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay, but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude, that a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the law.—Moreover, the law entered, that the offence might abound; but where sin abounded, grace did much more abound; that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord.*

† Rom. iii. 31.

The doctrine asserted in the above and other passages of scripture may be thus paraphrased: that every intelligent creature is under an unchangeable and unalienable obligation, perfectly to obey the whole law of God; that all men proceeding from Adam by ordinary generation, are the children of polluted parents, alienated in heart from God, transgressors of his holy law, inexcusable in this transgression, and therefore exposed to the dreadful consequences of his displeasure; that it was not agreeable to the dictates of his wisdom, holiness and justice, to forgive their sins without an atonement or satisfaction; and therefore he raised up for them a Saviour, Jesus Christ, who, as the second Adam, perfectly fulfilled the whole law, and offered himself up a sacrifice upon the cross in their stead: that this his righteousness is imputed to them, as the sole foundation of their justification in the sight of a holy God, and their reception into his favour: that the mean of their being interested in this salvation, is a deep humiliation of mind, confession of guilt and wretchedness, denial of themselves, and acceptance of pardon and peace through Christ Jesus, which they neither have contributed to the procuring, nor can contribute to the continuance of, by their own merit; but expect the renovation of their natures, to be inclined and enabled to keep the commandments of God, as the work of the Spirit, and a part of the purchase of their Redeemer*.

B. 2.

* The intelligent reader will probably perceive, that I have expressed the above doctrine in such general terms; as not distinctly to take a part in the differences that are to be found a-

This short account of the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness will be further illustrated and explained in the progress of this discourse, intended to shew, that in those who do cordially embrace it, the obligations to holiness are not weakened, but strengthened and confirmed. For this purpose be pleased to attend to the following observations; in all of which I desire it may be remembered, even where not expressly mentioned, an opposition is intended between the principles and views of a believer in Christ, who rests his hope on his imputed righteousness, and those who act on any contrary principle.

In the first place, he who expects justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ, hath the clearest and strongest conviction of the obligation of the holy law of God upon every reasonable creature, and of its extent and purity. This will appear very evidently, if we consider what it is that brings any person to a be-

Among some authors, as to the way of explaining it, and particularly as to the nature of faith. The reason of my doing so is, that I would willingly rather reconcile than widen these differences; and because it is my firm persuasion, that however some think it justest, or wisest, or safest, to express themselves one way, and some another, yet all who have a deep and real conviction, that they are by nature in a lost state, and under the wrath of God, and that there is no salvation in any other but in Christ; are, if they understood one another, at bottom, or at least in all things any way material, entirely of the same opinion. Accordingly the reader will, I hope, find that the reasoning in the following pages may easily be applied by them all without exception.

lief or relish of this doctrine. It must be a sense of sin, and fear of deserved wrath. Let us search out the cause by tracing the effects. Whence arises the fear of wrath, or apprehension of God's displeasure? Only from a conviction of guilt. And what can produce a conviction of guilt, but a sense of obligation? This is manifestly the doctrine of scripture, which teaches us, that *by the law is the knowledge of sin*—and that *the law is a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ*. Those who have none at all, or a very imperfect sense of the obligation of the divine law, will never have the least esteem of the righteousness of Christ, which atones for their transgression of it; it must appear to them to be foolishness: whereas those who have a strong conviction of the justice of the demand of the law, both esteem and use the plea of their Saviour's merit. Such also have a strong sense of the extent and purity of the law of God, as well as its obligation in general. Whilst others consider nothing as sin, but the grossest and most notorious crimes, they are deeply sensible of the alienation of their hearts from God, whom they are bound supremely to love, and to whose glory they are obliged to be habitually and universally subservient.

This conviction of the obligation of the divine law, so essentially connected with, or rather so necessarily previous to, an acceptance of the imputed righteousness of Christ, is evidently founded upon the relation of man to God, as a creature to his Creator. This relation then continues, and must continue, unchangeable;

therefore the obligation founded upon it must be unalienable; and all those who have once been sensible of it, must continue to be so, unless we suppose them blinded to the knowledge of God as Creator, by the discovery of his mercy in Christ the Redeemer: but this is absurd; for the subsequent relation of a sinner to God, as forgiven and reconciled through Christ, never can take away, nay, never can alter his natural relation as a creature, nor the obligation founded upon it; neither can it be conceived as consistent with the perfections of God, to abate the demands of his law, that is to say, a perfect conformity to his holy will*.

* Since mention has been made of perfect conformity to the will of God, or perfect obedience to his law, as the duty of man, which is indeed the foundation of this whole doctrine, I think it necessary to observe, that some deny this to be properly required of man, as his duty in the present fallen state, because he is not able to perform it. But such do not seem to attend either to the meaning of perfect obedience, or to the nature or cause of this inability. Perfect obedience is obedience by any creature, to the utmost extent of his natural powers. Even in a state of innocence, the holy dispositions of Adam would not have been equal in strength and activity to those of creatures of an higher rank: but surely to love God, who is infinitely amiable, with all the heart, and above all, to consecrate all his powers and faculties, without exception, and without intermission, to God's service, must be undeniably the duty of every intelligent creature. And what sort of inability are we under to pay this? Our natural faculties are surely as fit for the service of God as for any baser purpose: the inability is only moral, and lyes wholly in the aversion of our hearts from such employment. Does this then take away the guilt? must God relax his law because we are not willing to obey it? Consult even modern philosophers; and such of them as allow there is any such thing as vice, will tell you, that it lyes in evil or misplaced affections. Will then

Every the least deviation from it, by transgression, or neglect of duty, must still be evil in itself, and must still be seen, and esteemed to be so by the God of truth, who cannot lie. Now, is there any thing in the gospel that hath the least tendency to lessen the sense of this obligation, after it hath been once discovered? Very far from it: on the contrary, all that Christ hath done for the salvation of sinners, as its immediate consequence, magnifies the law, and makes it honourable.

Perhaps it may be thought, that the releasing a sinner from the sanction of the law, or the punishment incurred, by pardon purchased and bestowed, has this effect: and here it is, to be sure, that men, by their partial views, are apt to suppose the objection lyes. But let us only reflect, that the obligation to duty and obedience to the Creator hath been seen by a believer in the strongest light, and must continue to be sensible. Will he then be induced to act in the face of a perceived obligation, by an instance of unspeakable mercy? Is this reasonable to suppose? or rather, is it not self-contradictory and absurd? It is so far from being true, that this mercy disposes to obedience, as a pecu-

that which is ill in itself excuse its fruits in any degree from guilt or blame? The truth is, notwithstanding the loud charge of licentiousness upon the truths of the gospel, there is no other system that ever I perused which preserves the obligation of the law of God in its strength: the most part of them, when thoroughly examined, just amount to this, that men are bound, and that it is RIGHT and MEET and FIT that they should be as good and holy as they themselves incline.

liar and additional motive, as I shall afterwards shew more fully in its proper place. In the mean time, it is self evident, that it can be no hindrance. What leads us into error in this matter is what happens sometimes in human affairs. In a human government mercy, or a promise of impunity for past crimes, may enable, tho', even in that case, not incline a rebellious traitor to renew his wickedness. But this is a most unjust and partial view of the case, in which the very circumstance is wanting upon which the chief stress ought to be laid: for human laws reach only outward actions, because human knowledge is so imperfect, that it cannot discover the disposition of the heart: and as all professions are not sincere, so kindness is often bestowed on improper objects; and this kindness may discover the impropriety, but not cause it.

