

Timothy East

The Forgiveness of Sin



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The Forgiveness of Sin

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The Forgiveness of Sin

*And the Possibility of Attaining a
Personal Assurance of It*

By Rev. Timothy East

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Preface by Lutheran Librarian

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Preface.

IF THE READER wishes to know, why the author has composed this work, and given publicity to it, he is prepared to assign two reasons.

First; he has been requested to do it; and the request originally urged by an intelligent and much esteemed friend, has been urged by many who have accidentally heard that he was thinking about doing it.

Second; though his knowledge of books is rather extensive, yet he does not know one, which treats the subject he has brought under the consideration of the reader, in a concise and popular form; — adapted to the divers modes of thinking prevalent amongst the different orders of Christian professors.

The celebrated Dr. Owen, in his exposition of 130th Psalm, goes very deeply into the subject of divine forgiveness; and occasionally brings out truth with a simplicity and force of statement which is calculated “to relieve the perplexities of exercised Christians;” but he is so prolix, and often so involved, that the reading of it is generally felt to be painfully wearisome. Other authors of more recent date, are in his opinion, too technical; too elaborate, and too diffuse; and have too much of a controversial spirit pervading their treatises, to secure that fixedness of attention, and to excite that calm, yet intense interest, which a reader delights to feel, when reading for his spiritual and eternal welfare. Whether he has avoided the evils he condemns, and has produced such a work, as the taste, and moral state of the times require, are questions which he leaves to the judgment and decision of his readers.

What he has written, he has written to produce a practical effect; and if the reading of it should prove the means of disturbing the false peace of the criminally indifferent, or of imparting consolation to the conscientiously fearful, or of exciting to higher degrees of gratitude the comparatively few, who know that they are safe for eternity, the prime object of his toils and

solicitudes will be accomplished; and then, in either case, should a knowledge of it ever reach him, his tributary offering shall be presented to **Him**, who alone can give success to the labors of his servants, and to whom be glory for ever.

Introduction.

THAT MAN IS A SINNER, liable to present and future punishment, is a fact which no one will dispute, who bows to the authority of revelation. Assuming this as an indisputable fact, there are several momentous questions arising out of it, which demand our prompt and serious attention. Can his sins be forgiven without an act of trespass being committed on the sanctity of the divine government? Or, in other words, can mercy be extended to him in harmony with the claims of justice?

In immediate connection with this momentous question, stands another of paramount importance to his present happiness. Assuming that his sins can be forgiven without any compromise of the honor of the divine government, is it possible for him, while an inhabitant of earth, to "obtain a knowledge that his sins are actually forgiven; and that he may consequently consider his final salvation absolutely certain? On this question there is a wide difference of opinion. Some believe that the attainment of this knowledge is not only possible; but they consider it the duty, as well as the privilege of every one to seek after it, who believes in Christ; through whose death and mediation the forgiveness of sins is bestowed, without any reference to past merit or future compensation.

Some believe that the attainment of this knowledge is possible by men of preeminent piety and devotedness to God, but that it is not attainable by themselves. The consequence of this is, they live in envy of the attainments of others — in spiritual bondage; in a state of great mental privation; and though hope sometimes sheds a feeble light over the darkness of despondency, yet the way of peace they know not; they are in perpetual fear of perishing — of being cast away with the wicked.

Others believe the attainment of this knowledge absolutely impossible, even by the most devout. Indeed they do not hesitate to condemn as presumptuous, any effort to attain it; nor do they hesitate to bring the charge

of fanatical delusion against anyone who ventures to speak of having attained it. The consequence of this is, they live not only in a state of uncertainty on the question of the forgiveness of their sins, but in a state of comparative indifference. They feel it to be utterly useless to make even the most strenuous efforts to attain, what they systematically believe is unattainable by any human being. They yield assent to the divine origin of the Christian faith; attend its public services; have some sort of family and personal religion; and pay attention to the cultivation of the social virtues, but never feeling the pressure of guilt, and never powerfully awed by the terrors of the world to come, they live in ease, though not in what they deem a condition of absolute security. In fact, they dismiss from their solitudes, amidst the claims of this life, the great questions which relate to the remission of their sins, and their eternal salvation.

It is the design of the author, in the following treatise, not only to raise, but to attempt to settle the various questions to which he has now referred the attention of the reader in these introductory remarks: to stimulate those to prosecute the inquiry with greater diligence, who deem the attainment of this important branch of knowledge possible; and especially to show, that the charge of fanatical delusion which is brought with such an air of magisterial decision against those who profess to have attained it, cannot be sustained by any decisive authority, nor by any process of valid reasoning. How far he has succeeded in executing his design, must be left to the impartial judgment of the intelligent reader; but of one thing he is certain, that if it be impossible to know that our sins are forgiven, we should act a more consistent part, to go through life clad in the deepest mourning, and giving utterance to the most doleful cries of grief and bitter lamentation: than to live in ease, devoting ourselves to the gratification of our senses and our tastes; leaving the final decisions of the last dread day, without any degree of intense solicitude, whether they relate to a condition of changeless blessedness, or interminable misery.

In conclusion, he has one request to make of the reader, and then he shall leave the issue, under the guidance and benediction of Him, whose province it is to have compassion on them that are out of the way; and that request is — before you read another sentence, bow the knee before the throne of grace, and devoutly pray in the name of Christ, that the reading of the

ensuing chapters may promote your present happiness, and make you more earnest on the question of your eternal salvation.

Chapter 1. The Believer's Salvation Absolutely Certain.

The Theory of Redemption defective, unless provision be made to convey to believers in Christ, a Knowledge that their Sins are Forgiven, and that their Salvation is Absolutely Certain.

1. The Authority of God's Word.

We know, on the authority of the word of God, that the sins of believers can be forgiven, without affording them the least encouragement for the commission of renewed offenses; and that they can be saved, without impairing, in the slightest degree, the honor of the divine government. The Lord our God has created a great variety of intelligent and accountable beings, who are placed under the dominion of a law which is holy, wise, and good. Their duty to Him and to each other, is clearly defined, and is enforced by a heavy penal sanction. Hence no one can disobey or transgress, without incurring the penalty attached to the offense. Some of the angels rebelled against His authority, and as no Mediator appeared in their behalf, they “are reserved in everlasting chains under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day.” Man also has fallen under the curse of a violated law, but happily the voice of mercy is heard speaking from the celestial glory, and saying, “deliver him from going down into the pit, I have found a ransom.”

The Son of God, uniting the spotless excellencies of perfect humanity, with the incommunicable perfections of divinity, made his appearance in the likeness of man; and sustains the complex character of a Priest and a Mediator, basing the merit of his mediation on the perfection of his obedience to the precepts of the divine law, and on the infinite worth of his

voluntary and vicarious death. It is not necessary that I should adduce any arguments to prove the absolute necessity of such an intervention in our behalf, as that which the obedience and death of Jesus Christ disclose; nor is it necessary that I should notice any of the objections which infidelity may advance against it, but simply prove: —

[1] That Jesus Christ, by suffering the just for the unjust, thus giving his life a ransom for sinners, secures the honor of the divine government from all liability to impeachment, when the supreme Legislator chooses to exercise mercy in forgiving them their sins. That he was in a condition to make an atonement for sin by his vicarious death, is, I think, evident from the following fact. He was not born under the law of mortality, and consequently he was not subjected to death. He had life in himself, he could retain it, lay it down, and take it again, by virtue of his own independent right and power of self-disposal. Hence when explaining the design of his mission and death, he stated that he came to give his life a ransom, and that he shed his blood for the remission of sins; and before his ascension, he commanded his Apostles to go and proclaim the forgiveness of sin in his name. In the epistles, which were written under the immediate inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we are told that he offered up himself as a sacrifice to God, that his blood cleanseth from all sin, that he was delivered up to the demands of justice for our offenses, and then raised for our justification. Hence, saith the Apostle, “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” 1 John 2:1, 2.

In the perfect obedience which he rendered to all the precepts of the divine law, we see on his part a recognition of its immutability and authority; and in his sufferings and death we behold an impressive manifestation of the holiness and justice of the divine Legislator in executing on him the penal sentence. The claims of justice being thus enforced, conceded, and honorably discharged, God appears just, or righteous, while exercising mercy; — just in demanding the perfect obedience and vicarious death of our Mediator; and merciful in freely forgiving the sins of penitent sinners who believe, or trust in Christ. Hence, saith the Apostle, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:9.

[2] The exercise of mercy in freely forgiving the sins of believers, tends to uphold the honor of the divine government, by establishing the authority of its laws, and working in them a very high degree of practical righteousness. “Do we,” says the Apostle, “then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law,” Rom. 3:31. That is, do we, who expect the remission of our sins in consequence of our trusting in the death and mediation of Jesus Christ, to the entire exclusion of all personal attainments and doings, as the foundation of our faith and hope, set aside the authority of the law of God, which commands us to be holy, even as he is holy? No. We rather establish the authority of the law by the very act of trusting in Christ; and by which act we claim an exemption from its condemnatory sentence. But how so?

In the first place, our faith in Christ recognizes the immutable authority of the law, in the perfect obedience which he rendered to all its precepts, when engaged in bringing in an everlasting righteousness for our justification; and it also recognizes the immutability of divine justice, in demanding his vicarious death, before mercy ascended the throne of grace to forgive us our sins.

In the second place, the convicting power of the law, which leads sinners to repentance, and to the act of trusting in Christ for salvation, does two things: It constrains the penitent sinner to mourn over his acts of transgression and disobedience; and it also constrains him to admit the equity, as well as the authority of the law which he has broken. Whatever be the degree of mental suffering he may endure when he first feels a sense of guilt and consequent condemnation — whether it be the anguish which tortures, or only the gentle emotions of sorrow that depress the heart, he readily admits the infliction to be equitable, because deserved. His confession is, “Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight; that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest,” Ps. 51:4. Thus his mental sufferings and his penitential confessions tend to establish the authority of the law, from whose condemnatory sentence he expects to be delivered in consequence of his trusting in Christ, who “is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth,” Rom. 10:4.

In the third place, the exercise of mercy in the free forgiveness of sins, produces such a sense of obligation to God, and such a sense of obligation

to the Mediator, who bore the sins of the redeemed in his own body on the tree, as constrains the pardoned sinner to render as perfect an obedience to all the precepts of the divine law, as he can render. It is true, owing to the evil tendencies of his heart, he never can arrive at a state of absolute perfection, but he struggles to attain it. He would be, but alas! he finds he cannot be, altogether perfect. The confession of the Apostle he adopts as his own:

“For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am I who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin,” Rom. 7:22-25.

To account for this steadfast recognition of the authority of the law of God, extending over thought, motive, speech, and action; and for this perpetual effort to obey its injunctions, even while living under a full assurance of being delivered from its condemnatory sentence, is comparatively easy. The pardoned sinner, is a sinner renewed in the spirit of his mind; the love of righteousness, supplants the love of sin; and though owing to the still remaining depravity of his heart, he may often both disobey and transgress, yet he cannot deliberately or willingly commit any sin, as a source of mental gratification. His daily prayer is, “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me,” Ps. 51:10. — “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting,” Ps. 139:23, 24. Hence the spontaneous homage of his soul to the authority of Jehovah: “I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart,” Ps. 40:8. Rom. 7:22; Ps. 119:113.

We thus see, that as a renovating power always accompanies the exercise of mercy, transforming the heart of the sinner who is freely forgiven; creating within him as strong a desire after conformity to God in righteousness and true holiness, as to be saved from the wrath to come; the authority of the law is established by the triumphs of grace, and obedience impelled by the influence of gratitude and love, becomes purer in its nature,

and more uniform in its developments, than it could be if enforced only by the terrors of justice. We thus see, that as no penal sanction is withdrawn, by the exercise of mercy, so no moral obligation to obedience is weakened. The precepts under the reign of grace are enforced by new and stronger motives, in consequence of the penalty being inflicted on our great Mediator; and the laws of the new covenant are transcribed from the tables of stone, and written on the fleshy tables of the heart, which is enlightened and animated by that new spirit which delights to walk in the statutes of the Lord, and keep his, judgments. Ezekiel 36:25-28; Heb. 8:8-12.

2. Why Wouldn't Salvation Be Made Absolutely Certain?

If no provision be made in the theory of redemption to let believers in Christ know that their sins are forgiven, and that their salvation is absolutely certain, it must be attributable to one of two reasons: — the God of mercy is either unwilling, or unable to let them know it. Shall we suppose that he is unwilling to do it? this would be an impeachment of his benevolence. Or shall we suppose that he is unable to do it? this would be fixing a limit to the exercise of his omnipotence. It would be saying, he may have power to pardon, and power to save, but he has no power to make known his gracious acts and intentions to the objects of his sovereign favor.

3. A Defective Theory of Redemption

I will now proceed to show wherein the theory of redemption is defective, if no provision be made to convey to believers in Christ a knowledge that their sins are forgiven, and that their salvation is certain.

[1] It is defective as a theory of consolation.

No pressure is so heavy and agonizing, as the pressure of guilt! No mental anguish is so acute and torturing, as the anguish of remorse! No apprehensions are so fearfully terrific, as the apprehensions of future and eternal woe! This state of excitement, varying in the degree of its intensity, often raises a whirlwind of commotion in the human mind, which is no less

difficult to describe, than to allay or control. What is felt, is felt to be an awful reality; not the dream of delirium. "What must I do to be saved?" is a question which is now proposed with terrific anxiety; as it is uttered on the wreck of mental happiness, the storm still raging, and no means of escape within the range of vision. The prayer of the publican is now felt to be the most appropriate prayer which can be uttered — "God be merciful to me a sinner." This concise, yet comprehensive prayer, is not the prayer of dull formality — the monotonous utterance of a mechanical devotion, — but the prayer of intense feeling; and on the issue, peace of mind, and the hope of deliverance from the wrath to come, are dependent.

But if no provision is made to convey to a penitent sinner a knowledge that his sins are forgiven, it would be, on his part, an act of folly, or of daring presumption, to expect an answer to his prayers; and the necessary consequence is, he would be compelled to live through life in a state of fearful uncertainty, as to the issue of his hopes and fears. In that case, he would turn his eye on the sublime theory of redemption, as Noah would have turned his eye on the ark, if the door of escape from the coming deluge had been shut against him, as the waters of destruction rose to cover the earth. He would then feel, and bitterly feel, that the theory of redemption, which makes ample provision for the vindication of the honor of the divine government, and which is admirably adapted to meet the peculiar exigencies of a guilty and perishing sinner, is defective in one essential ingredient of perfection, by making no provision to let him know that his sins are forgiven, and that he may indulge "the good hope through grace," of being sheltered from the dreaded storm of the divine displeasure.

[2] It is defective, as a restorative theory.

Its avowed design is to restore man to that state of moral relationship to God, with its appropriate dispositions and consequent feelings and expectations, in which he would have lived, if he had never fallen from his original condition of righteousness and true holiness. Hence, God in Christ is represented as reconciling the world to himself; and Jesus Christ is represented as subduing the enmity of our heart against God, and bringing us into a state of holy fellowship with him. By virtue of his mediation, based on the merit of his death, reconciliation is effected between the offended sovereign and his rebellious subjects; they are freely forgiven, are restored to his favor, and have the right of access to him in the exercise of

prayer and of praise: and he rules over them in righteousness and love. But if the whole of this wondrous process takes place and they know it not, can any practical effect, corresponding with its avowed design, be produced in them?

[2a] Can they love God? The apostle John, when assigning the cause of a sinner's love to God, states most emphatically, that if "we love him, it is because he first loved us." There must be a manifestation of his love, to enkindle our affection; and this manifestation must not be some general expression of benevolence extended over the entire family of man, becoming so attenuated by extension as to let fall no dew-drops of special favor on man individually; but it must be such a manifestation of love, as an offended child receives, when his father passes by his faults, and readmits him into the enjoyment of his paternal affection and confidence. Without this he could not love God, for a sinner, conscious of his having offended God and broken his holy law, can never be brought to love God, until he be convinced that God loves him. He may as soon love pain and torments, as love an offended God, whose a]mighty justice is to get itself glory in his destruction; but when he is, persuaded that God is reconciled to him, then he has with joy and delight received the word of reconciliation; for we love him, not abstractedly, or metaphysically, but experimentally, 'because he first loved us.' And when the Holy Spirit sheds abroad the love of God in our hearts, and reveals to them God's first loving us, then we see God in a new light. We look upon him as our reconciled Father, and in this character he appears altogether amiable and lovely...

The formalist is the first to cry out enthusiasm, if he hear that the love of God arises from the knowledge of our being reconciled to him in Christ. It is with him the very mark of this new religious madness for any man to say, that he loves God from a sense of his having freely forgiven him all trespasses... And yet the scripture is full of this enthusiasm, it has thus assigned the grounds and reasons of our love to God, 'We love him because he first loved us.' Here we are taught that our love to him arises from his first loving us; but how can we know he first loves us, unless he manifest it, and shed it abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost. And in this way he does manifest it. 'He sends his good Spirit into our hearts to let us know that he first loves us."¹

[2b] Can they trust in God?

Indeed, what confidence can a guilty sinner repose in God, if no provision be made in the theory of redemption, to let him know that God is reconciled to him and hath forgiven him? It is more natural for a sinner who feels his guilt, to dread the inflictions of justice, than to expect the exercise of mercy. We have a striking confirmation of this in Adam. When he knew himself to be a sinner, he immediately began to contrive how he could escape from the divine presence. 'And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself:' Gen. 3:10. Nothing but, Thou shalt die the death, sounded in his ears. In the morning of that day he was made by the hand of God; was admitted into his immediate presence, and held intimate and audible fellowship with him; why then doth nothing now but fear, flying, hiding, possess him? He had sinned; and the promise was not yet given; no revelation of forgiveness was yet made; and therefore he knew not what other course to adopt, than to attempt to hide himself amongst the trees of the garden."