But make the similitude compleat, and see how it will lead us to determine. Suppose one who hath been in rebellion, deeply and inwardly convinced of the evil of rebellion, and his obligation to submission; suppose this conviction so strong that he confesseth the justice of the sentence which condemns him to die, and this is very consistent with a desire of life: will a pardon offered or intimated to such a person, make him disloyal? is this its natural, nay is it its possible effect? If it could be supposed to have any such consequence at all, it could only be in this distant way, that pardon seems to lessen the sense of a judge's displeasure at the crime. But even this can have no place here, because sufficient care is taken to prevent any such

abuse of it, by the substitution and vicarious sufferings of a Mediator.

I cannot help observing here, that the similitude above used will lead us to the discovery of one great cause of the objection against which I am reasoning. It arises from that corruption of heart, and inward opposition to the law of God in its extent and purity, which is in all men by nature, and continues in all who are not renewed in the spirit of their minds. As they have a strong tendency and inclination to transgress the law where they dare, they are ready to think, that the hopes of impunity must encourage every one to a bold violation of it. And no doubt this would be true, if there could be any real esteem, or cordial acceptance of the gospel, without a previous conviction of the obligation of the law, and the guilt and demerit of every transgressor†. But supposing what is in truth the case with every believer, that there is a real and strong conviction of the obligation of the law of God upon every rational creature, which cannot be taken away.

B 3

† But this is impossible: for tho' there may be some sort of fear of punishment, occasioned by displays of divine power, where there is no true humiliation of mind, or genuine conviction of sin; this is but like the impatient struggles of a chained slave, instead of the willing subjection of a penitent child. There is still in all such an inward murmuring against the sentence, as that of an unjust and rigorous tyrant, and not of a righteous judge. Therefore, tho' such should pretend to rely on the merits of Christ for pardon and deliverance, it is plainly not from their hearts, and therefore neither to the saving of their souls, nor to the reformation of their lives.

then to imagine that the mercy of God in pardoning sinners for Christ's sake will lessen or weaken the sense of this obligation, is a most manifest contradiction. On the contrary, sin must needs have received a mortal blow, the love of it must necessarily have been destroyed, before pardon in this way could be sought or obtained: so that the apostle might well say, *how shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?*

In the second place, he who believes in Christ, and expects justification through his imputed righteousness, must have the deepest and strongest sense of the evil of sin in itself. This is in a good measure included in, or an immediate consequence of, what has been already mentioned. For the obligation of the law, as hinted above, is but very imperfect, if we consider it only as founded on the power of God, and the dependence of the creature, and not also on the holiness, justice, and goodness of the law itself. In the first sense, perhaps, it may be felt by the wicked in this world, at least, we are sure it is felt by devils and damned spirits in a separate state. They know that they must suffer, because they will not obey. But where there is a compleat sense of obligation, it implies a belief of the righteousness of the law, as well as the power of the Lawgiver, of the equity, nay, the excellence of the command, as well as the severity of the sanction. All such not only believe that God will punish for sin, but that it is most just that he should do so, and that sin has richly deserved it.

It may therefore seem unnecessary to add any thing on this subject more than has been already said : but I have mentioned it by itself, because besides that sense of the obligation and purity of the law of God, which must pave the way to a sinner's acceptance of the righteousness of Christ, there is a discovery of the evil of sin, and its abominable nature, in every part of this *mystery of godliness, God manifested in the flesh*; and the truths founded upon it; so that the more these are believed, and the more they are attended to and recollected, the more must the believer be determined to hate and abhor every wicked and false way; every new view which he takes of the gospel of his salvation, every act of trust and confidence exerted upon it, must increase his horror of sin, and excite him to fly from it.

Let us consider a little what views are presented us of the evil of sin in the doctrine of Christ, and of him crucified. Here we see that a holy and just God would not forgive sin without an atonement. What a demonstration is this of its malignity, if carefully attended to, and kept constantly in our eye, as a part of our very idea of the Divine Nature! The difficulty in this case is our partiality in our own cause; we are unwilling to think sin so very blame-worthy, because this is condemning ourselves: but, let us consider what views an all-wise and impartial God hath of it, and form ours upon his. And that we may not so much as once blasphemously imagine, that he also is partial on his own side, let us remember

that he is the God of love, and who, by this very salvation, hath magnified his love in a manner that passeth knowledge. He shews his sense of the evil of the crime, even whilst he is contriving, nay, in the very contrivance of a proper way for the criminal's escape. He is not, so to speak, setting forth the malignity of the offence, in order to justify the severity of his own vengeance, but he is exerting his amiable attribute of mercy, and yet here must the evil of sin appear.

Consider, in a particular manner, upon this subject, the dignity and glory of the person who made this atonement. The value of the purchase may be seen in the greatness of the price; the evil of sin in the worth of the propitiation. † *For we are not redeemed with corruptible things, such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot.* It was no less a person than the eternal and only begotten Son of God, who was before all worlds, the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person, who suffered in our stead. Whoever considers the frequent mention in the sacred oracles, of the glory and dignity of the person of Christ; must be satisfied that it is not without design; and none can truly relish or improve these truths, but such as thence learn the evil of sin, the immenseness of that debt which required one of so great, nay, of infinite and inexhaustible

haustible riches, to be able to pay it. A creature indeed behoved to suffer ; and therefore he became the son of man, but intimately united to the Creator, God blessed for evermore. It was one of the first and earliest confessions of faith, That Jesus Christ was the Son of God ; and this belief must have the strongest influence in shewing us the evil of sin, which none else was able to expiate.

In many passages of scripture, God's sending his own Son into the world to save sinners, is represented as the strongest proof possible of his compassion and love. The nearness of the relation teaches us, as it were, to suppose some reluctance in bestowing him ; in allusion to which there is a fine expression of the apostle *Paul*, * *He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?* The very same thing shews, with equal clearness, his abhorrence of sin. However strongly disposed to save sinners, he would have sin to be expiated, tho' his own Son should be the victim : if any thing could have made him dispense with it, this should surely have had the effect : and therefore the condemning of sin seems to have been as much in view, as the salvation of the sinner.

Every light in which we can view this subject, contributes to set before us the evil of sin. I shall only mention further, the greatness and severity of the sufferings of our Redeemer, as they are represented both

C

* Rom. viii. 32.

prophetically, to shew how much was exacted, and historically, to shew what was paid. As the whole of his life was to be a state of humiliation and sorrow, it is said, * *As many were astonished at thee, his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form than the sons of men.* Again, *He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and we hid, as it were, our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.* Once more, *He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed.* In the history of his life in the new testament, we see all this verified, in the meanness of his birth, and the continued insults and reproaches thrown upon him during the course of his life. There is one remarkable passage, *John viii. 57. Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?* The meaning of this is hardly obvious, unless we suppose that his natural beauty and bloom was so wasted and decayed by sorrow, that he seemed to strangers near twenty years older than he really was.