Indeed, how can any sinner, who feels that he has offended God and incurred his displeasure, venture to trust in his mercy or compassion, if he can find no provision in the theory of redemption, which pledges the divine faithfulness to the exercise of these gracious affections towards him? Will he not be under a strong temptation to believe that " God hath forgotten to be gracious, and that he hath in anger shut up his tender mercies; "and thus, when shut up under the absolute dominion of mistrust, if not of despair, will he not bitterly deplore even the existence of a theory of redemption, which brings no tidings of redemption to him? Will he not turn away from such a theory, which develops a systematic adaptation to his hapless condition, with the same excited feelings, as agitate and exasperate the sensitive breast of the poor man when driven from the mansions of wealth, where he has been refused the crumbs which fall from the rich man's table?

[2c] Can they feel grateful to God?

Thankfulness for blessings received, is one of the principal duties that is incumbent on believers in this world; and it is also one of the most delightful exercises in which they can be engaged. I will suppose a case: a penitent sinner approaches the throne of grace, pours forth the grateful feelings of his heart for the temporal favors conferred on him, — for support under trials, or for deliverance from them; offering up his thanksgiving for the mission and death of Jesus Christ; but he can proceed

no further. He has slaked his thirst at the waters which flow from the nether spring of providential kindness, but he has never tasted, the sweeter and more exhilarating waters which gush from the upper spring of redeeming grace and pardoning mercy. He can offer up his oblation of gratitude for the good gifts of providence; but for the remission of sin, and the hope of eternal life, he can present no such oblation, because these blessings have not been bestowed upon him. His gratitude, like that of an unpardoned state prisoner, relates exclusively to food, and raiment, and a few comparatively unimportant comforts assigned to him, till the fatal day of his execution arrives. He may read the language of the Psalmist, but as it alludes to a state of blessedness of which he has no experience, it merely tends to aggravate the desolateness of his condition.

"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile. Ps. 32:l, 2.

As he reads the 103rd Psalm, his spirit sinks within him, and he closes his bible in deep despondency, exclaiming, "his mercy is gone for ever."

[2d] And with what feelings of heart can such a penitent sinner anticipate the eventful hour, when, in a disembodied state, he shall see God, and stand before his judgment-seat? Will he look forward to that hour with any other emotions, than those of agonizing uncertainty, or of appalling terror? Alas, his ceaseless soliloquy will be, "Woe is me!" — the unvarying utterance of unmitigated agony, "Woe is me! Woe is me! I am undone! I am lost; and lost for ever." The terror of his spirit will increase in the degrees of its violence, as the years of his life increase in their number; every new symptom of declining health will be regarded as the coming up of another messenger of woe; and when feeling conscious that the hour of his departure is at hand, like the condemned captive, who is undergoing the torturous process of being broken on the wheel of tyranny, every pulsation of his heart will be the beating and throbbing of a spirit anxious to escape from the horrors of one condition of unendurable misery, yet dreading the possibility of its issuing in a greater.

Now let a man who is thus systematically taught to believe that he cannot know that his sins are forgiven, till he hears the fact proclaimed by

the voice of the Lord, on his entering the eternal world, be brought into contact with some eminently pious believer who has tasted that the Lord is gracious, and who can adopt the triumphant language of the Apostle:

“I know in whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day,”
2 Tim. 1:12.

What precise impressions will his communications produce? I will suppose that he knows this believer to be a man of sterling integrity of principle; of sound judgment; cautious in speech; not given to any imaginative flights; no dreamer of visionary dreams; but one whose habit is to speak what he knows to be true, and on whose testimony he can rely. He hears this believer speak of sin, its guilt, and its demerit, as he can speak; but he hears him speak also of the removal of guilt, of joy and peace in believing; making occasional reference to heaven, as the place of his future residence, where he expects to see God, and to mingle with the spirits of the glorified in purity and bliss for ever. The effect of such a free and unreserved communication would be somewhat startling and perplexing, as he would be unable to account for the facts of the communication. “Yes,” he says, “my friend is a pious man, and he is a cautious man. He speaks of God with reverence, but with reverence softened by the love of affection, as a prince speaks of his father who is the reigning monarch of the empire. He speaks of Jesus Christ with strong emotions of gratitude, as the captive speaks of his benevolent liberator, employing the bold language of inspiration as the vehicle for the utterance of his warm and impassioned emotions. All this is novel to me; it sounds like an intelligible, yet strange language. He certainly possesses what I want; peace of mind, and a good hope through grace; and if I judge from his statements, he has no more doubt of the remission of his sins, and of his final salvation, than one of the spirits of the redeemed. Has he received any special revelation, as the Apostle received one when caught up into the third heavens? seeing sights and hearing sounds which he could neither utter nor describe on his descent to earth. It is possible, but not probable, because he makes no allusion to anything which borders on the miraculous or the marvelous. What he says, and what he feels, appear to spring out of what he believes; and he believes what I believe; yet my belief is the cold abstraction of momentous truth; his belief is the reception of the

truth in the love of it; and while my belief keeps me under the bondage of terror, his belief inspires confidence and joy.”

These two great experimental facts, by being placed in juxtaposition, will develop more strongly than any mode of inductive reasoning, the different bearing on the human heart of the two opposite theories of belief. The theory of belief which admits the possibility of acquiring a knowledge of the remission of sin, teaches us that God waits to be gracious to the relenting sinner, who bows down and prays for mercy; and that Jesus Christ is able and willing to confer the gift of eternal life on every one who comes to him; while the opposite theory teaches us to believe that the exercise of mercy is purposely delayed for some indefinite period; and that the power of the Mediator will not be exercised in our behalf, even if it ever be exercised, till we pass into the eternal world. Under the inspiring influence of the former theory, we plead for the remission of our sins, as a child pleads with his living father, and have the answer of peace; and we repose a confidence in the present mediation and intercession of Jesus Christ, as a client commits the management of his cause to an able and upright advocate, not doubting the issue; while under the chilling influence of the latter theory, prayer becomes useless, as we are denied the privilege of expecting mercy or salvation; and are reduced to the dire necessity of living to the end of our days in a state of morbid indifference, or agonizing uncertainty. The former theory is admirably adapted to excite our gratitude to the God of all grace, and to work in us the peaceable fruits of righteousness; while the latter enkindles no devout affections, merely disclosing to us what it is possible to acquire on entering the eternal world, when it will be too late to correct our errors, or repair any loss we may sustain; and that loss may be the loss of the soul.

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1. Romaine.↩

Chapter 2. Knowledge of the Forgiveness of Sin.

How a Knowledge of the Forgiveness of Sin is Acquired and Sustained, and What is its Practical Tendency.

[The design of God]{smallcaps} in all his dispensations towards us, is to display his own glory; by causing us to apprehend the manifestation of the perfections of his nature; and constraining us to perceive, that in their harmonious exercise, they uphold the sanctity and authority of the laws of his moral government. These perfections take their descriptive epithet from the occasion of their exercise; the infliction of punishment, is the exercise of justice; the remission of sin, is the exercise of mercy; and these perfections always act in harmony, through every stage of a sinner's salvation. Hence the Lord never exercises mercy in the forgiveness of sin, till justice has made a sinner feel his guilt, and made him distinctly apprehend his liability to a state of eternal condemnation. "By the law," says the Apostle, "is the knowledge of sin;" that is, by an application of the law of God to the conscience of a sinner, he perceives and feels that he has been living in a perpetual violation, or disregard of its holy precepts, — each separate act of transgression and disobedience, incurring fresh guilt, and additional degrees of punishment. Not one sin which has been committed, has escaped the notice of the supreme Legislator and Judge; no sin of childhood, no sin of youth, no sin of riper years, no sin of thought, no sin of word, no sin of action. His all penetrating eye has followed you, O man, through the whole of your history; and in the book of his remembrance, every sin, with its degree of aggravated guilt, is written: and how terrible is the sentence which stands recorded against you! "The soul that sinneth shall die." "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." Gal. 3:10.

And there are circumstances which aggravate the enormity of these acts of transgression and disobedience; they have been committed against God; — a being of boundless and ceaseless benevolence. It is He, O man, who has given to you, your life, — who has upheld you from infancy, to the present hour; who has endowed you with all your mental faculties, and with all your senses; who has preserved you amidst scenes of the greatest temptations and dangers; who has restored you when going down to the grave, and healed your sickness and diseases; who has borne with all your insults, and acts of daring and malignant hostility against his authority; and who has been waiting for a long series of years to see you a penitent at his footstool, that he might be gracious to you. Yes, it is the distinct recognition of these circumstances of aggravation that makes the sense of guilt, like fire in the bones; that raises a tumult of anguish around the wounded spirit; and constrains to the utterance of the agonizing confession, which is an act of homage to the majesty of the violated law: “Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight; that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.” Ps. 51:4.

But that which operates with most force in breaking down the haughty and hostile spirit of man; producing the most lowly self-abasement, and exciting the most ingenuous and heart-rending sorrow, is a vivid apprehension of the love of Christ in behalf of guilty and perishing sinners, displayed in the privations of his life, and in his dying agonies, when giving his life a ransom for them. “Ah,” saith the sinner, “have I thus regarded the wonderful, astonishing love of my Redeemer? Is this the return I have made to him? Are not heaven and earth astonished at the despising of that love, at which they themselves are astonished?” And, while no audible voice is heard, yet such appeals as these will be felt, as though coming from the compassionate Redeemer. “Did I love thee, and leave my glory to become a scorn and reproach for thy sake? Did I think my life, and all that was dear to me, too much for thee, to save thee from the wrath to come? Have I been a wilderness to thee, or a land of darkness?¹ What could I have done more for thee, than shed my blood for the remission of thy sins, and give my life a ransom for thy redemption; but how hast thou requited me for these unsolicited manifestations of my compassion and love.” Thou hast despised me, and insulted me. Go, thou ungrateful man, and see if thou canst find another friend who will die for thee? or another advocate who will plead for thee — or another Saviour who can deliver thee from the wrath to come.

Go, ungrateful man, and “mourn” over thy base ingratitude, “as one mourneth for his only son, and be in bitterness as one is in bitterness for his first-born.”

When a man thus perceives and feels that he has by his repeated violations of the law of God, involved himself in the depths of guilt and its consequent danger; and when he perceives and feels that his guilt and his danger are awfully aggravated and increased by his hostility to a God of infinite, benevolence; and by his ingratitude to the Redeemer who died to redeem and to save him, his prayer for mercy will be as importunate, as his contrition will be sincere. He will not go to the throne of grace and offer up a languid petition for its exercise, and then withdraw in a state of comparative indifference as to the issue. No. He will feel that his happiness now, and his happiness for ever, is dependent on the issue; and he will pray with a fervor bearing some correspondence to the value of the blessing he solicits. He will adopt the language of the Psalmist, but even this impassioned language will not give expression to all his feelings or all his desires: “Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice, let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?” Ps. 130:1-3.

And as it hath pleased God to prescribe the only way in which he will exercise mercy; the man who feels his guilt, and apprehends his danger, will seek for mercy in the way which is prescribed for its exercise. “I am the way,” saith Jesus Christ, “No man cometh unto the Father but by me.” “For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.” Eph. 2:18. — “Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.” Heb. 7:25.² Hence on the meritorious death, and prevailing intercession of Jesus Christ, does the sinner place his entire and exclusive dependence, when praying for the remission of his sins, and for deliverance from the wrath to come. “O my Father, I have sinned against thee. I have incurred thy displeasure. Justly’ mightest thou banish me from thy presence; and send me to hell. Thy terrors make me afraid. But in the midst of deserved judgment, remember, O remember mercy! Thou hast encouraged me to pray for mercy; and therefore I hope. Thou hast commanded me to pray for mercy; and therefore with gratitude I obey. Pardon, O Lord, my sins; blot out mine iniquities, for His sake who suffered the just for the unjust. Give

peace to my soul, O Lord, for his sake who ever liveth to make intercession for me.”

Shall we suppose, when God, “who delights in mercy,” sees a penitent sinner thus bowing in deep contrition at his footstool; and when he hears him pleading for mercy in the name of Jesus, that he will spurn him from his presence in anger, or leave him to perish in despair? No — he will not do this. He will not sacrifice his integrity by allowing justice to triumph over mercy, when the penitent sinner pleads for the exercise of mercy, the merit of the blood of atonement, which has given to justice an honorable equivalent for the withdrawal of its claims on him. No — he will not allow the thunders and lightnings of Sinai to play around the agonized and affrighted spirit, which is waiting and listening in the cleft of the smitten rock, to hear the small still voice of mercy speaking pardon and peace.

[1] I will now consider what is implied in the forgiveness of sin. It is the free remission of the punishment which sin deserves. A transgressor under a human administration may be forgiven; yet he may be kept in a state of poverty and civil degradation, and he may live to re-commit the crime of rebellion, and suffer the extreme penalty of the law. But under the divine administration, they whose sins are forgiven, are restored to the favor of God, are elevated to the rank of adopted children, a pledge is given to them that they shall never be brought into condemnation, but shall ultimately enjoy eternal life. Hence, saith the Apostle: “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” — “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.” Rom. 8:1, 38, 39. This wondrous exercise of mercy in remitting the punishment to which the sinner is justly subjected, is distinguished by two peculiar properties; its greatness, and its freeness.

[1] Its greatness.

Under a human administration, the criminals in whose character there are no redeeming virtues, and in whose conduct there are no palliating circumstances, are usually reserved for the infliction of the penal sentence; it being considered incompatible with the honor and the safety of the

government to forgive them, and to restore them to liberty. But the Lord Jehovah says: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." Isa. 55:7-9. By the wicked and the unrighteous man, we are to understand the man of extreme perverseness of disposition, of extreme impiety of spirit, and of extreme profligacy of manners; one who is extremely defective in all the obligations of social life, a moral pest and nuisance, too impure and too contaminating to go at large without exciting terror in the virtuous part of the community, and whose banishment all would hail with acclamations of joy. But let such a man forsake his way, and give up his evil thoughts, and turn to the Lord by penitence and contrition, he will have mercy on him, and abundantly pardon him. If we could lift up the veil and see the holy and happy spirits who are now singing the song of Moses and the Lamb; and if we could distinguish each one apart from the rest, we should behold many who, when on earth, held rank with the chief of sinners "but they are washed, but they are sanctified, but they are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." 1 Cor. 6:11.

"Manasseh was proverbial for his wickedness, sold himself to work iniquity, and thereby to the devil, yet God did not suffer Satan presently to move away with the purchase, but by a sore affliction, brought him to his knees — humbled and reformed him.

"When Christ came into the world, bringing salvation, to whom did he offer it? Was it not to publicans and harlots? Publicans are counted the worst of men, and harlots the worst of women; giving this reason, that 'he came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.' It was with this good reason he kept such bad company. And as a specimen of his saving power, he carried about with him several of these notorious converts, as it were with this proclamation: 'Behold the mighty things my grace can do, what sinners I can reclaim, what sins I can pardon, and how many devils I can cast out. Look upon these, and believe that I am able to save to the uttermost, all that come unto God by me. Look upon these, and believe that

no kind, number, degree of sins, can keep a man out of heaven, that does not keep him from coming to Christ.'

"The woman of Samaria, was a wicked person by her own confession; and by Christ's discovery, yet with how soft and winning an address does he assure her, 'If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.' John 4:10. To covetous Zaccheus he says, 'This day is salvation come to thy house.' — Salvation to be had for fetching, was great grace; but he brings it home to his house.

"How he dignifies his sufferings — how he turns the ignominy of his cross into glory, by proving the saving merits of his death in the Conversion and salvation of the dying thief! Here the poor wretch hung, breathing his last! With what eyes, with what heart and thoughts must the expiring criminal survey Jesus hanging by him upon a cross, covered with blood and scorn, so as to collect the remainder of his breath into such a prayer — 'Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.' Luke 23:42. What, pray to a dying person, for life! to a crucified Jesus for a kingdom! to one that appeared outcast by Jews and deserted even by his own disciples, to such an one, for admission into the kingdom of glory! How extraordinary the request! How gracious the inward operation that produced it; and how speedy and full the answer. 'To-a'ay shalt thou be with me in paradise.' Luke 23:43. I will carry thee up with me into heaven, as the fruit of the present 'travail of my soul,' as a trophy of my victory over Satan: and will show thee there as part of the spoils that shall adorn my triumphs over hell and its powers, and as the earnest of the full recovery and salvation of all those for whom I am now dying. He thus snatches from the very brink of hell, one that seemed not only void of grace, but past grace; and melts the heart in an instant, that had been hardening for many years.

"Paul speaks of himself as if he were a monument set up by Christ to hear such an inscription as this, 'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.' 1 Tim. 1:15, 16.

“The crucifixion of our Lord was the most doleful tragedy cruelty ever acted; or sorrow can describe. Wherever the guilt of it could fall, one would think it should be with weight to sink the perpetrators of it below the reach of mercy. The Apostle charges it home upon Jerusalem. Him, you have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and stain. Never can any minister again preach to so wicked an auditory, till a new kind of wickedness arise, greater than the murder of the Lord of life. Yet, to wash these wicked hands from the guilt of all they had done, he tenders the laver of the blood of Christ, inviting them to repent — ‘Every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost,’ Acts 2:38: not excepting any that were concerned in it — not excepting any of those priests that persuaded the multitude to ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus; nor him that spit on his face, or struck him on the head; nor him that thrust the spear into his side, if any of them should be in the crowd.”³ And no less than three thousand of these men, who stood charged with the crime of murdering the Lord of life and glory, felt the terror of guilt, under the first sermon they heard; sought mercy, and obtained it; and on the same day, were added to the church of Christ. What splendid proofs, that “the Lord God is merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.” Exod. 34:6.