In the close of the gospel, we have an account of the last scene of his sufferings, in the garden, and on the cross. *He was sore amazed, and very heavy.—His soul was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.—His sweat was as it were great drops of blood, falling down to the ground.* He was at last stretched upon an accursed tree, where the pain of a tortur'd body was but

* Isa. lii. 14. liii. 3. liii. 5.

small to the anguish of an overwhelmed spirit, which constrained him to utter this heavy complaint, *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* Let the Christian stand at the foot of the cross, and there see the evil of sin, which required so costly an expiation. Let him there see the holiness and justice of God in its punishment. Let him hear the most High, saying, *Awake, O sword, against the man who is my fellow.* And let him thence learn, how much sin is the object of divine detestation.

Hath a believer then a firm persuasion of all these truths? Are they the frequent theme of his meditations? And must they not necessarily fill him with an abhorrence of sin, inflame him with a hatred of it, and excite in him a self-loathing on its account? Thus it is said in the prophetic writings, † *They shall look on me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born.* And must not a repetition of the same views still strengthen the impression, so that, as the apostle *Paul* tells us of himself, * *The world will be crucified unto him, and he unto the world.*

I am sensible, that these things will have no such effect upon the enemies of the gospel, who disbelieve them, or upon those Christians, if they deserve the name, who disguise, explain away, or give up the fa-

C. 2

† Zech. xii. 10. * Gal. vi. 14.

tisfaction of Christ; or even those who have a strong ~~incture~~incture of a legal spirit, and are for contributing somewhat toward their acceptance with God, by their own merit, and defective obedience. Such cannot relish these sentiments; and therefore it may seem improper, in reasoning against enemies, to bring them at all in view. But let it be remembered, that however little many believe such things, they may yet perceive, if they will attend to it, their natural operation upon those who ~~do~~ believe them. And let any modern adept in the science of morals shew in his account of the foundation of morality, and the nature of obligation, anything that hath a force or influence equal to this: or, will the nominal self-righteous Christian, who thinks Christ only made up some little wants which he finds in himself, or that his death had only some general expediency in it, ever be equally tender in his practice, with him who sees so much of the purity of the law of God, and his detestation of sin, as to esteem all his own righteousnesses but as filthy rags, and bottoms his hope of acceptance wholly upon the perfect righteousness of his Redeemer?

In the third place, He who expects justification only through the imputed righteousness of Christ, has the most awful views of the danger of sin. He not only sees the obligation and purity of the law, but the severity of its sanction. It is a fear of wrath from the avenger of blood, that persuades him to fly to the city of refuge. And if we compare the sentiments of others with his, either the generality of a careless

and blinded world, or those who act upon contrary principles, and a different system from that which we are now defending, we shall find, that not one of them hath such apprehensions of the wrath and vengeance of God due on the account of sin, as the convinced sinner, who flies to the propitiation of Christ for deliverance and rescue,

I am very sensible, that many readers will be ready to challenge this argument as pressed into the service; and wholly improper upon my scheme: they will suppose, that every believer, in consequence of his faith in Christ, is screened from the penalty of the law, and sheltered from the stroke of divine justice; he is therefore no more under this fear; and its being no more a motive of action, in the future part of his conduct, is the very ground of the objection I am attempting to remove. This is no doubt plausible; but let it be remembered, in what way it is that believers are freed from their apprehensions of the wrath of God; it is by their acceptance of his mercy thro' faith in Christ. Before the application of this remedy, they saw themselves the children of wrath, and heirs of hell; and they still believe, that every sin deserves the wrath of God, both in this life, and that which is to come. Will they therefore re-incur the danger from which they have so lately escaped, and of which they had so terrible a view? will they do so voluntarily, even although they know the remedy to be still at hand, still ready to be applied, and certainly effectual? Suppose any person had been upon the very point of perishing.

in a violent and rapid stream, and saved when his strength was well nigh exhausted, by the happy intervention of a tender-hearted passenger, would he voluntarily plunge himself again into the flood, even altho' he knew his deliverer were standing by, ready for his relief? This supposition is quite unnatural; and it is equally so, to imagine, that one saved from divine wrath will immediately repeat the provocation, even whilst he trembles at the thoughts of the misery of that state from which he had been so lately delivered:

Let us only consider the strong sense which a believer usually shews of the danger of others in an unconverted state, from a persuasion of their being under the wrath of God. He warns them, intreats them, pities them, and prays for them. He would not exchange with any one of them, a prison for a palace, or a scaffold for a throne. How then should he be supposed to follow them in their practice, and thereby to return to their state?

But perhaps, here again it will be urged, that this is improper; because, according to the principles of the assertors of imputed righteousness, a believer, being once in a justified state, cannot fall from grace; and therefore his sins do not deserve wrath; and he himself must have, from this persuasion, a strong confidence that, be what they will, they cannot have such an effect: and accordingly some have expressly affirmed, that the future sins of the elect are forgiven, as well as their past, at their conversion; nay, some,

that they are justified from all eternity, that God doth not see sin in a believer, that his afflictions are not punishments, and other things of the like nature. Now, tho' I must confess I look upon these expressions, and many more to be found in certain writers, whatever glosses they may put upon them, as unguarded and antiscriptural; yet, not to enter into the controversy at all, I suppose it will be acknowledged by all without exception, that a believer's security, and the impossibility of his falling from grace, is a security of not sinning, that is, of not being under the dominion of sin, as much as, or rather in order to his security of deliverance from the wrath of God. His pardon is sure; but this security is only hypothetical, because his faith and holiness are secured by the promise of God: so that, to suppose a person to sin without restraint, by means of this persuasion, that his salvation is secured by his first acceptance of Christ, is a supposition self-contradictory. However strongly any man may assert that a believer's salvation is secure, he will not scruple at the same time to acknowledge, that if such believer should sin wilfully and habitually, and continue to do so, he would be damned; but he will deny, that any such case ever did, or ever can possibly happen*.

* Indeed there can be nothing more unfair, than to take one part of a man's belief, and hence argue against another part, upon which the first is expressly founded. If I should say, I am confident I shall never be drowned in a certain river, because I am resolved never to cross it at all; would it not be absurd to reason thus; here is a man who hath a persuasion he will never

The objection must surely appear strongest upon the principles of those who make the nature of faith to consist in a belief, that Christ died for themselves in particular, or of their own personal interest in him, and the pardon and life which he hath purchased, thereby making assurance essential to it. Yet even these will not deny that their faith is not always equally strong, and that their assurance is sometimes interrupted with doubts and fears. Now, what is the cause of these doubts, and this uncertainty? is it not always sin more directly, or by consequence? So that sin renders their faith doubtful, which is the very same thing with putting them in fear concerning their future state. Indeed it is not more sure that our Redeemer invites all weary heavy-laden sinners to come unto him, that they may find rest, than it is that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God. So that every instance of voluntary sin, must throw back the believer (at least as to his own sentiments) into his former state, till he be again restored by faith and repentance.

From this I think it evidently appears, that the motive of the danger of sin is not weakned, but hath its full force upon those who expect justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ. And, if it is not weakned, it must be strengthened by this persuasion, since, as I have shewn above, none have so deep a sense of the obligation of the law, and the evil of sin, and

be drowned in this river; therefore he will be surely very headstrong and fool-hardy in fording it when it overflows its banks, which is contrary to the very foundation of my security?

by consequence none can have so great a fear of its awful sanction. And that this is agreeable to scripture, might be shown at great length, where the putting their right to the favour of God and eternal life more and more beyond all doubt and question, is recommended to believers as an object of their care and diligence. Thus says the apostle to the *Hebrews**, *And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence, to the full assurance of hope unto the end.* And the apostle *Peter*, after a long enumeration of the graces of the Christian life, says †, *Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure.* Nay, the fear of wrath, and of finally perishing, is represented by the apostle *Paul* himself, as one view, at least, which habitually influenced his own conduct ‡; *But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away.*

In the fourth place, Those who expect justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ, have the highest sense of the purity and holiness of the divine nature; and therefore must be under an habitual conviction of the necessity of purity, in order to fit them for his presence and enjoyment. If this doctrine, in its main design, or by any of its essential parts, had a tendency to represent God, (I will not say as delighting in sin, but) as easy to be pacified towards it, passing it by with little notice, and punishing it but very

C 3

* Heb. vi. 11. † 2 Pet. i. 10. ‡ 1 Cor. ix. 27.

slightly, there might be some pretence for drawing the conclusion complained of from it. For I think it may be allowed as a maxim, that as is the God, so are his worshippers, if they serve him in earnest. Whatever views they have of the object of their esteem and worship, they will endeavour to form themselves to the same character. But if, on the contrary, this doctrine preserves the purity of God entire; nay, if it gives us still more strong, awful and striking views of it; it can never encourage such as believe it, in the practice of sin.

But that this is the case with all such as believe and understand the doctrine of justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ, may be demonstrated in the clearest manner. It might indeed be shewn from a great variety of arguments founded upon the mediation of Christ: at present I shall mention but two, the propriety of which, and their relation to the subject in hand, every one must immediately perceive. In the first place, That Christ behoved to suffer by divine appointment for the expiation of sin, is not only equal with, but stronger than, all other evidences of the purity of God; and his abhorrence of sin. It is an event of the most striking and astonishing nature, every reflexion upon which overwhelms the mind, that the eternal and only begotten Son of God should assume the likeness of sinful flesh, and stand in the room of sinners: even tho' the merited punishment had been inflicted upon the offenders themselves, it would not have been such a proof of the purity of God. Here,

even when he is inclined to mercy, its exercise is obstructed till justice is satisfied. Can any one consider this without being deeply convinced, that he is a God *of purer eyes than to behold iniquity*, and with whom unrighteousness can have no communion? will any; after such views, hope for his favour, while they retain the love of sin, or expect to dwell in his presence while they continue stained with its pollution?

The same thing must also carry convincing evidence with it, that to suppose Christ to have bought an impunity to sinners, and procured them a license to offend, is self-contradictory, and altogether inconsistent with the wisdom and uniformity of the divine government: that he never could hate sin so much before, and love it after the sufferings of Christ; that he could not find it necessary to punish it so severely in the surety, and yet afterwards love and bear with it in those for whom that surety satisfied. Not only may this be clearly established by reason and argument, but it must be immediately felt by every one who sees the necessity of the atonement of their Redeemer. They will be so far from taking a liberty to sin, that, on the contrary, they will be ready to cry out, *who can stand before this holy Lord God**? Accordingly we shall find

* It is a certain fact, that the number of persons under distresses of mind by perplexing doubts, or anxious fears, concerning their future state, is incomparably greater amongst the friends than the enemies of this doctrine. By this I do not at all mean that either their doubts are dutiful, or their fears desirable. Such a state is to be looked upon as the fruit of their own weakness

in experience, that none are more ready to call in question the integrity of their own character ; none more ready to fear the effects of the sins that cleave to them, as unfitting them for the divine presence, than such as trust solely in the merits of Christ for their acceptance with God.

The second thing I proposed to mention in the doctrine of Christ's mediation, which shews the purity of the divine nature, is our continued approach to God by him as an intercessor and advocate. It contributes to keep continually upon our minds a sense of the divine holiness and purity, and of our own unworthiness, that we are not permitted to approach him but by the intercession of another. Such a conduct in human affairs, properly serves to shew dignity and greatness on the one part, distance and unworthiness on the other. The same conduct then in God towards us, doth it not convince us, that he must be sanctified of all them that draw near to him ? And, whilst it makes imputed righteousness the condition, plainly shows the necessity of inherent holiness, as a qualification in our approaches to his throne. Suppose an earthly prince were to be addressed by two different

and imperfection, and as a chastisement from a wise and gracious God, either more immediately for correcting their sins, or for the trial, illustration and perfecting of their grace and virtue ; but its being more common among those who believe in Christ's imputed righteousness, than others, is a plain proof that this doctrine doth not naturally tend to inspire any with an unholy boldness, or a secure and slothful presumption.

persons, one who thought he had a title upon his own merit to make an immediate application, and another who could not approach him without one nearly related to him, and in high favour at court, to procure his admission, and to back his request; which of these would probably be most respectful to his sovereign, and most solicitous to avoid giving offence by his conduct? Surely the latter: and so it is always with the humble, mortified believer, who *counts all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus* *.

In the fifth place, Those who expect justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ, must be induced to obedience, in the strongest manner, by the liberal and ingenuous motive of gratitude and thankfulness to God. That it is the native and genuine expression of gratitude to God, to live a pure and holy life, I suppose will hardly be denied: at least, this the scriptures represent as pleasing him, serving him, doing his will, honouring him. It is indeed extremely difficult to conceive, how God Almighty, and all-sufficient, should be at all affected with our conduct, either good or bad: it seems to be improper to say, that he can be pleased or displeased with our actions, or that he hath any interest at stake. Nothing, to be sure, can be more weak and impotent, than the injuries offered, or the assaults made upon him by created beings. As his nature is without variableness or sha

D

* Philip. iii. 8.

dow of turning, so his happiness is such, as can neither be increased nor impaired. And yet, in this way, he himself hath taught us to conceive of the matter, that holiness is not only an imitation of his character, but obedience to his will ; and its contrary a transgression of his law. These have been the sentiments of all nations without exception ; and, after the utmost efforts we can make to exempt him in our minds from all human passions or affections, of joy, anger, or displeasure, we cannot help considering it still as proper to say, such a course of life is agreeable, and such another is displeasing to God, and will provoke his wrath.

Is not gratitude then a principle of action that will be powerful and operative ? Mankind in general bear witness to this as they have agreed in all ages ; to brand ingratitude with the blackest mark of infamy, and to reckon it among the most atrocious of crimes. And indeed we find by experience, that it is comparatively stronger, for the most part, than the opposite motives of force or fear. There is a sort of natural tendency in man to resist violence, and refuse submission to authority, whilst they may be won by favours, and melted to thankfulness and gratitude by kindness and love : at least, this will apply perfectly to the present case, where the bare outward performance, (which may indeed be the effect of fear) will not be accepted without the inclination of the will. A slavish dread both lessens the degree, and debases the nature of that obedience we might essay to perform.