[2] By its freeness; though its exercise is made dependent on our believing that he can, and that he will forgive us. We have a very forcible illustration of the correctness of this statement, in the following fact: — “The father of the child possessed with a devil, being in a great agony when he came to our Saviour, cries out, ‘If thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us.’” Mark 9:22. He would fain be delivered, but the matter was so great, that he questioned whether the Saviour had either compassion or power enough for his relief. And what did he obtain hereby? Nothing but the retarding of the cure of his child; for our Lord holds him off, until he had instructed him in this matter; saith he, ‘If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.’” verse 23. Mistake not, if thy child be not cured, it is not for want of power or pity in me, but of faith in thee. My power is such as renders all things possible, to them that believe.”⁴ Now, do we not often act on the principle on which this man acted, virtually affix limitations to the exercise of omnipotent benevolence; and thus doubt the possibility of obtaining forgiveness, from a supposition that the magnitude and enormity of guilt, will operate as a check to its free

and spontaneous bestowment? This latent spirit of unbelief must be subdued, as it is the mysterious power which is permitted to keep in a state of abeyance the exercise of mercy; and we must be brought to admit, that the Lord is as willing to forgive, as he is able. When this spirit is subdued, and we honor God by believing that he will do what he has promised to do, then the obstruction to the exercise of mercy is removed; and though for wise, yet concealed reasons, he may, for a little while, delay the actual manifestation of his pardoning love, yet if we wait in his own appointed way, he will freely give, what we earnestly and anxiously implore. “Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord.” Hosea 6:3.

Amongst men the exercise of mercy is usually attended by some degree of suspicion and mistrust in the integrity of the criminal who is forgiven; he may be freely pardoned and restored to liberty, but a taint will always rest on his character; and if he should repeat his offense, his punishment will be increased in consequence of the previous act of remission. But under the divine administration there is no more remembrance of sin; and the pardoned sinner is treated as a righteous, though never regarded as an innocent person. Hence the Psalmist says: “The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.” — “For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.” Ps. 103:8, 11, 12. The language of the prophet Micah is thrilling and transporting: “Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us: he will subdue our iniquities: and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.” Micah 7:18, 19. Indeed, the exercise of mercy, judging from the facts and the current language of the scriptures, affords the highest degree of satisfaction and delight to the divine mind. No one, I think, can read the touching description which our Lord has given us of the prodigal, without feeling convinced, that the father felt a higher degree of joy on seeing his son return to his long deserted home, than the son did, with the treatment he received; and this father stands in the sacred volume as the personification of our heavenly Father, who takes more delight in exercising compassion and mercy towards his relenting children, than they can feel by its blissful manifestations. The following quotations in their primary application, refer to the deep interest

which the Lord Jehovah feels for his church during her imperfect and suffering condition here on earth; yet it requires no effort of the imagination, nor any perversion of the laws of the most rigid interpretation to believe, that what relates to the entire number of her members, is equally true in relation to each separate individual: "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty: he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love; he will joy over thee with singing." Zeph. 3:17; see also Isa. 49:13-16. And though the subjoined passage may be regarded as predicting a state of spiritual prosperity and honor, to be enjoyed by the Lord's redeemed people during some favored period of their residence on earth, yet this rather sanctions, than renders doubtful, the propriety of its application to that altered state of existence to which all will be advanced whose sins are forgiven. "And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." Isa. 35:10. I cannot close this section more appropriately, than by referring the attention of the reader to the language of Jesus Christ, which is decisive of the fact, that the joy felt in heaven in anticipation of the salvation of a penitent sinner, is not felt exclusively by the angels of light. "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one; I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me; for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world." John 17:20-24.

[2] Is the knowledge of the remission of our sins, attainable during our residence on earth?

I cannot suppose that when God is pleased to pardon a sinner; delivering him at the same time from a state of condemnation, and conferring on him the gift of eternal life, that he designs to keep him ignorant of it; because he has made it our duty to believe that he delighteth in the exercise of mercy; assuring us that if we turn to him with penitence, and in faith, he will

abundantly pardon us. In addition to this, Jesus Christ has said again and again, that if “we come to him, and believe in him, we shall not perish, but have everlasting life.” The apostle Paul, who wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, says that if “we call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall be saved.” And the apostle John says: “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.” 1 John 5:13. These enunciations of mercy, and of the gift of eternal life, are incorporated in the history of revelation to be credited; and it is both our duty, and our privilege, to believe that when the Lord speaks, he speaks the truth; and that he intends to fulfill his own promises, and confer the blessing which he has encouraged us to expect, and for which he has commanded us to pray.

A son offends his father, who writes and says, that if he will confess his error, and implore forgiveness, he will forgive him, and restore him to his favor. He does confess his error, and on his knees, as the tears of sorrow fall from his eyes, he does implore his father to forgive him, and to renew the expression of his paternal kindness; but the father speaks not; no smile displaces the angry frown; the dark and stormy night comes on, and the door of home is still shut against the relenting son, who is left without, holding in his hand the written promise of forgiveness, which he pleads, but pleads in vain. Shall we liken our heavenly Father to such a father as this? Can we so far dishonor him, as to imagine that he will not fulfill the promise on which he has caused us to hope? Can we so far dishonor the blessed Jesus, as to suppose that now he is exalted to the throne of majesty and power, he looks with an eye of indifference on the penitent suppliant at his footstool? complacently allowing him to linger on in a state of mental torture, rather than say in the small still voice of his spirit, “go in peace, thy sins are forgiven thee?” He would say so if he were on earth, and can we imagine that he feels any reluctance to say so now he is glorified in heaven? Happily. the possibility of attaining this knowledge, is a fact less dependent on conjecture, or hypothetical reasoning, than on a species of evidence which precludes the rationality of doubt or suspicion; and to this evidence, which is the evidence of testimony, I will now call the attention of the reader.

[1] We have the testimony of many who have died in faith, and in the full assurance of entering into rest. The Apostle in the 11th chapter of his epistle to the Hebrews, gives us a list of patriarchal elders who obtained a good report, and who had this testimony, that they pleased God. These all died in faith, which presupposes they knew that their sins were forgiven; or they could not have anticipated an entrance into the heavenly country. Unless Job knew that his sins were forgiven, could he have said, — “For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another: though my reins be consumed within me.” Job 19:25-27. The Psalmist says, “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.” Ps. 32:1. The Apostle, in his epistles to the saints at Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi, and Colosse, adopts a style of address which necessarily implies an assurance on their part, that they were brought into a state of reconciliation and holy fellowship with God; and consequently could and did rejoice in hope of the glory to be revealed in them. And these saints, who were once the children of wrath even as others, obtained mercy through Christ; and are now with the rest of the redeemed, bowing before the throne and singing, “Unto him that loved us, and washed as from our sins in his own blood.” Rev. 1:5.

[2] If we now pass from those who have lived and died in the faith, to those who are its living witnesses, we shall obtain additional evidence to prove that it is possible for believers to acquire a knowledge that their sins are forgiven; and a consequent assurance of their final salvation. It is with difficulty that this evidence can be collected, because there is usually great reluctance on the part of those who are admitted into fellowship with God, to disclose the hidden secrets of their hearts. But occasionally they “that fear the Lord,” will speak one to another, and will tell what “he hath done for their souls.” The following quotation from Dr. Owen, embodies in very simple language, the evidence which thousands can supply in confirmation of the fact under consideration: — “I went to him, by Jesus Christ, against whom I have sinned, and have found him better to me than I could expect, or ever should have believed, had he not overpowered my heart by his Spirit. Instead of wrath, which I feared, and that justly, because I had deserved it, he said to me, in Christ, ‘Fury is not in me.’ For a long time I could not believe it; I thought it impossible that there should be mercy and

pardon for me. But he still supported me, sometimes by one means, sometimes by another; until, taking my soul near to himself, he caused me to see the folly of my unbelieving heart, and the vileness of the hard thoughts I had of him, and that indeed there is with him forgiveness and plenteous redemption. This hath taken away all my sorrows, and given me quietness, with rest and assurance. I can now call him my Father; Jesus Christ my Redeemer; and heaven I look upon as my future home: and with devout gratitude, I can say — ‘Yes, I to the end shall endure, As sure as the earnest is given; More happy, but not more secure, The glorified spirits in heaven.’”

In some, this sense of forgiveness and security, is the calm unruffled peace of the soul, in others it is the joy unspeakable, and full of glory; in all who possess it, it is the living witness, which he that believeth on the Son of God, hath in himself.

But to obviate all possible misapprehension on the subject, I would make two remarks: — First, however desirable it may be to attain this assurance, that our sins are forgiven, yet its attainment is not essential to our salvation. Many, I have no doubt, obtain an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage. Yes; I have known that at eventide, the light of peace and joy has suddenly dispelled the gloom of despondency which has encompassed the heir of salvation, in his passage through time to eternity; and I have heard, again and again, the fearful and the timid exclaim, when in the immediate prospect of death: “Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ.” 1 Cor. 15:57.

And secondly, this assurance, when obtained, is susceptible of great variations in the vividness of its apprehensions, and its power of impression on the heart. “It may be higher or lower, greater or less obscure, or attended with clearer evidence. It is not quite lost, when it is not quite at its highest. God sometimes marvelously raises the souls of his saints with some clear and near approaches to them; gives them a sense of his eternal love, a taste of the embraces of his Son, and the inhabitation of the Spirit, without the least intervening disturbance; then this is their assurance. But this life is not a season to be always taking wages in: our work is not yet done, we are not always to abide in this mount; we must come down again unto the battle, fight again, cry again, complain again. Shall the believer

now be thought to have lost his assurance? No. He had before, assurance with joy, triumph, and exultation; he hath it now, or may have it, with cries, tears, and supplication, and his assurance may be as firm, when he is on the earth, with a sense of sin, as when he is carried up to the third heaven, With a sense of love, and foretaste of glory.”⁵

We now come to the consideration of a question which will require more than an ordinary degree of attention both on the part of the writer, and his reader.

[3] How is a knowledge of the forgiveness of our sins, and the certainty of our salvation, to be attained?

We are not to expect that any miraculous mode of communication will be adopted; such as a voice speaking to us from the excellent glory, and saying, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Nor must we look for any mystic sign, such as a bush remaining unconsumed, when enveloped in flame; or a fleece, alternately saturated with water, or remaining dry, just in opposition to the operation of the ordinary laws of nature.

Nor have we any authority to expect such an announcement made to us through the medium of a dream; or by any sensible token; or by some irresistible impression, keeping in suspension the exercise of our faculty of believing, and the attendant action of the heart, of trusting in Christ. No, — we exclude from the process of inquiry, every intervention which involves a departure from the established rule of the divine procedure; which rule, always requires the free and conscious exercise of our mental faculties.

I take for granted that the reader has felt the conviction of guilt; that he has clearly apprehended his danger; and is relying for forgiveness and eternal salvation, on the death, and the intercession of Jesus Christ: but though this conviction of guilt, this apprehension of danger, and this act of dependence on Christ, may be an exciting cause for gratitude, yet it will not yield perfect satisfaction, as the momentous question, “hath the Lord forgiven the iniquity of my sins?” still remains undecided. And to anticipate the solution of this all-important question, without devoting to its consideration an unusual degree of attention, with a corresponding degree of devout and anxious feeling, would be presumptuous; and far more likely

to stay the progress of the great work of personal salvation, than to accelerate it. I would then advise the reader —

[a] To devote an extra portion of time to a diligent and devotional examination of those parts of the word of God, which have a special relation to the question under consideration. And I give this advice for two special reasons: first, the clearer and more comprehensive your knowledge, the more steadfast will be your faith, when you do believe; and secondly, the interesting labor of studying the word of God, will greatly tend, under the unction of the Holy Spirit, to increase your eagerness to obtain the knowledge for which you are so anxiously seeking; and better fit you for the enjoyment of it, when it is attained.

[a] Turn to the following references to ascertain whether your feeling of penitential sorrow for sin, corresponds in its cause, and its intensity, with what the Lord requires in every penitent sinner — “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes,” Job 42:5, 6; 40:4; Psalms 6, 32, 33, 51, 102, 130, and 133; Ezek. 20:43, 44; Joel 2:12, 13; Hos. 14:1-4; Zec. 12:9-14.

[b] Turn to the following references to enlarge your conception of, the **grandeur** of God — “In the year that King Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered _his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried ’unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke,” Isaiah 6:1-4; Psalms 89, 139; isa 40, 44; Hab 3: —

Of His Condescension — “Thus saith the Lord, the heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the Lord: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word,” Isa. 66:1, 2; 1 Kings 8:22-29. Meditate, on his assuming our nature into union with his own; and appearing on earth in the form of a man, to effect our eternal redemption — “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus

Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich,” 2 Cor. 8:9; Phil. 2:5-11; 1 Tim. 3:16: —

Of His justice — “He is the Rock, his work is perfect; for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth, and without iniquity; just and right is he,” Deut. 32:4; Ps. 11:7; 33:5; 89:14; Jer. 9:24. Meditate, on the sufferings which the dear Redeemer endured, when he was answering the claims of justice in our behalf — “Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts smite the Shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered; and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones,” Zec. 13:7; Is. 53; Rom. 8:34: —

Of His Purity — “Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders,” Ex. 15:11; Josh. 24:19; Isa. 6:1-4; 43:14, 15; Hab. 1:13; Rev. 15:4: — and

Of His Mercy — “And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children, unto the third and to the fourth generation,” Ex. 34:6, 7; Deut. 4:31; Ps. 103:8-14; Jer. 3:12; Mic. 7:18; Eph. 2:4-9.

[c] Turn to the following references, and you will have a clear explanation of the **design** of our Lord’s mission and death — “Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many,” Matt. 20:28; 1:21; Luke 19:10; John 1:29; 3:14-16; 10:15-28; 1 Tim. 1:15, 16; 1 John 4:9, 10: —

And of the **completion** of that glorious design. — “Who was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification,” Rom. 4:25; 8:34; 1 Cor. 15:3, 4; Ephes. 1:7; Col. 1:14-23; Heb. 2:9; 4:14-16; 9:24; 1 John 1:7; 2:1, 2; Eph. 2:8,9.

[d] Turn to the following references, to ascertain whether your prayers have the fervor which they ought to breathe; and whether they are offered in the appointed way — “I give myself unto prayer,” Ps. 109:4; Gen. 32:24-26; Neh. 13:35; Ps. 25:1-7; 38:1-9; Luke 18:13; 24:23; — “And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in

the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it," John 14:13, 14; 16:23, 24; Rom. 8:26, 27.

[e] Turn to the following references, that you may have distinctly and deeply impressed on your heart, the inseparable connection between an implicit faith in the truth of the divine promises, and the bestowment of the promised blessing — "If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established," Isa. 7:9; 2 Kings vii.; Isa. 26:3, 4; Jer. 39:15-18; Matt. 13:58; Luke 7:48-50; John 3:36; 5:24, 40; Acts 14:8-10; 16:31.

[2] I think it would be useless, if not sinful, to expect to acquire this knowledge, Without imploring the aid of the Holy Spirit; — reposing a dependence on him in every stage of the inquiry. If less prominence be given to the work of the Spirit, in the theory of redemption, than to the work of Jesus Christ, yet an equal degree of importance is attached to it, as the practical efficacy of divine truth on the heart, is made dependent on him. Of the necessity of his interference, we have a decisive proof in the case of the Apostles. They were initiated, by the oral instructions of Jesus Christ, into the mysteries of the Christian dispensation, but they remained mysteries during the whole period of his tarrying with them; but when the Spirit descended at the feast of Pentecost, supplying the clue of discovery, and giving an impulse to the faculty of perception, the truths, which had been floating about in the expanse of their mind, confused and shapeless, like the elements of ancient chaos, were suddenly reduced to order, presenting a theory of faith, clear, concise, and perfect; and they were instantaneously qualified to execute their divine commission, to go and teach all nations. And it is obvious from the language of our Lord, and the statements of the Apostles, that the agency of the divine Spirit is equally necessary through all future ages; as the effectual administration of the truth on the hearts of men, is made dependent on his active power. It is he who convinces of sin; who renews and enlightens the mind; usually employing the word of truth, either read, or heard, as the instrument by which these great spiritual effects are produced.

"As we are indebted to the Spirit for the first formation of the divine life, so it is he who alone can maintain it, and render it strong and vigorous. It is his office to actuate the habits of grace where they are already planted; to hold our souls in life, and to strengthen us that we may walk up and down in the name of the Lord. It is his office to present the mysteries of salvation;

— the truths which relate to the mediation of Christ, and the riches of his grace, in so penetrating and transforming a manner, as to render them vital operating principles, the food and solace of our spirits. Without his agency, however intrinsically excellent, they will be to us mere dead speculation, an inert mass; it is only when they are animated by his breath, that they become spirit and life.

“It is his office to afford that anointing, by which we may know all things; not only by a light which-is merely directive to the understanding, but which so shines upon the heart, as to give a relish of the sweetness of divine truth, and effectually produce a compliance with its dictates. It belongs to him to seal us to the day of redemption; to put that mark and character upon us, which distinguishes the children of God, as well as to afford a foretaste and an earnest of the future inheritance. ‘And hereby,’ saith the Apostle, ‘we know that we are of God, by the spirit which he hath given us.’ It is his office to subdue the corruption of our nature, not by leaving us inactive spectators of the combat, but by engaging us to a determined resistance to every sinful propensity by teaching our hands to war, and our fingers to fight, so that the victory shall be ours, and the praise his. To help the infirmities of saints who know not what to pray for as they ought, by making intercession for them, with groanings: which cannot be uttered, is an important branch of his office. He kindles their desires, gives them a glimpse of the fullness of God, that all-comprehensive good; and by exciting a relish of the beauties of holiness, and the ineffable pleasure which springs from nearness to God, disposes them to the fervent and effectual prayer which availeth much. In short, as Christ is the way, so it is equally certain, that the Spirit is the fountain of all the light and strength which enable us to walk in that way.”⁶

As, then, the divine Spirit is the acting agent in carrying into practical effect the entire work of Jesus Christ³ and as in every stage of our meetness for a better world, from the hour we first believe, till actual vision supplies the place of faith, we are left dependent on him, I think it would be an act of great presumption in any man, whatever be his attainments, to enter on the solemn and momentous inquiry, whether his sins are forgiven, and his salvation is certain, without, in the first place, and during the whole process of examination, invoking his gracious assistance.

[3] We must now ascertain if we really do believe in Christ, as it is on this act of the mind, that the forgiveness of sin, and the gift of eternal life is suspended. To assert that faith in Christ, is the mere assent of the understanding to the truth of the facts, and doctrines relating to his complex person, and his mediatorial work, is an ingenious and subtle maneuver, by which their redeeming, and sanctifying, and consolatory power is greatly neutralized; and the present safety and final happiness of the soul is placed in the greatest jeopardy. For, in the first place, it requires no other power than that which a man of ordinary intelligence possesses, to arrive, after a careful examination of the sacred records, at the highest point of assurance, that the stamp of divine authority, confirms the truth, of every part of the revelation which they contain.

And secondly, we have had repeated proofs, that many have yielded implicit assent to the truth of these facts, and doctrines, who have held the truth in unrighteousness; and some of distinguished eminence, who have preached the truth with the eloquence of an Apollo, who have dishonored the Christian character by their licentious course of living.

And we know, thirdly, that the devils believe, and tremble while they believe, but their sins are not forgiven, nor is the gift of eternal life bestowed on them.

I consider faith in Christ, to be that assent of the mind to the facts and doctrines bearing a relation to him, which has a powerful, and an abiding effect on the heart; and this view of the nature of scripture faith is, I think, supported by the testimony of the sacred writers, who speak of it as a personal act, and a divine gift; the homage of the intellect, and an active principle of the heart. I am, for example, taught to believe that Jesus Christ shed his blood for the remission of sin; that he suffered the just for the unjust, that sinners might be brought into a state of reconciliation with God; that they have redemption through his blood from all the penal consequences of sin; and have a right to the possession of eternal life: and I am conscious that I do believe these great facts of revelation, as implicitly as I believe, that Paul once preached at Athens; or that Luther effected a glorious reformation in Germany. But if I do nothing more than merely assent to the truth of these great facts, will anyone presume to tell me that I possess the faith, which is the result of the operation of the Spirit of God;

when it differs not, except in the comparative feebleness of its impression, from the faith of devils, who tremble while they believe.

I feel morally certain, that I must do something more than merely assent to the truth of these great facts, or I never can expect to be saved. My belief in them, to be practically availing, must impel me to pray for forgiveness' for Christ's sake; and must impel me to rely, for the exercise of mercy, on the merit of his death, and the prevalence of his intercession. The difference between mere assent, which is the homage of the intellect, and assent, which exerts a commanding power over the other faculties of the mind, may be fairly illustrated by the following imaginative case: — A rich and benevolent being, whose form is never seen, and whose voice is never heard, dwelling within the walls of his own stately mansion, has contrived to make known his determination to afford relief to all objects of distress, who apply to Him in a prescribed way. One goes and is relieved; and another goes and is relieved; and then others go and are relieved; and each one reports the result of his application. In these cases, we see assent to testimony working a practical effect; and issuing in a corresponding advantage. But there is one, in the community of suffering, whose belief in the benevolence, and resources of the invisible benefactor is equally strong with that of others, but he makes no personal application; and the consequence is, he lives in a state of privation, and in that state he dies. In this supposed case, the invisible benefactor, adopts the principle which is adopted by an invisible Benefactor of an infinitely higher order, who says to all the hapless children of misery and want, — “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened. 07' what man is there of you, whom, if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?” Matt. 7:7, 11. This immutable principle of the divine procedure, is beautifully illustrated and conclusively established by the following important facts of Jewish history. Cities of refuge,⁷ were selected in convenient localities of the land of Israel, for the protection of the man, who by accident killed another; but it was only the man-slayer who fled to one of them and gained an entrance within its gates, whose life was preserved: — he who remained at home, or who was overtaken on the

road, fell under the stroke of the avenger of blood. The mystic angel descended once in the year to agitate the water in the pool of Bethesda, and to impart to it, a healing virtue; but it was only the man who first stepped in that was cured.

“On this principle, which requires the concurrence of the will, and the heart, with the assent of the understanding, I have acted; and do act. I have implored, and do implore the remission of my sins; through the redemption of Christ.- ’On the merit of his death, and the prevalence of his intercession I rely for free access to the Father; and for the bestowment of the inestimable blessing of eternal life. My prayers I know are imperfect, but I know they are sincere. My act of dependence on Jesus Christ, I admit is exercised amidst many fears arising from a sense of my extreme unworthiness; but I know it is absolute and entire.” “I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning; I say, more than they that watch for the morning.” Psalm 130:5, 6.

It is while thus waiting at the throne of grace, “looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life,” that it pleaseth God, who delighteth in mercy, to give such a direct manifestation of his forgiving love, as enkindles hope; and sometimes such manifestations of his forgiving love, as impart joy and peace in believing. And this direct manifestation of pardoning love may be made by the forcible application of some appropriate promise; or it may be made through the medium of the minister of the sanctuary, when proclaiming the glad tidings of salvation; or it may be made by the more independent act of the Holy Ghost, shedding abroad the love of God in the heart, which he has subdued to the obedience of the faith, and which he has purified by its power. And when this hallowed process of believing and trusting takes place, followed by the promised manifestations of mercy and of love, the believer then knows that his sins are forgiven, and that he is accepted as complete in the beloved; and then, like the Eunuch, he can go on his way rejoicing.

Oh what a delightful transition! From fear, to hope; from remorse and bitter anguish, to mental ease; from a state of alienation from God, to holy fellowship with him; and from the fearful looking for of fiery indignation, to the anticipation of eternal glory. Such a transition, which rarely takes place, unattended by self-evident signs of its reality, is the most important

event which can occur in the history of man. It is then he feels the full force of the language of the Psalmist, — “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.” Ps. 32:1. The elevation of a pauper to the possession of great wealth; the advancement of a condemned traitor to a post of distinction and honor, are events which when they happen, serve to form splendid paragraphs in the biographical sketch; but they sink into absolute insignificance when compared with the more wondrous elevation and advancement of a child of wrath, to the honor of an adopted son of the Lord God Almighty, partaking of the purity of his nature; and undergoing a moral process, which is to prepare him, for a presentation before the majesty of the divine glory, with exceeding joy; the various orders of happy spirits, that inhabit the eternal world, to be the spectators of the sublime scene.

But the manifestations of pardoning love, which come with such a vivid power of impression to some, that they instantaneously know their sins are forgiven; do not come with an equal vividness and force of impression to all. The small still voice of mercy, speaks so feebly, or so indistinctly, that they are not quite sure it speaks to them.

“Sometimes they’ve had a little taste,
And thought its coming nigh;
But ah, the blessing did not last,
The visitant pass’d by!”

During these seasons, when the light of consolation breaks in upon the darkness of dejection; and when hope and fear alternately agitate the feelings of the heart, there is invariably such a degree of submission to the divine will, associated with such an exclusive dependence on Christ, as tends to destroy all fear of being lost, even if no well grounded hope of being saved, springs up in the mind. This is certainly an anomalous state of feeling, analogous to the feeling of the shipwrecked mariner, who feels certain that he shall not perish, even while he has some strange misgivings that he shall never reach the shore.

Yet it is a very common state of feeling, indicative of the possession of that genuine faith in Christ, which will ultimately’ break through all the gloomy fears which encompass and depress the heart, and enable the

believer to say, — “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.” 2 Tim. 1:12.

This faith, which believes, and trusts, and which is honored by such self-evident, or somewhat ambiguous tokens of the divine favor, is a living principle, performing moral functions of which the believer, whatever may be the degree of his joy and peace, is as conscious as he is of the action of his senses, or the operation of his mental faculties. He can adopt the language of the Apostle, moderating the degree of his confidence, to harmonize with the degree of his joy and peace; “I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live.” Yes, I live, for I breathe. I breathe the breath of prayer and of praise. I live, for I have the use of all my senses. I can feel. I feel sin to be a burden; and holiness to be a source of delight. I can taste. I taste the bitterness of grief — and at times that the Lord is gracious. I can see. I can see the beauty and glory of Christ; my beloved, and my friend. I can hear. I can hear the voice of the Lord speaking in his providence, and in his word.

I live, for I possess the power of motion. I can resist, and strive against sin. I live, for I can exercise my mental faculties. I can think of God, of Christ, of the Comforter, with holy delight. I prefer walking in the ways of the Lord, to walking in the paths of the ungodly, or standing in the way of sinners. I love the name of Jesus. I love his people. I love his ordinances; and if he were the only being in existence, and my affections were purified from the gross alloy of sin, in his presence I should have a fullness of joy — the beholding of his person, and his glory, would be the consummation of my blessedness."

This faith bows with reverence to the authority of the law of the Lord, which the believer adopts as a rule of his conduct, from choice, rather than compulsion. He is commanded to love the Lord, to trust in him at all times, to submit to his varied dispensations, however dark and mysterious; and to give thanks for his mercies; and these commands he endeavors to obey, though he knows, that his love, his confidence, his submission, and his gratitude, are vastly disproportionate to the equity of the divine claims, or the extent of his own obligations or capabilities. He is commanded to commit no sin, to purify himself as the Lord is pure; to abstain from the appearance of evil, to walk in the fear of the Lord all the day long; and to glorify him in his body, soul, and spirit; and these commands he endeavors

to obey, though he is conscious of many defects, and of many irregularities and inconsistencies, which he bitterly deploras; and that many shades of imperfection may be discerned in his deportment. There is no precept of the sacred code which he wishes to have expunged; and if his mental strength equaled the prevalent tendency of his heart, his obedience would be as' perfect, as is the obedience of the spirits of the glorified, springing from motives equally pure with theirs.

Now, I think it is utterly impossible, that such an extraordinary process should take place in the heart of any man, without his knowing it; even though he may not know the exact time it commenced, or be able to trace, by any sensible signs, the order of its progression; but still, as this process takes place through the medium. of his own mental faculties, and is, at every stage of it, a process which he appears to be the prime, if not the exclusive agent in conducting, his knowledge of its reality, and of its exact correspondence with the most rigid claims of the word of God, will not satisfy him, that it is a work wrought in him by a supernatural power, unless the divine Spirit attests it, by his own conclusive, yet inexplicable testimony: — “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.” Rom. 8:16. Hence after the most cautious references to our consciousness of certain great heartfelt realities; and after the most cautious self-examination, to ascertain whether we are enlightened and renewed; and after the most cautious submission of our faith and practice, to the test of the word of God, we must depend for a full assurance of forgiveness, and final salvation, on that other Comforter, whose province it is to work in us the peaceable fruits of righteousness: — “the work of righteousness being peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever.” Isa. 32:17.

[4] Is this knowledge, after it has been acquired, ever lost, and if so, how can it be recovered? The most ample provision is made in the theory of redemption for the preservation, and final salvation of all, to whom the Lord forgiveth the iniquity of their sin. They are not called into fellowship with Him, and then rejected; pardoned, and at last condemned. “I will,” saith Jehovah, “make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear, in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me.” Jer. 32:40. “And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of

my hand.” John 10:28. But these promises, which guarantee the believer’s final safety, do not render it absolutely impossible for him, to fall away from his steadfastness, and relapse for a season into an evil course; and thus lose all sense of the pardoning love of God. David was a man after God’s own heart, distinguished as much for the fervor of his devotion, and the integrity of his principles, as for his zeal in the suppression of idolatry, and the establishment of the worship of Jehovah: but alas! in an evil hour he fell under the power of temptation, and became an outcast from the blissful manifestations of the divine favor. In what pathetic strains does he deplore his hapless, though not hopeless condition, — “For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer.” Ps. 12:4; 51:3, 4, 9, 11, 12.

But this case of David was an extreme case, one which very rarely happens; and all such cases may be regarded as exceptions to the general rule; — occurring, when they do occur, usually in persons of some distinction in the circle of Christian fellowship, to act as beacons to warn others of their danger; and to make the most confident " take heed lest they fall." The recovery of such to their former state of fellowship with God, and its consequent peace and joy, is generally a work of very slow progression; like the setting and healing of broken bones by the intervention of human agency, rather than by a word, or a touch of a miraculous power. Such persons, during the progress of their recovery, are left to feel that it is an evil thing, and bitter, to forsake the Lord their God; to reproach themselves for their folly, and their ingratitude; and to endure the keenest inflictions, of self-condemnation and remorse. “Yes, I have sinned against the God of my mercies, who quickened me, when I was dead in trespasses and sins; and who spake peace to my soul. I have sinned against my adorable Saviour, who bled, and groaned, and died, to redeem and to save me. I have grieved the Holy Spirit. Base wretch! I have broken my vows of perpetual devotedness to his service. I have brought a reproach upon his holy name; and on his people. I am cast away from his presence. My punishment is great. I deserve it. It is greater than I can bear. Woe is me! Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, —” For innumerable evils have compassed me about; mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up they are more than the hairs of mine head; therefore my heart faileth me." Ps. 40:12; 77:3, 4.

When this knowledge is lost, to whatever cause the loss may be attributed, its recovery ought to be sought for in the same way as it was originally obtained; yet with greater self-abasement and humiliation of spirit, and with more earnest prayer. As David regained a knowledge of the forgiveness of his sin after his grievous fall 3 and as Peter had a renewed manifestation of the pardoning love of the Redeemer, after his reiterated denial of him; so may any reclaimed penitent, hope again to taste that the Lord is gracious. Listen to his appeal; and ponder over the faithfulness of his promise: — “O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. Take with you words, and turn to the Lord; say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously so will we render the calves of our lips. I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him.” Hos. 14:1, 2, 4.

But to regain the eden of mental peace, after it has been destroyed, by tasting the forbidden fruit, will require greater vigilance, and energy, than to hold fast the possession of it. “It is no time now to be slothful; the soul’s all, its greatest concerns, are at stake. Dull, cold, formal, customary applications to God, ordinary actings of faith, love, and fervency, usual seasons, opportunities, and duties, will not do now. To do no more than ordinary now, is to do nothing at all. He that puts forth no more strength and activity for his deliverance, when he is in depths, ready to perish, than he doth, or hath need to do when he is at liberty, in plain and smooth paths, is scarcely like to escape. Some, in such conditions, are careless and negligent;’ they think, that though, at present they are in danger, they shall yet have peace at last; in which frame there is much contempt of God. Some despond and languish away under their pressures. Spiritual sloth influences both these sorts of persons. Let us see the frame under consideration, exemplified in another. We have an instance in the spouse, of whom we read in Solomon’s Song: ‘By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not. The watchmen that go about the city found me; to whom I said, Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?’ Chap. 3:1, 3. She had lost the presence of Christ; it was night with her, a time of darkness, and disconsolation; and she seeks for her beloved. ’ By night on my bed, I sought him whom my soul loveth.’ Christ was absent from her, and she was left in depths of sorrow and in darkness. Wherefore she seeks for him, but as most are apt to do in the like condition, she mends not her pace, goes not out of or beyond her course of ordinary duties, nor the frame she was

usually in at other times. But what is the issue? she says, 'I found him not.' This is not the way to recover a sense of lost love, nor to get out of her distresses. And this puts her on another course. She begins to think, that if things continue in this state, she shall be undone. 'I go on, indeed, with the performance of duties still; but I have not the presence of my beloved; I meet not with Christ in them; my darkness and trouble abide still; if I take not some other course, I shall be lost. Well, saith she, "I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth:" I will shake off all that case, and sloth, and formality, that cleave to me; and adopt some more vigorous course. In whatever ordinance, or by what duty, public or private, of communion with others, or solitary retiredness, Christ ever was, or may be found, or peace obtained, I will seek him, and not give over until I come to an enjoyment of him.'"⁸ And such a resolution must be adopted, and acted on, by every penitent sinner, who has lost all sense of the pardoning love of God, or he will never recover it: but he must put a restraint on a roving disposition, which some are too apt to indulge: when roused to an apprehension of the greatness of their loss. I have known some, who have, when in this restless and disconsolate frame of mind, left one ministry for that of another; I have known others, who have attended with pharisaical eagerness and scrupulosity, all the public services which have been conducted in their usual place of worship; and I have known some, who, in addition, have subjected themselves to a species of popish penance, if peradventure they might regain their lost peace; but they have failed. And the cause of their failure is very obvious. They have placed a dependence on the means of grace, rather than on the God of grace: or they have attended the means of grace, with a depressed, but not with a broken heart, and a contrite spirit. Or possibly they may have been more anxious to have their sins forgiven, than to have their hearts cleansed from the defilements of sin; more anxious for peace, than for higher degrees of purity; more anxious to be delivered from the terrors of condemnation, than to be made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. Or possibly they may have presumed, without being conscious of committing such an 'offence against the 'Holy One, to impeach his loving-kindness in withdrawing the manifestations of his pardoning love; 'or to prescribe to him when, or through what means, he shall renew the tokens of it.