This is an universal principle; and, in particular, while the law of God stands in its force and rigour, as a covenant of works, threatening death without hope of mercy, against every transgression, it begets a despondent sloth, and, at best, serves only to discover our sin and misery; nay, as the apostle *Paul* strongly and justly reasons, it renders our corrupt affections more inflamed and violent by restraint; * *Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law; for I had known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet, &c.*

But let us now compleat this argument, by shewing, that a believer in Christ is under the strongest obligations, from gratitude, to do the will of God: and, how many considerations concur in shewing this? The unspeakable greatness of the blessings he receives, no less than deliverance from everlasting misery and anguish, and a right to everlasting glory and happiness.—The infinite and affecting condescension of the great and glorious Giver, who, in mercy to those who could not profit him at all, but, on the contrary, had highly provoked him, laid help for them upon one who is mighty to save.—The astonishing mean employed in this design, viz. *God's not sparing even his own Son, but delivering him up for us all.* Well might the apostle *John* say *, *God SO loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life*—But, above all, the sense which he himself hath of his mis-

D 2

* Rom. vii. 7.

† John iii. 16.

ry and wretchedness. Nothing can be more dreadful than the apprehensions which a convinced sinner hath of his own state: what, and how strong then must his sense of gratitude be, to him who hath given his Son, and him who was given himself, for the purchase of his pardon? with what earnestness will he seek after, and with what cheerfulness will he embrace, every opportunity of testifying his thankfulness? will not the name of his Redeemer be precious, *even as ointment poured forth*; his laws delightful to him, and his honour dear?

It is proper to observe here, that the single view of the blessings of divine goodness, which must have the strongest influence in leading us to a grateful resentment of them, is intirely peculiar to such as expect justification thro' the imputed righteousness of Christ; *viz.* their being of free, unmerited grace and mercy. For, tho' there are other classes of Christians who pretend to disclaim the belief of any merit in man, it would be no difficult matter to shew, that there are none who do not, by their professed principles, or their usual language, suppose it, excepting those described in the beginning of this discourse. And such not only believe his mercy to be unmerited, but that they have justly deserved his wrath and indignation, nay, and that they continually do so, even in their best state; their purest and holiest actions having such sins attending them, or such a mixture and alloy of unholiness and impurity in them, as, if they were

weighed in the exact balance of justice, would be sufficient to procure their total rejection.

In how strong a light is this represented by the sacred writers ; and how powerful does its operation appear to be upon themselves ? They seem penetrated and possessed with a sense of the love of Christ, and of God in him, as having sinners for its object. Thus the apostle *Paul* reasons ; *For scarcely for a righteous man will one die, yet, peradventure, for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us* *. And again, *If when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son* †.—What a sense of the love of Christ is discovered by the two following passages of the same apostle ! *That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith ; that ye being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth and length, and depth, and height ; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge* ‡. The other is, *If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha* § ; than which nothing could more strongly express his own sense of the obligation. It deserves notice also, that the inspired writers do often represent it as one of the strongest arguments against sin, that it is a reproach and dishonour brought upon our Redeemer and Lord, *For many walk, of*

* Rom v. 7, 8. † Rom. v. 10. ‡ Eph. iii. 17, 18, 19.
§ 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

*whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ *. Seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame †.*

I must again upon this, as upon a former branch of the subject, observe, That, no doubt, such arguments as these, will have little or no effect upon those who have but an imperfect belief of them, which, it is to be feared, is the case with not a few who go under the name of Christian. But, is it not very evident, that they must have the strongest imaginable influence upon all such as are acted by a lively faith in the doctrine of redemption? They must see themselves indebted to the undeserved mercy and love of God for favours of infinite value; and therefore must certainly endeavour to express their gratitude by an intire consecration of their lives to their benefactor's service.

This leads me to observe in the 6th and last place, That those who expect justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ, must be possess'd of a supreme or superlative love to God, which is not only the source and principle, but the very sum and substance, nay, the perfection of holiness. That those who believe in and hope to be accepted, and finally saved, thro' the imputed righteousness of Christ, must be possessed of a supreme love to God, appears from what hath been already said upon the subject of gratitude. Love is

* Philip. iii. 18. † Heb. vi. 6.

the most powerful mean of begetting love. Thus says the apostle *John*, *We have known and believed the love that God hath unto us ; God is love**. And a little after, *We love him, because he first loved us ‡*. The infinite and unspeakable mercies which he hath bestowed on us, with all the circumstances attending them, the means and manner of their conveyance, which have been hinted at above, must necessarily excite the most ardent love in return, and every proper expression of it. This is their immediate and natural, nay, this is their necessary and unavoidable effect. *For the love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead ; and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again †*.

If any shall think proper to assert, That favours bestowed are not to be considered as the true and formal causes of love, but the excellence and amiable qualities of the object. Thus, for example, supposing any person of a character justly hateful in itself, from caprice, self-interest, or any other sinister motive, to bestow many signal favours upon another, the beneficiary might receive, and delight in the favours, without esteeming, nay, even when he could not esteem, the giver. If this is considered as an objection against what I have just now said, and the conclusiveness of the argument to be founded upon it ; I offer the two

* 1 John iv. 16.

‡ 1 John iv. 19.

† 2 Cor. v. 14.

following answers to it. 1st, That in the account given in scripture of the redemption of the world by the substitution of a Saviour, and the justification of sinners by the imputed righteousness of Christ, there is the brightest display of all the divine perfections. The almighty power, the unsearchable wisdom, the boundless goodness, the inflexible justice, and inviolable truth of God, shine in this great design, with united splendour. Every attribute, that can in reason claim our veneration and esteem, as well as our thankfulness and gratitude, is here to be seen. Even these perfections of justice and mercy (which I will not call jarring attributes, as some too harshly do, but) which seem to restrain and limit each other in their exercise, are jointly illustrated, and shine more brightly by their union, than they could have done separately; and, at the same time, the purity and holiness of the Divine Nature, which is the sum of them all, is deeply impressed upon the mind. So that here is every thing that can produce love; worth, and excellence to merit it, love and kindness to excite and raise it. From this it evidently appears, that he who believes in the imputed righteousness of Christ, must have a superlative love of God.

But 2dly, Lest it should be said, that many have not this view of the doctrine in question, as honourable to God, and representing him in an amiable light, but the contrary; I observe, that there must have been a discovery of the glory of God, as shining in this plan of salvation, to all who cordially embrace it. Nothing

else could induce them to do so. If its enemies do not see this, and therefore set themselves against it; this confirms the different and honourable sentiments entertained by its friends: so that even supposing (what we will never grant) that this view of the amiableness of the Divine Nature, as represented in the gospel, were not well founded; yet, doubtless it is the view of those who *count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ **, and glory in nothing but *his cross*.

The truth is, notwithstanding any cavilling objections that may be raised against it, many favours received by one to whom they are absolutely necessary, and by whom they are infinitely prized, must naturally and necessarily produce love. This will be reckoned a first principle, by every unprejudiced mind; and it is always supposed in the holy scriptures, where the saints are represented as under the habitual and powerful impression of love to God, for his love to them manifested in their redemption. Thus says the apostle *Paul, For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Now, is there any thing more necessary to show, that those who believe and trust in the imputed right-

teousness of Christ must be holy in their lives, than their being under the influence of a supreme love to God? Is not this the first and great commandment of the law, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind* †? Is not this a never-failing source of universal obedience? as they love God, will they not love their brethren also: the very worst of men, because they are the creatures of God; and the righteous more especially, because they are his saints, his chosen ones? can they love God supremely, and yet voluntarily displease him, breaking his commandments, or resisting his designs? We know that love hath a quite different effect, in every other and inferior instance, endearing to us every thing related to the person who possesses our esteem and affection: how then can it be supposed so preposterous in this single case, when it is fixed on the greatest, and the best of objects?