These stirrings of the disconsolate spirit prove, that there is spiritual life, and that the spiritual senses are in exercise; and so far, they are pleasing indications of an approaching change; but before that blissful change, which is desired, can be realized, the penitent must mourn apart; he must look on him whom he has pierced by his sins; and be in bitterness of soul, as one who has lost his first-born; and he must feel a self-abasement, and prostration of spirit, like that which Job felt, when he said, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee: Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Job 42:5, 6. He must seek the recovery of his long lost peace, in the appointed way for its bestowment; but he must look through the means to him who has appointed them: renouncing all dependence, except on the merit of the atonement and intercession of Christ; and then, with the spirit of the Psalmist, adopt his determination: — "I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning; I say, more than they that watch for the morning." Ps. 130:5, 6. How consolatory to be assured "that his anger endureth but a moment; in his favor is life; weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." Pray as the Psalmist prayed, and then your prayer, like his, will soon be turned into praise: — "Hear, O Lord, and have mercy upon me: Lord, be thou my helper. Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing: thou hast put of my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness; to the end that my glory may sing praise to thee, and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks unto thee for ever."

[5] How is this knowledge sustained? Though ample provision be made for the free forgiveness of all sins which a believer may commit during his continuance on earth, yet there would be a manifest impropriety in saying that a sin is forgiven, before it is actually committed. To adopt such a theory of belief, with its corresponding phraseology, would be to depart from the more consistent theory of the word of God, and its more appropriate language. Our Lord, whose knowledge of the order of the divine procedure, was perfect, has taught us to pray as regularly, for the forgiveness of our sins, as for our daily bread.⁹ The Apostle Peter represents the believer as ceaseless in his access to Jesus Christ, "to whom coming;"¹⁰ coming daily, coming hourly, coming perpetually, to be cleansed from the defilements of sin, to obtain mercy, and find grace to help him to subdue and overcome all the evil tendencies of his depraved heart. "The clean, require to be again

and again cleansed. The sins of a single day, would be enough to condemn us: weighed in the balance, we should be found wanting. The believer never subsists on an independent source of his own — he lives by faith; faith is not the reservoir, but the habitual receiver. He is constantly directing his eye toward him in whom it hath pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell, as the source and medium of pardoning and purifying grace." And this constant habit of praying for the forgiveness of sin; and praying more especially when any sense of guilt presses on the conscience; and praying through faith in the agonizing death of the Son of God, has a natural, and an ordained tendency, to keep the evil of sin more distinctly before the mind; and to render it more loathsome and offensive. It tends also to elevate our conceptions of the purity of God, of his long-suffering, of his condescension, and of his boundless compassion and grace: and by a perpetual reference, in our apprehensions and penitential language, to the agonies of the cross, as the wondrous medium through which pardoning mercy is constantly exercised, we necessarily shrink with still greater horror from sin, which rendered such agonies essential for our redemption. Thus by what we suffer, and by what we enjoy; by the exercise of an active faith in the unchangeable love of God, and the efficacy of the blood of atonement; by meditation, by prayer, and by a devout, and constant attention to the external means of instruction, impression, and consolation, our knowledge of our pardon, and acceptance, and completeness in the beloved is sustained; and though groans and tears may be often heard and shed over a remembrance of our sins of disobedience and transgression, yet this sensitive and excited state of feeling, is not incompatible with the fullest assurance, that all is well. "A man may have a deep sense of sin all his days, walk under the sense of it continually, abhor himself for his ingratitude, unbelief and rebellion against God; without having his assurance of forgiveness, and his assurance of final salvation disturbed;" if he be enabled to live by faith on the atonement, and intercession of Christ; and walk in newness of life, which is the only decisive evidence that his faith is of the operation of the Spirit.

[6] What is the practical tendency of this knowledge?

[1] It sets at rest the anxious solitudes of the heart. The prisoner, in anticipation of his trial, and during its progress, looks forward with intense interest to the verdict which is to restore him to liberty, or consign him to an

ignominious death. The verdict is returned; and it is against him; and his life, which was once his own property, is now the property of his sovereign. His only hope for its repossession, is in the royal clemency. He draws up his petition for mercy; and has it presented. These acts, which are purely mechanical, we can easily conceive; and almost as easily describe: but who can describe, or who can conceive, the convulsive state of his heart, while the issue hangs in doubtful suspense. He hopes, but fears: and again he hopes, but fear returns to torture his agonized frame. At length the door of his dark prison-house opens; the herald of mercy enters, and the condemned man is ushered into newness of life. What a change! What a blissful transition! The light of opening day now sheds a brighter radiance than ever gilded the horizon of his vision; the song of early bird, sounds in sweetest melody; and he feels, by the force of contrast, a stronger pulsation of joyous delight, than ever previously throbbed in his heart. This slight sketch of the mental process through which a condemned traitor passes, when passing from the dread of an ignominious death, to the enjoyment of life and liberty, is no fanciful, or overcharged description, of the more solemn and eventful process, through which a sinner, who has incurred the displeasure of God, passes, when he passes from the terrors of guilt, to the possession of that peace which passeth understanding: and from the fearful apprehensions of future wrath, to the hope of a blissful immortality. Then it is, like the sons of Israel when relieved from their inglorious captivity, he exclaims with emotions equally intense and thrilling, “The Lord hath done great things for me; whereof I am glad.”

But the transition is not equally sudden, nor equally self-evident to all, who pass from death to life. The moral process which takes place within the recesses of the heart; — giving rise to a sense of guilt, and an apprehension of danger — to contrition, to self-humiliation, and to hope; which induces to the habit of more serious and intense reflection, — to more fervent prayer, to a more frequent and a more devout reading of the bible; and to a more regular attendance on the means of grace, is in the experience of many, a process so slow that it is almost, if not altogether imperceptible. It may be regarded as an intermittent process, rather than a regularly progressive one. It admits of strong, and faint convictions — of deep, and slender emotions — of intense, and languid desires — of determined, and fluctuating resolutions; the light of deliverance sometimes shines for a little while, with radiant clearness, and then goes off into nightly shadows; the

voice of peace is occasionally heard, but it produces no permanent effect; and though there is no lingering desire cherished in the heart to go back, to re-enjoy the pleasures of sin, which have been forsaken, yet the prospect of attaining rest and quietness for ever, often becomes fainter, and fainter. But though the moral process be thus irregular, and though the signs of progression be thus equivocal and unsatisfactory, yet he who has begun the good work, will, and does carry it on, nor will he leave it in a state of incompleteness. The resistances which prevent the more rapid progress of the transition from death to life; from slavish dread, to the enjoyment of peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, will be gradually, yet perceptibly weakened; the “accepted time” will come, when the small still voice of mercy will be heard; when all dark forebodings will cease; when hope will spring up with vigor and expectancy, as it springs up in the heart of the shipwrecked mariner, when he sees the dawn of morning light; and when the believer in Christ, emancipated from the bondage of fear, will walk in the light of the divine countenance; the language of doubt and mistrust, will be exchanged for the language of holy confidence; the voice of joy and rejoicing will be heard in his tabernacle, as he exclaims, under the excitement of intense gratitude; — “this is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in my eyes.”

[2] It calls into powerful exercise the affections of the heart. When the Lord, in his administrative providence, moves on in a uniform manner, conferring blessings through the intervention of secondary causes, and visible agents, his hand is but rarely seen; but when “he comes out of his place,” and bestows unanticipated favors, then he is acknowledged as the giver of every good and perfect gift. This is especially true, when he is pleased to forgive a guilty, and self-condemned sinner. The exercise of mercy,

[1] Awakens the highest degree of admiration, at the condescending kindness of the Lord. In what impassioned language does the inspired prophet address him: “Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy.” Micah 7:18.

[2] Love is enkindled. The language of the Psalmist finds an utterance from the lips of every pardoned sinner: “I love the Lord, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications.” Ps. 116:1.

[3] Gratitude is excited: "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases." Ps. 103:1, 3. Bishop Home, in his comment on these words, says: At the head of God's mercies must for ever stand "remission of sin," or that full and free pardon purchased for us by Jesus Christ whereby, if we truly repent and believe in him, our transgressions, though ever so many, and ever so great, are done away, and become as if they had never been; from a state of guilt we pass into one of justification, from a state of enmity, into one of reconciliation, from a state of servitude, into one of liberty and sonship. Next to pardon of sin, considered as a crime, we are to commemorate the cure of it, considered as a disease, or indeed as a complication of diseases. "Who healeth all thy infirmities." The body experienceth the melancholy consequence of Adam's offense, and is subject to many infirmities; but the soul is subject to as many. What is pride, but lunacy; what is anger, but a fever; what is avarice, but a dropsy; what is lust, but a leprosy; what is sloth, but a deadly palsy? Perhaps there are spiritual maladies similar to all corporeal ones. When Jesus Christ was upon earth, he proved himself the physician of men's souls, by the cures he wrought upon their bodies. It is he alone who forgiveth all our iniquities; it is he alone who healeth all our infirmities. And the person who findeth his sin cured, hath a well-grounded assurance that it is "forgiven:" and who that knows and feels this, can repress the joyous utterance: "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name." Ps. 103:1.

[4] The necessary consequence of the exercise of forgiving love, is the complacent surrender, which the pardoned sinner makes of himself to the service of his Redeemer. Thy people, says the Psalmist, shall be willing in the day of thy power, and appear before thee adorned in the beauties of holiness. "The day of his power, is the season of their conversion, when the corruptions of nature can no longer hold out against the prevailing influences of grace, — when the heart, will, and affections, turn from the world to God: and they make, as the first disciples did, a free and voluntary offer of themselves, and all they have, to their Redeemer." With what holy delight, and with what grateful feelings is this act of self-surrender performed; and renewed, again and again, at subsequent periods of the divine life. Then it is they appear to the Redeemer, in the beauties of holiness; black in their own eyes, yet comely in his; adorned with humility, faith, hope, love, and all the graces of the Spirit." "What shall I render unto

the Lord for all his benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all his people.” Ps. 116:12-14.

As the manifestations of pardoning mercy, are made through the meritorious death of Jesus Christ; and as his death is the procuring cause of such manifestations, these holy affections of the heart are strongly excited towards him. Yes, I admire the character of the Son of God; especially his condescending benevolence. He was rich; but for my sake he became poor. He did exist in the form of God, and that form he might have retained, when he appeared on earth, but for my sake he " took upon himself the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Phil. 2:7, 8. Yes, he did possess a self-disposing power over his own life; and he gave that life a ransom for me; for me he wore the crown of thorns; his side was pierced for me; he shed his precious blood for the remission of my sins; he ever liveth to make intercession for me; and he has graciously promised to come again, and receive me to himself; that where he is, there I may be also, beholding his glory, and singing for ever, and for ever, “worthy is the Lamb.”¹¹

I recollect reading, some years ago, of an eminently pious Scotchman, who was often seen, by his equally pious servant, to weep. “Why, Sir,” said his servant on one occasion, “are you so often weeping?” The venerable man paused, and then replied. “I weep, because I cannot love my Saviour more fervently.” And I would ask, where can we find a redeemed, and pardoned sinner, who does not feel that such tears of sorrow should stream from his eyes?

[3] It excites strong sympathy in behalf of others. It is not possible, I think, for any man to be delivered from a condition of extreme danger, without feeling a tender solicitude for others who may be exposed to it. Can the sailor, who has been miraculously rescued from the perils of the mighty deep, stand and look with an eye of indifference on his comrades, who are still hanging on the masts and rigging of the sinking vessel; or who are endeavoring, amidst the raging violence of the tempest, to reach land, on some broken plank? Impossible! Will not the prisoner, who is restored, by an act of royal clemency, to his sweet home, drop the generous tear of commiseration, over those he leaves behind under the sentence of death?

And think you, O reader! that the pardoned sinner, who is delivered from the wrath to come, and on whom the gift of eternal life is conferred, can congratulate himself on his escape, and prospects; and yet feel no tender sympathy for others, who are still in the gall of bitterness, and in the bonds of iniquity: still the children of wrath, fitting themselves, though unconscious of the awful fact, for endless destruction? Impossible! "Why do you weep?" said a gay and thoughtless youth, to his pious mother. "Why weep, my child? because you are treasuring up to yourself wrath, against the day of wrath." Yes; the pardoned sinner, like his divine Lord, has compassion on them that are out of the way, and who are ready to perish: and this feeling is often rendered painfully intense, by the indifference they manifest to their own appalling condition. He remonstrates, and at times ventures to give the alarm; but all in vain. As they feel not the pressure of guilt on their conscience, they apprehend no danger; and cry peace, peace, when sudden destruction awaits them. He sees the rising up of that fearful storm, which will fall upon them, when they pass into the eternal world; the perspective of that terrific vision, is present to his imagination, when they will say "to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" But as he has no power to rouse them to an apprehension of their coming danger, and thus induce them to flee from the wrath to come, like his Lord, when descending from the top of Olivet, looking on the devoted city, he weeps; but his tears are the tears of agonizing, yet unavailing compassion, and he turns away from the scene, breathing the language of fervent prayer. " Ah! reign, wherever man is found, My Lord, beloved. and divine! Then shall my noblest joys abound, When every human heart is thine. A thousand sorrows pierce my soul, To think that all are not thine own; Ah! be adored from pole to pole: Where is thy zeal? Arise, be known."

[4] It yields to the pardoned sinner the sweetest consolation, when he is oppressed by the adverse events of a dark and mysterious providence. I have sometimes known, from the testimony of a believer, that the great blessing of an assurance of his forgiveness and salvation, which he has sought in vain in the days of prosperity, has been reserved against a day of adversity: and has then been imparted. Coming at such a period, when depressed and nearly overwhelmed by the sorrows of the world, it has had all the inspiring effect of an unexpected visit from a friend when far from

home, sojourning amongst strangers. It has at once removed. the heaviest load that pressed down the heart; rolled away the darkest cloud that intercepted the vision of future bliss; and given a vigor and chaste vivacity to the spirits, which no other exciting cause could I give. "I now see," says the believer, "that infinite wisdom determines the time when the choicest blessings shall be bestowed. Had I fully known, in the days of my prosperity, that my sins were pardoned, and that I was then accepted in the beloved, I should have had happier days than I ever enjoyed; but in that case, on descending into the deep waters of tribulation, I should have descended without any novel discoveries of the mercy of the Father, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, or the love of the Spirit: which have combined to render my present condition far preferable to my former. A full assurance of my salvation, if it had been attained when my pleasant things flourished around me, would, like the constant presence of the pillar of cloud and of fire, have long since become so familiar, that its transporting effect might have become considerably weakened; but coming as it has come at this critical period, when hostile powers, and adverse occurrences are moving against me, it is no less animating and consolatory, than the unanticipated presence of the Son of God with his faithful disciples, who were cast into the furnace of fire. I should have been thankful for this precious gift at any time, but to have it conferred now, makes it doubly valuable, as it is an indisputable token of my Father's loving-kindness, given as a gracious substitute for mercies that have been taken from me; — the gushing forth of the pure stream of divine consolation, from a concealed fountain, in the wilderness of woe, for the bitter waters of Mara, at which I have been so long attempting to allay my thirst." He now hears the inaudible voice of the Lord speaking to him out of the cloud, now irradiated by the manifestations of his invisible presence, but which, on its first appearance, he "feared to enter;" — and he feels calm, and confident, amidst all the dangers which surround him. "But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." Isaiah 43:1, 2.

[5] It gives a calm and holy confidence in 'the anticipation of death. The believer who knows that his sins are forgiven, may at times dread the

approach of death, not because he dreads what will follow, but what usually precedes, and is attendant on death. The lengthened sickness; the restless nights; the parting look of agonized friendship and love; and the pain of dying, may, when in the distance, assume such a gloomy air and repulsive form, as deeply to depress the stoutest heart that ever felt supreme love to the Redeemer. This depression of the animal spirits, when anticipating the possible accompaniments of death, is not incompatible with the firmest assurance of entering into rest. This firm assurance in some, is the sweet calm of “perfect peace;” in others it is the “joy unspeakable, and full of glory.” But whether calm, or ecstatic, it is the assurance of one who feels that he is a sinner, yet a pardoned sinner; of one who depends for eternal life, with an immovable fixedness, on the death, and mediation of Jesus Christ; of one whose sense of unworthiness is so keen and humiliating, that the exercise of mercy in his behalf, excites as much astonishment as it does gratitude and love.

The sacred historian informs us, that the design of our Lord in giving such a graphic description of the future martyrdom of the apostle Peter,¹² was to signify beforehand, “by what death he should glorify God.” The expression is remarkable, and it is pregnant with an important meaning. God is to be glorified, not only by the life, but by the death of his people; and this is done when “they die patiently, submitting to his will: die cheerfully, rejoicing in hope of the glory of God; and die usefully, witnessing to the truth and power of religion, and encouraging others to expect the same consolations and hopes.” It is at this crisis in the history of man, that the worth of his principles is generally tested; and then it is, that faith in the atonement, and intercession of our exalted mediator, displays its superiority to every other source of human dependence, and consolation. Infidelity, in that eventful hour, is often seen to tremble, and shrink back with horror, from the dawn of eternity; to give utterance to the bitterest terms of self-reproach, and self-condemnation; and to feel the first droppings of that storm of wrath, which will never spend its fury. Yes, often have I been called to witness the awful scene — a fellow sinner detecting, in his last moments, the fallacy of the opinions he has embraced, when living amidst the gaieties and follies of the world; — and discovering, when the discovery comes too late, the truth of that theory of faith, which he has often made the subject of his ridicule, and of his scorn. Yes, often have I heard such bitter exclamations as the following: — “Oh that I had never

ridiculed the bible!” “Oh that I had never profaned the Sabbath!” “Oh that I had never forsaken the temple of the Lord!” “Oh that I had never allowed my companions to have beguiled me into the ways of evil! Oh that I had never visited the unhallowed haunts of impiety!” “My doom is fixed, and I am as certain of being damned, as if I were now in hell;” said an aged infidel, whom I visited a few years ago, but visited in vain. “I am going,” said a young man to me, as I drew near the bed on which he was dying, “to take a leap in the dark, and the consequences will be dreadful and final.”

But no such horrifying scenes as these strike on the senses, when we go into the chamber, where the heir of immortality is preparing to quit the stage of life. He utters no piercing cries; no hollow sepulchral groans come from the recesses of his heart; there is no mental anguish convulsing his exterior frame by the tremendous violence of its eruptions; no wild look, or fixed stare, is traceable in his eye, indicative of some coming evil. No. It is the reverse of this. He is tranquil, but not motionless; his hands are often raised in the attitude of prayer, when no sounds are heard. He speaks, he speaks as one who feels that he has been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ; who has been preserved by his power; and who expects, in a little while, to see him, arrayed in the majesty of his glory. It is delightful to listen to what he says. He gives utterance to the language of contrition, but not of remorse; to sorrow, that he has done no more to honor his beloved Redeemer during his life, but there is no expression of regret, that he has yielded himself to his service. He gives a solemn charge to his fellow-disciples, who are with him, “to be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord;” and then, after expressing a hope, that he shall meet them in another and a better world, he commends his spirit to the care of the Lord Jesus, and gently breathes his last earthly breath. We retire from such a scene as this, and exclaim, as Balaam exclaimed on a memorable occasion in the history of his singular life; “Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his.”

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1. Dr. Owen, page 87.↩
 2. Romans 3:24-26; Heb. 10:19-22.↩
 3. Grovenor.↩

4. Dr. Owen.↵
5. Dr. Owen.↵
6. Hall's Works, vol. 1., pp. 437.↵
7. See Numbers 35:1- See John 5:4.↵
8. Dr. Owen.↵
9. Luke 11:3, 4.↵
10. 1 Peter 2:4.↵
11. Rev. 5:12.↵
12. John 21:18, 19.↵

Chapter 3. Defense of Those Who Have Or Seek Assurance.

The Charge brought against those who Profess to have attained, or who are laboring to attain this Knowledge, Examined and Repelled.

[The primary design]{smallcaps} of the mission and death of Jesus Christ, and the consequent bestowment of the divine Spirit, is to repair the injury which the introduction of Sin has entailed on man; by restoring him to that original state of righteousness and true holiness, in which he was created. This act of restoration commences, when he is enlightened and renewed, and is reconciled to God by Jesus Christ; and it is perfected, on his entering into heaven, Where he is presented faultless before the presence of the divine glory, with exceeding joy. Now When he is undergoing this process of restoration, Which is to prepare him to appear, as a being of Spotless purity, in the presence of Jehovah; and of which process he has an unmistakable consciousness, Shall we say that he is laboring under a fanatical delusion? Or in other words, when he is enlightened, and is renewed; and when he has peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, and does rejoice in hope of the glory of God, will any one, who admits the primary design of the death of Christ, and the consequent bestowment of the divine Spirit, to be what I have stated it to be, venture to say, that its partial accomplishment is a creature of the imagination? What! when an effect is produced, which can be traced, as by the finger of mathematical certainty, to an adequate cause; and an effect, which the original contriver of the work of restoration, said he would produce, — will any one, who avows his belief in the power and integrity of the wondrous contriver, venture to say, that this palpably super-human effect, is an airy nothing; or a something which grows out of the hotbed of fanaticism? Yet so it is. Yes, we have men of great intellectual acuteness, and of great moral worth; men who are sincere believers in the divine origin of Christianity, and who

disdain to hold the least fellowship with any sectional part of the shifting camp of infidelity; men who revere the authority of the word of God, who are regular in their attendance at public worship, and who celebrate the ordinances of their faith, with devout solemnity, who boldly assert the utter impossibility of anyone acquiring a knowledge, while he is on earth, of the remission of his sins; and who do not hesitate to say, that all pretensions to the possession of this knowledge are presumptuous, or the delusive imaginations of fanaticism.

1. The Charge of Fanaticism

I will now examine this charge, namely, that it is presumptuous, or fanatical, in any man to assert the possibility of attaining a knowledge that his sins are forgiven; and that his salvation is absolutely certain. I admit that it is impossible for any man to acquire this knowledge, while he believes that its attainment is impossible; and also that it would be an act of daring presumption for any man, who is living in the voluntary commission of any sin, to assert that he knows his sins are forgiven. But it is not against such men that the charge is brought; but against men who are known to be men of decided piety; and who adorn their Christian profession, by works of practical righteousness. I will now proceed to prove, that this charge, when brought against such men, cannot be fairly sustained.

[1] It cannot be sustained by the authority of the word of God. This word decides what we are to believe in reference to the great questions of this inquiry; and from its decisions there is no appeal. Now this word pronounces a sentence of condemnation on every man, who does not repent, and who does not believe in Christ; but it declares that all who do repent, and do believe, shall be forgiven, and shall be saved. If an unbeliever, or any man who is living in the voluntary commission of sin, should say, that he knows from the testimony of the word of God, that a sentence of condemnation stands recorded against him; shall we say that he is guilty of an act of presumption; or that he is laboring under some fanatical delusion? Should we not rather say, he speaks in harmony with the solemn testimony of the Lord; and by his frank confession, does homage to its truth and authority. If I now reverse this case, I think the untenableness of the charge under consideration, will be apparent. A man repents of having sinned

against God, and he forsakes his sins, and he knows it ,he implores mercy in the name of Christ, and he places an implicit dependence on the death and mediation of Jesus Christ, for forgiveness, and for eternal life; and he knows it. What is such a man to say, to speak in harmony with the truthful testimony of the word of the Lord? Can he say, he knows that a sentence of condemnation still stands recorded against him? What! the recorded sentence the same, after he has repented, and trusted in Christ, as when he was living in sin, and in unbelief? What! will the God of justice, and of mercy, treat alike the bold transgressor who defies his authority; and the humble penitent weeping at his footstool? Shall the weary and heavy laden, who come to Jesus Christ for rest, and peace, and eternal life, meet with the same treatment, as the profane scoffer, who from his chair utters his hard speeches against him? What man will dare to imagine this, who bows with reverence to the authority of the word of God? If, then, that word compels us to believe, there is, and will be, a difference of treatment observed towards those who fear God, and those who fear him not — between those who receive Christ, and those who reject him; is it, I ask, an act of presumption to avow this belief? And if we know that we have repented of our sins, and do daily repent of them; and if we know, that we do trust in Christ for the remission of our sins, and for the gift of eternal life, is the avowal of our belief in the fidelity of the Son of God, to be regarded as an infallible sign, that we are spellbound by some strange delusion? No. The act of presumption is committed by the man who presumes that God will sacrifice his integrity, rather than give to the contrite sinner a satisfactory proof, that he delighteth in mercy, even though he has declared that " he taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in hzs mercy." Ps. 147:11. The delusion rests over the mind of that man, who imagines that Jesus Christ will not, now he is exalted on the throne of his glory, give rest of soul, and confer the gift of eternal life, on those for whom he lived, and agonized, and died; and whom he invites to come to him to be saved.

[2] This charge is not sustained, by the sanction of analogy. Analogical reasoning, is a species of reasoning which possesses very great weight, on all questions which are to be decided by moral evidence. The question under consideration is one of this order: it being a question to be set at rest by the evidence of testimony. A penitent sinner founding his belief of forgiveness, on the absolute promises of God, who delighteth in mercy ,and his expectation of eternal life, on the absolute promises of the Lord Jesus

Christ, who died to effect his salvation. We now turn our attention to analogy; and then we shall see what sanction she gives to the validity of such a belief; and to the consistency of such an expectation. A child offends a father, who promises to forgive him, and re-admit him within the family circle, if he repent of his offenses, and solicits forgiveness. The son does repent, and he does pray for forgiveness. Is it, I ask, an act of presumption on the part of the relenting son, to believe that his own father will do, what he has promised to do; or will anyone say, that he is laboring under a delusion, when speaking in rapture about returning home, and re-mingling, as in former days, in its hallowed associations?

A subject rebels against his sovereign, who promises that if he will lay down his hostile weapons, and if he will submit to his authority, and if he will, in terms of self-humiliation, implore mercy, he will forgive him, and liberate him, and advance him to honor and happiness. The hostile weapons are surrendered; the subject returns to his allegiance; and he does sue for mercy in the most self-abasing terms. Is it, I ask, an act of presumption, on the part of the yielding subject, to believe that his gracious sovereign will do what he has promised to do; or will anyone venture to say, that he is laboring under a delusion, when speaking with rapture about his approaching liberation, and the unmerited elevation to which he is to be advanced? I think not. Consistency requires that the relenting son, and the yielding subject, to do honor to the character of the father and the sovereign, should expect to receive the blessings which are promised; rather than cherish a lurking suspicion, that the promise is given to deceive; — regarding it as a mere lure to bring them under subjection, that punishment may be inflicted with greater ease and certainty. Analogy, then, instead of sustaining the charge of presumption, or delusion, against the believer who avows his belief in the pardoning . mercy of God; and the gratuitous bestowment of eternal life by the Lord Jesus Christ; gives her direct, and most expressive sanction, to the consistency of his belief, and the rationality of his expectation.

[3] This charge cannot be sustained, by any supposed advantages resulting, either to the honor of the divine government, or the moral purity of the penitent sinner; by his being kept ignorant of the actual remission of his sins, and his consequent right to expect eternal life. If the exercise of mercy would embolden the pardoned sinner to renewed acts of

transgression; and if the certain expectation of eternal life, would necessarily render him indifferent about a spiritual meetness for its enjoyment, there would be a manifest propriety in keeping him in a state of ignorance, and consequent uncertainty; but for the reasons already assigned, neither of these consequences can follow from his possessing the most satisfactory assurance of his present freedom from condemnation, and of his future salvation. Indeed, ignorance on these great questions will not secure that degree of obedience to the divine law, which knowledge will produce: as the obedience of a pardoned and saved sinner, will have the powerful, auxiliary aid of love and gratitude, to impel and perpetuate it; while the obedience of an unpardoned sinner, will be a careless or sullen submission to a violated law, which has pronounced on him the sentence of death. There is great force in the following lines: —

“Law and terror do but harden,
All the time they work alone:
But a sense of blood-bought pardon,
Soon dissolves a heart of stone.”

Indeed, the experience of all ages, and of every department of legislative authority proves, that while a criminal is under the terror of a penal sentence, and is kept in a state of uncertainty as to the issue of his application for mercy, there is a stronger disposition to abhor, than to reverence the authority which condemns; and to reject the law, which entails a curse, rather than to eulogize its beneficent character and tendency.

I knew a case of a young man of very accomplished manners, and a highly cultivated mind; who for striking a superior officer, was sentenced by a court martial to be hung. On the morning appointed for his execution, he was brought on deck; the crew looking on in breathless anxiety and sympathy. Not a tear fell from his eye: not a muscle of his face was seen to move; the spirit of a daring heroism nerved him to look on the apparatus of death, and its preparatory ceremonies, with a stern steadfastness which convinced every one present that his haughty, and unbending soul, knew not how to vibrate to the passion of fear. When all was still and quiet, except the wind which blew a stormy gale, and the waves that lashed the sides of the ship; the instrument was produced and’ unfolded, which gave a legal sanction to the whole of the proceedings; but instead of hearing the fatal

sentence confirmed, as he expected, it was a free pardon'. He was taken by surprise. His whole frame became greatly agitated. His eye rolled about, as the eye of delirium moves, indicating by its wild stare, that it fell on no definite object. stood still, as though he had no power or intention to move from the spot, which had been as the stepping-stone of death, but which was now the base of the throne of mercy. All became alarmed; as he, who had evinced courage enough to meet death in its most terrific forms, seemed not to possess sufficient strength or courage to cling to life. The surgeon stepped forward, and felt his pulse. Its course was nearly stayed. Stimulants were supplied. The pulse was felt again; After a lengthened pause, signs of returning animation and consciousness were visible. His friends pressed near him; spoke softly and kindly to him; congratulated him; and some gently touched him, and shook his hands. A scene now sprang up which no artist could sketch, or orator describe. The stem youth, who stood erect and immovable, when the ministers of death Were moving around him; whose color changed not, when his eye caught sight of the fatal rope, and the fatal beam; and whose lofty spirit appeared insensible to the touch of terror, or the touch of sympathy, suddenly fell; he fell on his knees; he wept for a few seconds; it was an audible weeping; rendered still more solemn and impressive by the weeping of others. He then lifted up his tremulous voice in thanksgiving to the God of heaven, for this wonderful interposition of mercy; and then arose, and thanked his generous benefactors, who had so unexpectedly obtained the remission of his sentence, and his liberty.

This youth immediately returned to his father's home, and lived in future life to advert, and often to advert with emotions of gratitude and praise, to the deck, where mercy rejoiced over judgment, and on which deck he passed from death to life; and where, by a process conducted by an invisible agent, as rapid as it was unmerited and unexpected, he was quickened from the death of sin, into newness of life; and from that day, to the day of his departure to a better world, he lived to prove, that the exercise of mercy secures to human, no less than to divine law, a more perfect, and a purer obedience to its enjoined precepts, than can be secured by the severest inflictions of justice.

I have now examined the charge which is alleged against those who profess to know that their sins are forgiven, and that their salvation is absolutely certain; and I think I have proved, that it is not sustained either

by the authority of the word of God, or by the sanctions of analogy; nor by any advantages which would flow from a state of ignorance.

2. Repelling the Charge

I will now advance a step further; and attempt to repel the charge: and I think,

[1] It may be repelled, as false, by an argument drawn from the divine benevolence. The various contrivances which are traceable in the different departments of the government of God, are so many illustrious developments of his active benevolence; as each contrivance is intended to answer the double purpose of gratification and utility. We perceive contrivance answering this double purpose, in the works of nature. I could easily multiply instances in proof of the correctness of this statement; but I will confine the attention of the reader to the structure and capabilities of the human tongue. The chief purpose in the formation of this organ, is to supply to man an instrument of speech; and to render him assistance in the work of mastication, by the facility with which it can, from its singular flexibility, shift the food from one part of the mouth to the other. Here we see a beneficent contrivance, answering the purpose of utility: but by covering the tongue with a very thin skin, and placing the papellae on its surface, it becomes endowed with the sense of taste; thus answering the purpose of gratification. Now, if I speak of enjoying my food, before it goes into the stomach to administer to the sustenance of life, will any sane man think of bringing against me the charge of laboring under a delusion? Certainly not. He will rather admire the goodness of God, in so arranging his complexed contrivances, as to make a present gratification [precede] {smallcaps} a future advantage.

We may trace contrivance answering this double purpose, in the dispensations of providence. — We know from the word of God, that the events of providence, however dark and portentous, are designed to work for the believer “a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,” which he will possess on entering the eternal world; and also “to work together for his good,” during the period he dwells on earth; and in the accomplishment of these beneficent designs, we know they administer to his present

enjoyment. Hence, how common the grateful acknowledgment? “Before I was afflicted, I went astray; but now have I kept thy word. It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes.” Ps. 119:67, 71. There is joy, in grief. This is no poetical illusion. It is a moral fact, attested by experience.

“Sweet to lie passive in his hands,
And know no will but his.”

Yes, the bitter often yields sweetness, as the poisonous flower supplies the bee with honey. There are songs for the night of adversity; and in the valley of weeping, the tears of gratitude fall, alternately with those of sorrow. “Although,” said the Prophet, when looking round on the appalling scene of desolation, “the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.” Hab. 3:17, 18. The three Hebrew youths, had a higher sense of mental enjoyment, when walking amidst the flames of the furnace, favored with the presence of the Son of God, than they would have felt, if they had been moving amidst the splendors of the court, receiving the honors usually conferred on the ministers of state. The Apostle appears to have had sublimer transports of spirit, after he was pierced with the thorn in the flesh, and while buffeted by the messenger of Satan, than before those severe afflictions fell upon him. “He gloried in his infirmities.” In the prison, where his feet were made fast in the stocks; and his back was lacerated by the tyrant’s scourge; he sang praises at the hour of midnight. The Christian martyr has been seen walking with calm serenity to the stake; and when the noise usually attendant on martyrdom, has died off into comparative stillness, his melodious notes have been wafted by the gentle breezes, to the listening and astonished multitude.

“I had much delight,” says an intelligent author, “this morning, in visiting a good man who has been bedridden these twenty-five years. I was preparing to pity him, but he called on me to rejoice. ‘Are you not wearied out with the length of your affliction?’ ‘Wearied, Sir?’ said he. ‘No, nature would soon faint, but God sustains me. I could lie here another twenty-five years, if it pleased God. I have found this bed to be the very gate of heaven.

Length of my affliction, Sir! O let me not call it long; it is short, very short, and will soon be over. These light afflictions, which are but for a moment, work for me a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.’ ‘This is a happy state of mind,’ said I. ‘Thank God for it!’ said he, as in a state of devotion. Then addressing me — ‘Why, yes, and every thing God does is to make us happy. Is he not all love? He cannot, then, be unkind. Is he not all wise? He cannot, then, do wrong. Are not his promises yea and amen in Christ Jesus? He cannot, then, break his word. None who have trusted him have repented of it. My day of affliction has been twenty-five years’ long; but I have found as my day, so my strength has been. Blessed be his holy name! O, Sir, I dare not complain. My affliction is a mercy.’”

Now if we see an afflicted believer bowing in resignation to the divine will; if we hear him say, amidst his privations and his sufferings, that he would rather have his trials, with his consolations, than relief without them — will any Christian man accuse him of laboring under some fanatical delusion? I think not. He would rather admire the goodness of God in so arranging his complexed contrivances, as to make, in this mysterious department. of his administration, a present gratification precede a future benefit.