It is a received maxim, That there can be no true love, where there is not some likeness and conformity of nature and disposition to the object beloved, and an endeavour after more. And this is a maxim that will in no case hold more infallibly, than in moral subjects. It is impossible that we can love purity, if ourselves are impure; nay, it is even impossible that we can understand it. Tho' an unholy person may have a very penetrating genius and capacity, may think

† Matth. xxii. 37:

acutely, and perhaps reason justly upon many, or most of the natural attributes of God, he can neither perceive nor admire his moral excellence. Instead of perceiving the glory of God as infinitely holy, he hates, and sets himself to oppose this part of his character, or to substitute something quite different in its room *. Or, if we can suppose him able, or from any particular reason inclined, to tell the truth, as to what God is, he can never discern or feel his glory and beauty in being such. For why, he himself is unholy, that is to say, in other words, he supremely loves, and hath his affections habitually fixed upon something that is not God, something that is contrary to God's nature, and a breach of his law.

Let us continue to reflect a few moments upon this subject, which is of great importance, varying a little the light in which it is viewed. Let us consider what is meant by a supreme and superlative love to God. These words must have a meaning. It is not a su-

* This is the true reason why many so warmly oppose God's vindictive justice, and that in the face of divers awful examples of it, even in the present partial and imperfect dispensation. That there are many marks of God's displeasure against sin, even in that part of his government which is at present subjected to our view, and also distinct warnings of a stricter reckoning to come, I should think, might be, to an impartial person, past all doubt: and yet, this is derided and denied by many, merely because they can never think that a perfection in the Divine Nature, for which they have no love or esteem in their own hearts. All who love God, then, must be like him; and even those who will not be what he really is, are always strongly inclined, at least, to suppose him what they themselves are.

preme love of a certain nature, or person, called God, whom no man hath seen, and of whom we know no more but the name. In this case the old maxim would hold, *Ignoti nulla cupido*; there can be no affection, of either love or hatred, towards an object wholly unknown. A supreme love of God therefore, where it really hath place in any heart, must mean the love of a character in some measure understood, tho' not fully comprehended. In short, according to the scriptures, it is a supreme love of the source and pattern of moral excellence, of a Being of infinite holiness and purity, with whom *evil cannot dwell*. Is not this, in truth and reality, the love of holiness itself, the supreme love of it? Can we love holiness then, and not aspire after it? can we love it, and not endeavour to practise it? nay, can we love it, and not possess it? can we love holiness supremely, and live in sin habitually? it is the grossest contradiction, the most absolute impossibility. There is then a diametrical opposition between the love of God, and the service of sin. To suppose them consistent, would be supposing, that the tendency of the heart and affections might be opposite to the course of the life, or supremely fixed upon two things mutually destructive of each other, contrary to which our Saviour justly affirms, *That no man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon* *.

• Matth. vi. 24.

Once more, Is not the love of God, I mean, the supreme love of God, precisely what is meant by holiness? It is not only an evidence of it, not only a source of it, not only an important branch, but the sum and perfection of it. For what is sin in the heart, of which all evil actions are but the fruits and expressions, and from which they derive their malignity and contrariety to the divine will? is it not the love and pursuit of inferior objects on their own account, and giving them that place in our affections, which is due only to God? All sins, of whatever kind, may be easily reduced to this, and shown to be nothing else, but the alienation and estrangement of our heart and affections from God, to whom alone they are due, which, in so far as it prevails, necessarily occasions a misapplication of every faculty of our minds, and of every member of our bodies, and thus a rebellion of the whole man. But whoever loves God above all, and places his chief happiness and delight in him, is truly holy; not only will be so, as the effect, but really is so, by the possession of this disposition. In proportion as this love is increased and strengthened, his sanctification is carried on; and when it is complete and triumphant, entirely free from the mixture of any baser passion, he is perfect in holiness.

It may probably occur to some readers, that this reasoning will not accord with the accounts given by many moderns of the nature and foundation of virtue. Some found it upon the present prevailing tendency of our own dispositions, and make it point directly and

immediately at our own happiness ; others found it upon our connexions with our fellow-creatures in this state, and make it consist in benevolence of heart, and beneficence in action ; others again, who approach nearer the truth, but without precision, stile it an acting towards every object, according to reason, and the nature of things. Upon any of these schemes, the connexion, or rather coincidence, above-alledged, between the love of God, and virtue, or moral excellence, does not so clearly appear. This indeed seems to me the great defect of these accounts of the nature and foundation of virtue, that they keep our relation and obligations to God at a distance at least, and much out of view. But as this is the first commandment of the law which God hath revealed to man for his obedience, *Thou shalt love the Lord with all thy heart, with all thy strength, and with all thy mind* ; so, upon a fair and just examination, the supreme love of God will be found the most consistent and rational account of the nature of virtue, and the true source from which all other virtues, that are not spurious, must take their rise, and from which they derive their force and obligation : it is founded not only upon the relation of creatures to their Creator, but upon the inherent excellence of the Divine Nature. For supposing (what will scarcely be denied) that God may be at all the object of our esteem and love, it is plain, that we ought to have the highest esteem for the highest excellence, a supreme love for what is infinitely amiable ; and if our affections do in any measure prefer what is less to what is more worthy, they must be, in that proportion, wrong and misplaced.

As to some of the phrases (for they are no more) which come into repute together, or in succession one after another, to express the rise and foundation of virtue, such as a sense of beauty, of harmony, of order and proportion: this is no explication of the matter at all; it is only transferring the language used with respect to sensible objects, to ethics or morality, in which it must be understood figuratively. That there is some analogy between those subjects and morality, may be easily confessed; but there are few different subjects in nature, between which as strong, or a stronger, analogy may not be traced. For example, how easy would it be to reduce all notions of morality, nay indeed all notions of beauty in painting, or harmony in music, to truth and reality, in opposition to falsehood? *Wollaston's Religion of Nature Delineated* is an example of this, in which he resolves the morality, or immorality, of every action, into the truth or falsehood of a proposition. And, whoever reads the book will, I dare say, be sensible, that it is just as natural and proper, as a certain noble author's rhapsodies upon beauty and harmony. In short, it were easy to shew, that none of the accounts given of the nature of virtue, have any meaning, truth or force in them, but in so far as they are founded upon, or coincident with, that which I have above given from the word of God †.

E 2

† There is one late writer *David Hume, Esq;* who, it must be confessed, hath excelled all that went before him in an extraordinary account of the nature of virtue. I have taken no notice above of his principles, if they may be called so, because I think both him and them worthy of the highest contempt;

boasted wisdom of men ; or in the words of the apostle, *That no flesh should glory in his presence.* The reception then which this doctrine usually meets with, should be so far from remaining as a prejudice or objection against its truth or utility, that, on the contrary, it should contribute to satisfy us, that it is the real and genuine doctrine of Christ, since it meets with the same sort of opposition, and from the same quarter, with which this was encountered at its first publication.

And indeed, besides this exact correspondence between the event, and what the scripture gives us reason to expect, as to the reception of the gospel in the world, I apprehend it ought to be a general prejudice in favour of its truth, considering the original it claims, that it doth not carry on it any of the marks of human wisdom. It seems to ly (if I may so speak) quite out of the way of human imagination and contrivance, and is diametrically opposite, in its whole tendency, to the most prevailing human inclination, *viz.* self-esteem, pride, and vain-glory. This indeed is the true reason why this doctrine is so unacceptable to the world, especially the ambitious part of it, that it is directly levelled against their corrupt affections. It gives a view of the holiness, purity, and justice of God, which is intolerable to all those who are not willing to break their league with sin and vanity. And when it is truly complied with, it not only divorces men from their

former attachment to sin and sensuality, but will not suffer them to glory, even in their new character. All who submit unfeignedly to the gospel, both feel and confess themselves wholly indebted for forgiveness and acceptance, for their present holiness and their future happiness, to the free, unmerited grace of God. How hard such a sacrifice is, none can conceive who have not some acquaintance with vital, experimental religion. Now, what is the most natural inference from this? Is it not, that we have not the smallest reason to suspect this doctrine to be a *cunningly devised fable*, but may rest assured, that it is *the wisdom and the power of God for salvation, to every one that believeth* *.

This leads me to observe, That if the reasoning which the reader hath perused upon this subject be just and conclusive, there is one circumstance in which this *doctrine according to godliness* essentially differs from all other schemes or systems of morality. It is, that any of these systems a man may understand, embrace and defend, without having his heart made better, or his morals secured or improved by it at all; whereas it is impossible, that any man can really, and from the heart, embrace the doctrine of Christ's imputed righteousness, without being sanctified by it, *dead to sin, and alive to God*. That the first of these assertions is true, the lives and characters of

E 2.

*-Rom. i. 16.

Some noted writers on the foundation of morality, have been, and are an undeniable proof: some of them do indeed expressly yield it; and it is evidently yielded, by implication, in all the late writings, where there is so frequent mention of the small influence that speculation has upon practice. On this is founded what a late acute and eminent writer † justly calls the master prejudice of this age, *viz.* “The innocence of error.” This may as well be expressed by its counterpart, the unprofitableness or inefficacy of truth, which surely ought to be but a weak recommendation of what is called truth by those who hold such an opinion.

That the other assertion is just, hath been the point undertaken to be made out in this essay: and whoever will but consider how unacceptable this doctrine is to mankind in general, may be satisfied that there can be no effectual inducement to embrace it, till there be such a discovery and sense of the evil and danger of sin, as is utterly inconsistent with a voluntary continuance in it. The apparent state of the visible church, in which vice and wickedness so shamefully abound, will be no objection to this, if what I hinted above be recollected*, that there is a great difference between a nominal or customary profession, and real belief. As to the few more zealous and eminent asserters of this doctrine, who

† Mr Warburton.

* See page 52.

sometimes greatly dishonour their profession, the answer is easy. They are hypocrites by whom indeed great *offences do come*; and the weak and unstable fall over the stumbling-block, and are tempted to doubt the reality of religion, by this discovery of the fallhood of its professors. But such can never be fairly ranked among believers, whose garb and habit they only treacherously wore, for some time, while they were in the interest of another master †. We

† Perhaps some may think the late accounts published of the *Moravians* an objection to the justness of this representation. They are said to be great asserters of the doctrine of imputed righteousness; and yet there have not only appeared some bad men among them, but they are universally charged as a sect with most impious and scandalous practices. Perhaps candour and charity might have led us to suppose, that most, or all of these accusations, were calumnious, if they had been affirmed by none but avowed enemies to the doctrines which they espouse; as the first Christians were charged by their enemies with eating human sacrifices, when they met in private to celebrate the Lord's Supper. But the case it seems is otherwise here; for some unsuspected accusers have appeared, whom none can imagine prejudiced against them for embracing the doctrine of imputed righteousness. I confess myself to have so little acquaintance with those *Herrn-hutters*, as they are called, either as to their principles or practices, that I cannot very fully handle the subject; but, if there is no other objection to what is affirmed above, no doubt an acquaintance with the true state of the case would enable us easily to remove this. Perhaps, after all, the bad practices charged against them, may be only the consequence of some designing persons getting in among them, and a great plurality may be innocent, or, at least, comparatively so. But however this be, it is not certain (at least to me) that

may say of them as the apostle *John* says, *They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us, but they went out that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us**.

But this is not all; for the reception of the doctrine of imputed righteousness is not merely to be considered as the best mean, comparatively, of producing, preserving and increasing our sanctification and purity, as sure and effectual, while others are precarious, but it is the only way, and all others are absolutely insufficient for the purpose. If this be indeed the doctrine of Christ, the scripture-method of salvation, then it is not only true, but a fundamental truth. Of this we are frequently and solemnly assured in the word of God. *I am the way*, (says our Saviour) *and the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me* †. So say the apostles *Peter* and *John*, *Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved* ‡. It is

they really embrace the same doctrine with us: They do indeed talk much of the Lamb, speak of hiding themselves in his wounds, &c. but I think their language is peculiar to themselves, and by no means the phraseology either of scripture, or of any other sect of Christians. Besides, as Count *Zinzendorf*, their leader, takes upon him to be a prophet, it is probable, they are just a set of deluded people, drawn away by his art, who may much more properly be said to believe in him, than in Christ.

* 1 John ii. 19. † John xiv. 6. ‡ Acts iv. 12.

therefore in vain for any to expect an effectual change of life, but by an acquaintance with Christ, and him crucified. We have indeed the clearest evidence from experience, that no human reason, no argument whatever, drawn from world'y conveniency, is at all sufficient to contend with violent and sinful habits. We see many examples of persons of excellent understanding and knowledge in other matters, nay, who can reason strongly and justly upon the bad consequences of vice in others, sometimes even in themselves, who will yet go on to ruin their name, family, fortune and health, while they are slaves to evil habits : nothing will change them but the grace of God.

And as we have seen above, that our own righteousness in its best state is wholly ineffectual for our acceptance with God, so all who have any expectations of this kind from it plainly show, that they have such defective views of the extent and obligation of the divine law, as are inconsistent with an unfeigned universal submission to it. This is a matter of the last importance, and ought to be particularly recommended to the serious consideration of such as may have, at some times, some imperfect convictions ; such as from a weariness and satiety of sinning may give a temporary preference to a life of religion, and raise a feeble ineffectual wish with *Balaam*, that they might *die the death of the righteous*. Such ought to be told that no endeavours to be a little better than before, no abstinence from some sins as a kind of atonement for others retained, no resolu-

tions taken on in their own strength, no righteousness of their own offered or trusted in as the matter of their justification, will be accepted, or is worthy of being so; that nothing will be truly effectual, till they see their lost condition, and believe in Christ, first for pardon, and then for sanctification, *to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved**. If they have any other plea, any other ground of hope and trust, it shall undoubtedly fail them; they must remain under a sentence of just and legal condemnation, and shall finally perish; for *he that believeth in the Son hath everlasting life; but he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him*, John iii. 36. †

* Eph. i. 6.