If, then, contrivance can be traced in the various works of nature: and if we can often perceive it amidst the apparent confusion of a dark and mysterious providence, where we should least expect to discover it; and if the design of every perceptible contrivance is to answer the double purpose of gratification and utility: may we not expect to be able to trace it, in that more select and gracious department of his administration, in which, through the death of the great Mediator, “mercy and truth meet together,” and mercy is heard to rejoice over judgment? In this more select, and gracious department of his administration, provision is made for the pardon and salvation of the guilty and the worthless; and if so, is it not reasonable to suppose, that he who has contrived to yield gratification, while contributing to the support of animal life; will contrive to impart the consolations of mercy, while conducting the moral process by which man is to be saved from the second death? Is this too much for us to expect, after the discoveries we have made of his disposition in favor of human enjoyment and happiness! Indeed, if we were unable to trace any symptom of such contrivance, as relates to present gratification, as well as ultimate

advantage, should we not be compelled to think, that in this most momentous department of his administration, there is wanting that one element of benevolence, which he has so lavishly displayed in every other?

But we can trace contrivance in the theory of redemption, answering this double purpose. Our Lord tells us, “That God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.” John 3:16. The gift is his only begotten Son; his equal; the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person; and the design of the gift is to save believers from perishing, and confer on them everlasting life. The Apostle, who knew the order of the divine procedure, when accomplishing an original purpose, says — “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.” Rom. 8:32. His argument is this — having satisfied the claims of justice, by the death of his Son; will he not now display the munificence of his kindness, by freely giving what is essential to our happiness. Yes, it is contrived in the scheme of redemption that with him, that is, with the reception of Christ, by faith, as our Mediator and Redeemer, shall be conveyed a manifestation of the pardoning love of God, which is of more importance to our present happiness, than, any other blessing he could confer.

The apostle asserts, and the experience of believers in all ages confirms the truth of his assertion, that those who are justified by faith, have peace with God, through Christ; that they have free access to the divine presence; and that it is their privilege to rejoice in hope of a state of future blessedness. And after dwelling at some length, and in various forms of apt and impressive illustration on the freeness and greatness of the love of God displayed in the salvation of man, through the death of Christ, he concludes by saying — “And not only so, but we also joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.” Romans 5:11. Receiving the atonement, (or reconciliation) the apostle states, is not only a pledge of future blessedness, but is a source of present joy. Peace, and joy, and hope of eternal glory, are necessarily consequent, on our being justified by faith, through the Lord Jesus Christ; and thus a present gratification is supplied to the believer, as an earnest of the certainty of his final salvation. If, then, this be the gracious arrangement of infinite wisdom and benevolence, when we hear a believer in Christ, expressing what he

feels, and knows, and enjoys, in the very language rendered by the spirit of inspiration, sacred to such utterances, shall we say that he is laboring under some fanatical delusion? Shall we admit that he speaks rationally, when he speaks of relishing the food by which his animal life is sustained; shall we admit that he speaks truthfully, when he speaks of being supported and comforted by the manifestations of divine power and benevolence, when passing through the severe trials of a dark and mysterious providence; yet when he speaks of enjoying such a sense of the pardoning love of God, as keeps his mind in perfect peace; and as inspires him with such a glowing hope of a blissful immortality, as destroys the fear of death, shall we say that his testimony ought to be rejected as false; or treated with the same cold, or scornful indifference, as we usually manifest towards the vague rhapsodies of fanaticism? Certainly not; if our judgment be regulated by the infallible statements of the word of God. In that case, we should receive his testimony, as an additional evidence in confirmation of the primary design of the death of Christ, and the consequent bestowment of the divine Spirit; and should, with impassioned gratitude, adore the goodness of God, in preserving the original design of contrivance, in the more select department of his administration, no less than in the more general; — allowing believers in Christ to participate in a present gratification, while passing through a mysterious process which is preparing them for a higher, and nobler, and purer state of blessedness, which will continue for ever. Hence the following lines, which are tinged with the strong coloring of the poet's imagination, embody and give a vivid expression to a sublime reality: —

"The men of grace have found,
Glory begun below:
Celestial fruits on earthly ground,
From faith and hope may grow.

The bill of Zion yields,
A thousand sacred sweets;
Before we reach the heavenly fields,
Or walk the golden streets."

[2] This charge may be repelled as false, by an argument derived from the mediatorial work of Christ.

[a] From that part of his mediatorial work which he has actually accomplished. He was to shed his blood for the remission of sin, and for the redemption of sinners; and he has done it. He died for the ungodly; suffering the just for the unjust. From the intrinsic worth of the atonement made by his death, an equitable provision is made for the salvation of all; yet in the concurring purpose of the Mediator, by whom the atonement was made, and the Sovereign Ruler, by whom it was accepted, as a public vindication of his adherence to the law of righteousness in the exercise of mercy, its effective application is to be limited. Hence the propriety and the consistency of the unlimited, and the restricted terms which are employed by the sacred writers when speaking of it. "The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world I" John 1:29. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ; according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved." Eph. 1:3-6. "In whom," saith the Apostle, "we," that is, "we who are thus chosen, and who are thus predestinated, [have] redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;" and it is our privilege to know it.

In the epistles addressed to the members of the different churches, we find some things specified, which related to the peculiar circumstances of their condition; but it is not the intention of the divine Spirit, who spoke through the Apostles, that the great facts and doctrines of the theory of redemption, should be regarded as relating either exclusively, or specially to them. They were not entitled to any spiritual blessing to which we are not equally entitled, if we, like them, have been enlightened and renewed; and like them trust in Christ, for the remission of our sins, and for eternal life: as "The righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe; for there is no difference." Rom. 3:22. Our faith in Christ springs from the same originating cause, as that from which theirs sprang; it being to all the gift of God. And the language which they employed when speaking of their experimental knowledge, and power of the truth, we may employ with equal propriety, if we really know the grace

of our Lord Jesus Christ, and have felt its transforming influence. They could say, "Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ:" by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." Rom. 5:1, 2; and so may we, if, like them, "we are made free from the dominion of sin, and are become the servants of righteousness." They could say: "In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins." Col. 1:14; so may we, if, like them, "We are delivered from the power of darkness, and are translated into the kingdom of his dear Son." They could say: "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." 1 John 4:10; so may we, if like them, "we hold fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."

The apostle John says, that they who believed in the Son of God, had "the witness" in themselves; — a consciousness which no arguments could disturb, that they did believe in him, and were consequently entitled, by virtue of the divine promises, to the possession of "eternal life;" and as this internal witness is a necessary accompaniment of the act of believing on the Son of God — limited by no time — restricted to no denomination of professing Christians — it produces in believers now, a consciousness which yields a high degree of grateful satisfaction that they do believe in Him, and are consequently as much entitled to expect eternal life, as the primitive believers were.

If, then, the death of Christ be intended to answer this double purpose, first to vindicate the honor of the divine government in its acts of mercy and grace; and secondly, to have a practical effect in securing the remission of sin and eternal life to them that believe; and if the primitive believers could speak with confidence of having redemption, and the remission of their sins, without being stigmatized as fanatics, by professors of the same faith; I should like to know by what authority any one, who admits the divine origin of the Christian faith, can venture to bring the charge of fanatical delusion against a believer, of "like precious faith" with the primitive believers, when he speaks as they spoke; and claims, in common with them, the spiritual blessings which are conferred on all in every age, who trust in Christ. Such a charge, if sustainable against believers in this age, would be equally sustainable against believers in any former age; but if the objector do not feel at liberty to stigmatize the primitive believers, as fanatics, or

enthusiasts, laboring under a delusion, he will feel the necessity of withdrawing the charge altogether: and of admitting that there is a producible effect, to be produced in him, or he is guilty of holding the truth in practical unrighteousness; a moral condition of existence, at once palpably inconsistent, and awfully hazardous.

[b] This charge may be repelled as false, by an argument derived from that part of his mediatorial work, which is yet in course of accomplishment. The Apostle says, after a luminous statement of the design of the death of Christ, as the one offering which answered the typical sacrifices of the levitical dispensation, and which led to their abolition, — “For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.” Heb. 9:24. He is now living in heaven, and he appears officially in the presence of God for us. He is our Mediator, Intercessor, and Advocate; and these relative characters involve the discharge of corresponding obligations. It is through faith in his mediation, that we have access to the Father, presenting our prayers in the name of Christ, according to his own regulation and promise, — “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father ’in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name:”ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.” John 16:23, 24. He intercedes in our behalf, either orally, or by virtue of his merit; and his intercession embraces all the manifestations of divine beneficence and power, which were included in the last prayer he offered up,¹ just before he had finished the stupendous work of man’s redemption. If so, and to doubt it is to suppose that in his exalted state, he is less solicitous for the welfare of his people, than he was in the days of his humiliation, he now prays for their preservation, their sanctification, and their glorification; that their joy in him,² as the Saviour and Intercessor, may be complete; and that they may partake of those manifestations of paternal love,³ which were in a preeminent degree vouchsafed to himself. And he ever liveth to carry on his intercessory pleadings;⁴ and it is on the perpetuity of his official existence, and consequent intercession, that the Apostle bases his ability to save to the uttermost, all in every age, who come unto God by him.

If, then, a believer in Christ, have access to the Father, through the mediation of ’Jesus Christ, when engaged in the hallowed exercises of

meditation, of prayer, and of thanksgiving; if his fellowship with the Father, and with his Son. Jesus Christ, be intimate, purifying, and elevating; if he feel the kindling of sacred joy, when meditating on the exceeding riches of divine grace, displayed in his conversion, acceptance, and preservation; and on the condescending dignity and exuberant lovingkindness of the Lord Jesus Christ; and if the love of God be shed abroad in his heart, in answer to the intercessory pleadings of his glorified Intercessor, shall we stigmatize him as a fanatic; and reproach him as laboring under some delusion? What! shall the coming down of divine influence to effect the sanctification of the soul of man; shall the putting forth of divine power to preserve him from the multiplied evils which abound in the world; shall the enkindling of holy joy, from a distinct recognition of the ability and willingness of Jesus Christ to save him, a worthless sinner ready to perish; and shall the warranted anticipation, of being admitted into union with all the redeemed in the heavenly state, be regarded as the spectre of evil which affrights reason from her throne, calling up some mystic spirit of delirium, to usurp its authority and power? To what an awful degree of alienation from God must that man be reduced; and how fatally ignorant must he be of the primary design of the faith which he admits to be of divine origin, even to insinuate such a charge; which if sustainable, would necessarily prove the perfect inutility of the theory of redemption, as a source of mental consolation, or as a foundation of a sinner's hope.

The relation subsisting between Jesus Christ and his people, is not a feigned, but a real relation; like the relation subsisting between kindred spirits who are bound together by the indissoluble ties of friendship, — involving obligations, and giving rise to expectations which correspond with their relative condition. Hence the argument which the Apostle employs to enforce constancy in the profession of our faith; and to encourage us to expect divine assistance, during the season of our greatest perils and afflictions, is invested with an extraordinary degree of impressive tenderness and power. “Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” Heb. 4:14, 16. His people live on earth; he lives in heaven. They live to suffer; he lives to sympathize with them under their sufferings. They live to feel their weakness; he lives to impart strength to them equal to their day; and while

they often fear, lest through the subtle influence of temptation they shall come short of entering into rest; lie protects and upholds them, and assures them, that because he “lives, they shall live also;” that not one shall perish of all “that come unto God by him.”

I go and visit an old friend, whom I have long known, and long esteemed, for his steadfast adherence to his religious profession, notwithstanding the opposition he has had to encounter; and as an extraordinary dispensation of suffering has set in upon him, my design in going is to offer him the expression of my sympathy. I see another seated by his side, who has visited him, for the same benevolent purpose. We are both struck with his appearance; he is tranquil, submissive, cheerful; he neither murmurs against the mysterious will of providence, nor does he appear to doubt its beneficial issue. “Now it is,” he says, “I understand the meaning of many parts of the word of God, which I did not understand before these trials came upon me. Yes, Jesus the Son of God, is touched with the feeling of our infirmities; and blessed be his name, he does give me grace to comfort and support me in this time of need. He has said, and I feel there is a divine reality in his saying, “My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” 2 Cor. 12:9. And how consolatory to be assured, on a testimony we cannot doubt, that “our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” 2 Cor. 4:17. We both retire; and my companion says, “it is gratifying, Sir, to find our afflicted friend so composed at such a crisis; but he is laboring under a strange delusion.” “In relation to what subject, Sir?” “Why, Sir, in ascribing his composure to the sympathy of the Son of God; when he ought rather to have referred it to the evenness of his own temper, and his own moral fortitude.” “But, Sir, is he not the best judge of the source from whence he derives his consolation, and his moral strength; and does he not, by ascribing its bestowment to the sympathetic kindness of Jesus, the Son of God, do precisely what the Apostle would do, under similar circumstances?” “I have, Sir, always regarded, and always shall regard such references, as a decisive proof of the facility with which a mind, which is imbued with religious ideas of a peculiar order, can bring itself under the spell of what I call a fanatical delusion.” “Be it so, Sir, but then you must admit from the case we have just witnessed, that the delusion answers all the purpose of a reality; that it

is invested with a sufficiency of power to allay the most fearful fears; to animate the most desponding hopes; to give moral strength to the most exhausted spirits; and to open up, in the vista of futurity, a scene of splendor and of blessedness, surpassing all that the eye has ever seen, or the ear heard; and what is still more remarkable, the admission of this supposed delusion, as a reality, becomes necessary to give an intelligible meaning to many parts of the word of God; and a completeness to the theory of redemption, as a theory of practical utility.”

This is no vivid sketch, taken from the creations of an active imagination, but an imperfect statement of sublime and glorious realities; the opening up to the eye of faith of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, which are concealed from the natural man, to whom "the things of the Spirit of God are foolishness; — the reappearing of the mystic ladder, which originally betokened, and still betokens, the ceaseless intercourse carried on between the visible and invisible world, even though no supernatural agency is now seen, as Jacob saw the angels of God ascending and descending.

[3] This charge may be repelled as false, by an argument drawn from the love the Saviour bears for his people; and the intention he has avowed to raise them to that exalted state of dignity and blessedness to which they are pre-ordained by the sovereign grace of God. Benevolence was the principle by which our Lord was impelled in undertaking and accomplishing the great work of human redemption; — his master passion, shedding a radiant brightness over his character during his abode on earth; — strong in death; reanimating him, on his repossession of life; and is unchangeably " the same yesterday, today, and for ever." But pure benevolence may make the most costly sacrifices in behalf of others; she may penetrate dungeons, and speak words of sympathy to the prisoner doomed to die; she may walk abroad amidst scenes of privation and of want, and feed the hungry, and give clothing to the destitute; she may take up the cause of the injured and the oppressed, and without fee or reward, go and plead it; and yet feel no complacent emotions in the persons whom she relieves, or attempts to serve. And do we not, when meditating on the doings of Jesus Christ, or when speaking of them, too generally think and speak, as though his benevolence were of this description; — a benevolence of disposition, dissociated from a complacency of feeling; the impelling power in a piece

of conventional mechanism turning out works of beneficence, rather than the warm and generous affections of the heart, which cleaves with the tenderest solicitude to the objects of its regard.

The Lord Jesus loves his people, and he takes delight in them; and he is so sensitively touched with the feeling of their infirmity, that he resents an insult offered to them, as an insult offered to himself; and will reward an act of kindness done to them, "in his name," as though it were done to him. Hence when upbraiding Saul of Tarsus, for his evil doings, he says, "unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" Acts 9:4. And when giving a sketch of the solemn transactions of the last day, he says, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." Matt. 25:40.

But while we readily admit that he does love his people, we too often think and speak, as though his love was a circle of protection encompassing the entire aggregate number, rather than a complacent affection cherished for each separate individual; — something like the mountains of defense standing round about Jerusalem, rather than the presence of the Holy One in the midst of her citizens, calling on each one to bless and praise the Lord for the personal manifestations of his lovingkindness. But this is not thinking and speaking, as he thinks and speaks. He addresses us in his invitations, and in his promises, in the individuality of our being; confers on us, as individuals, the gift of eternal life, as life is originally bestowed; makes manifest his favor to us, as individuals; and he will come again to receive us in the individuality of our persons into heaven, to present us faultless before the divine presence, and to assign to us our own mansion in the house of his Father. Hence the primitive believers employed a mode of expression, when referring to the love of Christ for his people, which implied their belief in, the personality of its manifestations: — "Who loved me." "Who gave himself for me."

The Apostle, when praying that the members of the Church at Ephesus might know,⁵ that is, might enjoy, the manifestations of the love of Christ, did not pray for a blessing peculiar to them, but that they might enjoy what is common to all the saints; and we are certain that he would not have prayed that they might attain this knowledge, if he knew it was unattainable. Can we suppose that he was laboring under some delusion, when he was offering up this prayer in their behalf; or that he would be

laboring under a delusion if he were now on earth and offered up this prayer, in behalf of anyone disciple of Christ? Certainly not. If he prayed that others might enjoy the love of Christ, may we not pray that we ourselves may enjoy it: and, if such a prayer can be offered up in faith, without subjecting us to reproach, why are we to be regarded as laboring under a delusion, when the prayer is answered? Do we reproach a friend as a fanatic, when he speaks of enjoying the sweets of social friendship? Do we consider the lover as laboring under some strange delusion, when his countenance brightens up with gladness, and his heart expands with strong emotions of delight, as he opens the epistle which is a silent, yet intelligible response to the ardor of his own attachment? And if a believer in Christ speak of enjoying the friendship of his best friend, why should he be stigmatized as a deluded fanatic? Is the most lovely and benevolent of Beings, incapable of giving any sensible expressions of his love to those, on whose behalf he veiled the brightness of his uncreated glory, under the dark eclipse of humanity, for whom he groaned in Gethsemane, and agonized and died on the cross? It is true, he is invisible; but what of that? Does the friend who enjoys the bliss of friendship always see his friend; or has the lover always the object of his attachment as his companion? Has not art provided a medium for the transmission of that mysterious influence, which keeps alive, and in ceaseless exercise the social affections, even when the persons to whom they cling, are far away sojourning amongst a foreign people? And has not that mighty hand that formed us, implanted deep in the human heart a sympathetic susceptibility, which, by some strange law of association, aids the growth, sustains the vigor, and matures the fruit of these affections, even when the artificial medium of communication is, for a season, interrupted, or totally destroyed? Should we never feel the charm of friendship, even if our friend were locked up in the tyrant's dungeon, and denied the privilege of letting us know that he still indulges the hope of seeing us again in the land of freedom? And is it all fancy when, musing on the dear departed, — the heart throbbing with emotions too delicate for words of common usage to express, — we exclaim “sweet is the memory of the dead?” and though dead, yet do we never feel that they still speak to us? speak, not by the utterance of audible accents, but through the medium of that untraceable and undefinable law of our mental constitution, which will not allow even death to destroy the bonds of friendship, when they are cemented by pure and ardent love.