† The application of these passages of scripture, to the particular principles above maintained, will, perhaps, be thought to include in it a very severe and uncharitable condemnation of many Christians, who differ in judgment upon the point of justification. And indeed I pretend no great friendship to the sentiments so frequently expressed of late, "That it is a small matter what a man believes, if his life be good." The assertion might perhaps be allowed, if it did not contain a foolish and unreasonable supposition, that a man may believe wrong, and yet have as good a life as he that believes right; the contrary to which will always be expected by him who gives credit to the word of God, that his people are *sanctified through the truth*. As to *Socinians* and *Pelagians*, who are the greatest opposers of the truths above defended, I never did esteem them to be Christians at all; so the consequence, with regard to them, may be easily admitted. But it will be thought hard to say the same thing of the *Arminians*. However, if the righteousness of Christ is the only ground of our justification, and the reception of him in this

I am naturally led to conclude this subject, by observing, that the importance, efficacy and necessity of the imputed righteousness of Christ, shews how much it is the duty of all ministers of the gospel, to make it the main and leading theme of their sermons. The preaching of the gospel is by the apostle *Paul*, in a very just and expressive manner, stiled, preaching *the unsearchable riches of Christ*. In him every prophecy, precept, promise and truth is centered. His character and work as a Saviour is held forth in a variety of lights in the sacred oracles, and in every opening or view that is given us, so to speak, of the dispensations of divine providence and grace, he is the chief figure, or the termi-

F 3

character the true principle of sanctification, I do not see how we can avoid concluding the danger of those who act upon any other plan. And yet I am persuaded there have been, and are many good men among them : which may be accounted for in this manner, that their hearts are better than their understandings; that they are habitually under the government of principles, which, thro' some mistaken views, and groundless fears of their abuse, they speak of more sparingly, or rather seem to establish the contrary positions. The proof of this assertion I take from their own writings, particularly from the difference between their sermons and other discourses, and those forms of prayer which they have drawn up, and not only recommended to others, but left behind them as a witness of their own exercise in their closets. If they be supposed to feel the sentiments which they express in their prayers, it can easily be made appear that these sentiments can only be dictated by the doctrine of free-grace. If what they say of themselves be true in its natural and obvious meaning, and if they believe it, which charity obliges us to suppose, it must be altogether vain to lay the least stress upon their own righteousness for their acceptance with God.

nation of the prospect. If therefore we would know what esteem is due to our Redeemer in our hearts, and how high a place he ought to hold in our views of religion, let us observe the regard paid to him by the sacred writers. They derive almost all their motives to every moral duty, from what he hath done, and is still doing for us, and seem to delight even in the repetition of his name. I am persuaded those who are accustomed to the devout and serious perusal of the word of God, will not reckon it *enthusiasm*, when I say, that these writers appear to be warmed and elevated above their ordinary measure, when they celebrate his salvation; and that both in the old and new testament, wherever we meet with any passage singularly lofty and sublime, there we may be sure that Christ the Redeemer is the immediate theme.

Justification by the free grace of God, thro' the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, was the doctrine taught among Christians, in the earliest and purest ages of the church. And their departure from it was the prelude to that universal corruption of faith and worship, and that relaxation of discipline, and dissolution of manners, which took place in the ages following. It is also very remarkable, that this doctrine was always fully and distinctly taught in these churches which never submitted to the tyranny, or received the corruptions of the *Romanish* Antichrist, I mean the churches of the *Piedmontese* vallies, which, by so many judicious writers, are supposed to be the two witnesses mentioned in the *Re-*

velation, who fled into the wilderness from the persecution of the Beast, and prophesied in sackcloth. The accounts which have been transmitted to us of the principles held by them, long before the reformation, plainly show, that they maintained this doctrine from the beginning. And as it is well known that the reformation took its first rise from the gross and scandalous application of the doctrine of merit in indulgencies, so all the reformers, without exception, were strenuous asserters of free grace. This was reckoned by them *articulus stantis aut cadentis ecclesiae*, by which the church must stand or fall. Particularly, our reformers in both parts of this island agreed in preaching the same doctrine, and the eminent piety of our fathers is a standing evidence of its force and efficacy.

It doth not perhaps become, and probably it would not be safe for me to enter into a particular examination of the manner of preaching in the present age; and therefore my reflexions upon that subject shall be very few and general. What is most obvious in our present situation, and what ought to affect Christians with most concern, is, the great prevalence of infidelity. This is the more surprising, that we have never wanted, and do not at present want, many able and eminent writers to stand up in defence of the gospel, and refute the changeable inconsistent reasonings of infidels, whatever form they shall, from time to time, think fit to assume, and on whatever principles they shall pretend to build. But, I am afraid, the best de-

fence of all is but too much neglected, *viz.* Zealous assiduous preaching the great and fundamental truths of the gospel, the lost condemned state of man by nature, and the necessity of pardon thro' the righteousness, and renovation by the Spirit, of Christ. This would make a far greater number of those who call themselves by the name of Christ, Christians indeed. And the visible efficacy of his doctrine would be a sensible demonstration of its truth and divine original. If these truths are not contradicted, it may be safely said, that they are by many kept more out of view than formerly. And surely we have no great cause to boast of our improvements in the preaching art, if its goodness is to be determined, like that of a tree, not by its blossoms, but its fruit.

There is one observation which may satisfy us, that the preaching of the cross of Christ will most effectually promote real reformation. It is, that those preachers who, (to say no more) approach nearest to making our own merit and obedience the ground of our acceptance with God, very seldom, if ever, give any alarm to the consciences of their hearers. Let them recommend ever so pure and high a standard of morals, they are heard without fear, and, if they preach elegantly, with pleasure, even by the most profligate. To such preachers, all vain, worldly-minded people, usually attach themselves, where they have not cast off the very form of religion; but most part of serious Christians, together with professing hypocrites, who can-

not easily be distinguished in this world, always follow preachers of another strain. It is easy to see the reason of this from what hath been said above ; there are none who set the strictness and obligation of the law, the holiness and justice of God, in so awful a light, as those who believe there is no shelter from the sanction of the law, and the wrath of an offended God, but in the blood of Christ. Perhaps, I am already ensnared and exposed to censure, by affirming, that there are among us preachers of different strains. But it is so certain a truth, that I cannot deny it ; and so important, that I will not disguise it.

Upon the whole, as the present aspect of public affairs, as the state of the world, and character of the age, loudly call upon all of every station to exert themselves with diligence for the support and revival of truth and righteousness : I hope the ministers of the gospel will promote this end, by zealously labouring to bring men to the saving knowledge of Christ, *the way, and the truth, and the life*.—*The foundation—the tried stone—the precious corner stone*, the strength and security of the building. To deny, explain away, or neglect to impart the truths of the everlasting gospel, is the way to leave the world in wickedness ; but, by preaching them in purity, and with simplicity, which, we have reason to think, will be accompanied with *the demonstration of the Spirit*, sinners are reconciled unto God, the power of sin is broken in them, the divine image is formed in them, and upon these

truths their hope of eternal life must rest and depend. Let us be ever ready to say with the apostle *Paul*, *God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ* *. And let us quicken our diligence, and animate our endeavours, by expressing, with the psalmist *David*, our faith in the perpetuity of his kingdom. *His name shall endure for ever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in him; all nations shall call him blessed. Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doth wondrous things. And blessed be his glorious name for ever; and let the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen and Amen* †.

* Gal. vi. 14.

† Psal. lxxii. 17, 18, 19.

F I N I S