And shall we presume to say, that that great and good Being who created us, who endowed; us with all our mental faculties, who has given to us a capacity for the enjoyment of social friendship, and a power to gratify it, is himself unable to contrive a medium of communication between himself and us? that he is unable to gain access to our hearts, to distill on them the sweet balm of friendship; and that he cannot shed abroad the manifestations of his love in us, without subjecting us to the charge of laboring under some fanatical delusion, if we dare to say, “his favor is sweeter than life, with all its charms of wealth or of honor?” And is a believer in Christ to be stigmatized as a fanatic, because his heavenly ‘Father’ lets fall on his aspiring soul, an occasional expression of his paternal kindness? and is he to stand out as a marked object of satirical reproach, because he has some faint knowledge of the love’ of Christ, which in its more powerful manifestations, surpasses the capacity of the imagination to conceive? And is it come to this, that-the very professors of the Christian faith, turn its practical workings on the heart into a theme of ridicule; and because they have not felt what others feel, and because they have no conception of the mental bliss which some others enjoy, choose to turn revilers, if not blasphemers? “Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon; lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph.” 2 Sam. 1:20. The love which Jesus Christ bears for his people, very naturally accounts for the desires and determination he so often expressed,⁶ to have them with him, when they have finished their earthly course: “In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.” John 14:2, 3. “Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.” John 17:24. Heaven is a place, but we know not where in the immensity of space it is situated; nor can we form any clear conception of the beauty or glory of its appearance; or of the form or internal arrangements of the mansions which the Saviour is now preparing for them that love him. It is his dwelling-place; but he will not dwell there alone, solitary, amidst the magnificent grandeur of its varied scenery; listening to no sounds, but the sweet symphony of his own wondrous thoughts; feeling no emotions but those pure, sublime, and ineffable

emotions, which are self-originated and self-sustained; he will have his disciples with him, “that he may rejoice over them to do them good” for ever. This is natural. They are his, — redeemed by his blood; and are tenderly beloved. He, the first-born of the celestial family will be seated on his throne, clothed with honor and majesty; they, the younger members, each one arrayed in his own glory, will stand before him. Having been, on their entrance into the divine presence, presented faultless before the Lord of Hosts, they bear the image of the heavenly 3 but after the resurrection, the likeness will be complete, as then, “their vile body will be fashioned like unto his glorious body.” What a splendid spectacle to gaze on! All the sons of God arrayed in the robes of immortality. The pomp and splendor of the most magnificent presentation that was ever seen on earth, on the most brilliant day the sun ever illumined with his brightness, vanishes away from the imagination as a vain exhibition of human littleness, when compared with the grandeur of this scene, when all the sons of God, fashioned after the similitude of the first-born, appear in the immediate presence of their Father, the King of kings, and Lord of lords, their face shining as the sun, and their raiment white and glistening: the palm branch of victory waving in their hand, as they unite their voices in one harmonious burst of gratitude and love, “Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing.” Rev. 5:12. Then the voice of the Son of God will be heard rolling in melodious accents over the immense myriads of the redeemed, saying to his eternal Father, “Of those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled.” John 17:12.

After assuming our nature into union with his own, which was an act of inconceivable condescension, — after passing through, in the days of his humiliation, an ordeal of privation and of suffering which marked him out as the Man of sorrows, — the one acquainted with grief; after enduring the insults and agonies of crucifixion, shedding his blood, and giving his life a ransom for his beloved disciples; after resuming possession of his life, and rising up into a new condition of existence in the celestial world; after appearing in the presence of God, to intercede on behalf of those yet unsaved, who still are resident on earth; and after receiving the homage, and listening to the triumphant song of gratitude and joy, sung "by the redeemed, whose robes of distinction and of honor, have been washed and

made white in his blood, and who now serve him day and night in his temple, can we suppose that it is to him a matter of perfect indifference, whether those yet dwelling in this vale of tears, and in whose behalf all the great events of his eventful life, and still more eventful death took place, are saved or lost? whether they are happy or miserable, during the period of their earthly sojourn? whether they live in a state of inviolable security under his protecting care, or are exposed to all the contingent accidents and dangers usually attendant on the power of self-preservation? and whether the mansions he is now preparing for them in the house of their Father, shall be occupied, or left, like so many deserted castles, the standing memorials of skill and of power, their proprietors gone into the land of darkness and of woe? Oh no, we dare not suppose this, as such a supposition would tend, not only to impeach the fidelity of the Son of God, but tend also to shake our confidence in the divine origin of that glorious theory of redemption of which he is the author and the finisher; — thus necessarily reducing it to the low level of a mere human contrivance, arrayed in the simple or gorgeous decorations of ecclesiastical ceremonials, in accordance with the taste of its devotees, but possessing no power to redeem, to sanctify, or to save the soul of man. If, then, we dare not entertain such a ruinous supposition, it follows, that the charge of presumption, or fanatical delusion, brought against a believer in Christ, who speaks with confidence of having received the free remission of his sins, and who speaks with equal confidence of the certainty of his final salvation, must be withdrawn as a wanton and unjust charge; and his testimony must be admitted as the testimony of a faithful and true witness, who, like the primitive believers, declares to others what he knows to be true, that they also may have fellowship with him, and truly his fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

[4] This charge may be repelled as false, by an argument derived from the absolute and independent power of Jesus Christ, as the Saviour of his disciples. When on earth, our Lord acted as a dependent, and an independent being; as a delegated servant, and an absolute sovereign; — performing stipulated engagements, yet acting as he chose in the exercise of his own uncontrolled authority. And now that he “is passed into the heavens,” and has resumed “the glory which he had with the Father before the world was;” he develops the same unique character as he developed when on earth; appearing there, as he appeared here, “God manifest — in the likeness of man;” acting there, as he acted here, a subordinate part as

Mediator, Intercessor, and Advocate; yet; as the following quotations from the records of inspiration prove, still acting as when on earth, independently of all official obligations, exercising his own self-derived and self-sustaining power, as though he were the only Being, on whose self-determining will, the present safety and final salvation of all his disciples is made to depend. On the other sheep, which were not of the Jewish fold at the time he uttered the memorable words which I am about to quote, he conferred the gift of eternal life, as he had conferred it on those who were already gathered under his pastoral care; but this gift was not bestowed on them, till after he was seated on the throne of his glory, when they formed a part of that one fold of which he was first the visible, and afterwards the invisible Shepherd, and of which he said, “they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of [My Hand]{smallcaps}.” John 1:28. Here we see him exercising his own power, independently, yet in concurrence with the equally independent power of the Father, in preserving from perishing, all, in every future age, on whom he should choose to confer the gift of eternal life.

The consolatory language which he addressed to his first disciples, and which he virtually addresses to his disciples of every age, determines not only the absoluteness of his power, but his independent right to exercise it: “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you onto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.” John 14:1-3. And the following determinate utterance in his last most extraordinary prayer, brings him before us as a sovereign in his own dominions, surrounded by the hosts of the redeemed, who are engaged in the contemplation of his glory as one chief source of their blessedness. “Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation «of the world.” John 17:24.

In confirmation of this important distinction between his subordination as a Mediator and Advocate; and his absolute independence as a Saviour, I will now adduce the following facts from the ’word of God: — When Stephen was dying, he said — “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Acts 7:59. The apostle Paul, in the anticipation of his own death, says — “I know

whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able: to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.” 2 Tim. 1:12; see 2 Tim. 4:8. The redeemed who stand before his throne, beholding his glory, unite in the following ascriptions of praise, which he accepts as a tribute due to his own majesty and benevolence: “Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.” Rev. 1:5, 6. And if we consult the biographical sketches of the faithful in Christ Jesus who have departed from amongst us, and entered into “the joy of their Lord,” we shall find that during their prolonged illness, and in a dying hour, they have, in the most simple, yet touching forms of expression, appealed to him to comfort them, to support them, to be with them when walking through the dark valley of the shadow of death; avowing, in forms of expression equally simple and touching their belief in his actual nearness to them, and in the all-sufficiency of his power to save them. Then it is that they appear to clear away from the empire of thought, reflection, and anticipation every other being, visible and invisible, that Christ Jesus may be to them, their “all in all” that one gracious and adorable being sustaining the relationship of a Saviour, whose presence to animate, and whose power to save, is all they want, when entering the eternal world. Yes; and this holy confidence of inviolable security, amidst the dangerous temptations of life; this placid calmness of spirit, and these transports of joy, in the immediate anticipation of death; this fearless looking for of the coming of the Lord Jesus to receive them the moment they pass the line which divides the two worlds, are the moral and spiritual effects of the workings of his mighty power; so many palpable demonstrations supplied in that solemn hour, when the heart speaks what she knows, and what she feels, that all is real, gloriously real, which the word of God records, respecting the presence of the Lord Jesus with his faithful disciples when entering into rest; and of his ability to save them to the uttermost, who come unto God by him. If, then, the Lord Jesus be a Saviour, as well as an Advocate; if he have power to save, as well as a disposition to plead, will you, O objector, say, that that disciple who avows his belief in his ability to save him, and who gives utterance to the language of gratitude for the actual workings of his mighty power, in subduing him to the obedience of faith, in giving him peace and joy in believing, and in inspiring him with the hope of glory; is laboring under some fanatical delusion?

Then go and tell the captive who has escaped from the loathsome dungeon, and is on the well-known road that leads to his native home, that he is laboring under some delusion; that the sights he sees, that the sounds he hears, that the fruits he gathers for the gratification of his taste, and that the limpid stream at which he slakes his thirst, are so many illusive phantoms playing before his strangely disordered imagination. Then go and tell him that he is still bound in the iron fetters of bondage, though he feels not the pressure, nor hears the clinking of its chains; and tell him that he will inevitably perish at last on the altar of tyranny, even though he knows he is walking abroad in the land of freedom, protected by the majesty and authority of her own immutable laws.

[5] This charge may be repelled as false, by an argument derived from the work of the Holy Spirit. I take for granted that the intelligent reader will admit, that the Spirit is a real, and a divine person, and that he has a part to perform in the economy of salvation, of equal necessity and importance, with the part to be performed by the Father, or the Son. Hence saith the Apostle: “For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.” Eph. 2:18. The Father is represented as seated on the throne of grace, when exercising his prerogative of mercy, in the forgiveness of sin; the Son is represented as standing before him, when making intercession: in behalf of those for whom he shed his precious blood; but the Holy Spirit is represented as actually indwelling in the souls of them that are sanctified; that is, of those who are set apart to appear before the majesty of the divine glory arrayed in the beauties of holiness. He dwells in them, not as an idol dwells in the temple of idolatry, motionless and senseless, performing no acts of power, or of beneficence; but dwells in them, to commence, to carry on, and to perfect their fitness for that ulterior condition of existence, which they are preordained to enjoy for ever. The dead are quickened, and made alive to God; they are born again, and become new creatures in Christ Jesus. When this great change takes place, which is ascribed to the agency of the Holy Spirit, the action of his power extends to all the faculties of the mind; giving to the understanding, a peculiar aptitude to apprehend with clearness and vividness of impression, what the Apostle emphatically designates “the things of God,” — to the will, an attractive impulse which induces to a complacent yielding to his authority, and to the affections, a consequent tendency to love him, and take delight in him.

'Tis true, that an unregenerate person, from his superior natural abilities, or from his more laborious and intense studies, may be capable of making more enlarged discoveries of God, his nature, his attributes, and his works, than a regenerate person who possesses not equal advantages; and he may be able to arrange, in a more logical order, the various parts of the great theory of redemption, to defend it with greater skill, and with more force of effect; and adorn its separate truths, with the more attractive ornament of explanatory and descriptive language. But though this be true, yet the unregenerate man cannot perceive so clearly as the regenerate man, the peculiar excellencies of these things, nor can he perceive so clearly their practical design; nor feel so sensibly their impressive and exciting influence.

“But it may be said, is there any thing apprehensible concerning these or any other matters, which may not be expressed in some proposition or other; and what proposition is theme. which a regenerate person can assent to, but one who is not regenerate may assent to also?- What definition, so truly expressive of the nature of these things, can be thought of, unto which a carnal mind may not give its approbation? What can be said or conceived so fully and truly, tending to describe and clear them up, but an unrenewed understanding may have the representation of the same truth, so as to give entertainment to it? 'Tis answered, there are many things to which somewhat may belong, not capable of description, and whereof we have yet a most certain perception.”⁷ In confirmation of this, I appeal to the effect of music. What is music but mere sound? and yet it is well known, that when in sweetest melody and harmony, it produces no more effect on some minds, than it does on the trees of a forest; while it is equally well known, that on others, its effect is not only powerful, but ineffably delightful; almost transporting. I may appeal to the different effect of natural scenes. You may take one man to an eminence, and point out to him a view of unsurpassable beauty and sublimity, but he gazes on it with as much indifference, as the beasts which traverse its hills and its valleys; while another, standing on the same eminence, is all emotion, irrepressible emotion; and he lingers on the spot, which he feels to be a spot of enchantment, till the shadows of the coming night cast the veil of darkness over all the thrilling beauty, and magnificent grandeur of the scenery. Now, there are no words by which we can express those peculiarities of sound, and sight, which are unperceived by some, while they are clearly

apprehended, and felt by others. “And so there is somewhat relating to the things of God, besides the truth of the conceptions that may be formed about them, which is more clearly apprehensible to a divinely enlightened understanding, than to one that is not so.”⁸

An unregenerate man may be able to trace with great ease the connection, between the expiatory sacrifice of Christ, and the remission of sin; and he may perceive the relation which the agency of the divine Spirit bears to the correction of the depravity of human nature; but his discoveries of these things will not excite in him, that intense and absorbing interest which they excite in a regenerate man. In him they are things which belong to a theory of truth, which in the abstract displays the wisdom, and the benevolence of God; but as there is an innate incongruity, between his prevailing disposition, and the nature and design of the theory itself, these things are regarded as mere abstract. propositions, which produce in him no practical effect. Hence he knows, if he examine the state of his own heart, that he is as indifferent, except when the terrors of death are falling upon him, about the remission of his sins, as though the blood of atonement had never been shed; and he knows that he has never sought, by earnest prayer, the aid of the divine Spirit, in the correction of his own depravity. And though he may have some definite apprehension of the wisdom which God has displayed in the harmonious adjustment of the various parts of the theory of redemption, and of his inexpressible love, in originating and perfecting it; yet he knows that his apprehension of these divine perfections, enkindles within him no overpowering emotions of astonishment, of admiration, or of joy. But it is otherwise with a regenerate man. He not only traces the connection between the expiatory death of Christ, and the remission of sin, but devoutly prays that “he may have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sin; and he not only perceives the relation which the agency of the Holy Spirit bears to the correction of the depravity of human nature, but he as devoutly prays, that he may be renewed and sanctified by his power; and his apprehension of the divine perfections, displayed in the origination and accomplishment of the scheme of salvation, leads him, as it did the Apostle, to exclaim, with corresponding emotions, —”O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” Rom. 11:33. Thus “the things of God,” which to the unregenerate man, are mere cold, and unexciting abstractions, are to the regenerate man, life-giving, and

spirit-stirring principles; and while on the former they produce no permanent effect in his heart, or in his character, on the latter they work a palpable and a wonderful transformation; yielding at the same time, and permanently yielding, the sweetest solace in the hour of sorrow, and opening up before the eye of his faith, the brightest visions of future blessedness.

This difference in perception, and consequent feeling, between men who profess their belief in ' the divine origin of the same theory of truth; and who possess equal advantages of acquiring an accurate knowledge of its nature, and practical design, would prove an unsolvable problem, if it were not for one fact; namely, the solution of the problem is found in the theory itself. Hence saith the Apostle, "For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now, if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?" 1 Cor. 4:7. "But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God." 1 Cor. 2:10, 11. And it is this act of the divine Spirit, in making clearly manifest to the understanding, and to the heart of the regenerate man, the import and the design of "the things of God," that causes the essential difference between him and the unregenerate man, and which originates, and will perpetuate for ever, his gratitude and love.

The regenerate man, in whom this wonderful process of transformation is imperceptibly going on, may not, except on extraordinary occasions, feel conscious of being under the immediate action of the divine Spirit; because it is through the medium of his own mental faculties, that every supernatural operation is conducted: "the Spirit merely helping his infirmities." Hence it is the regenerate man himself who perceives, who believes, who submits, who hopes, who fears, who loves, who desires; and who rejoices in hope of the glory to be revealed in him: yet he necessarily ascribes his inclination, and ability to perform all these mental acts, to the cooperating power of the Holy Spirit. To sum up all in a few words, I may say, that repentance, faith in Christ, submission to divine authority, hope in the mercy of God, love to him, delight in him, desire after a perfect conformity to him, and an expectation of seeing and enjoying him for ever,

are the unmistakable spiritual signs of the workmanship of the divine Spirit; and it would be as absurd, to attribute these personal acts to the unaided powers of our own mind, as it would be, for a man to ascribe the ingenious and time-telling mechanism of the watch, to its power of self-origination. The Psalmist says, “All thy works shall praise thee, O Lord: and thy saints shall bless thee.” Ps. 145:10. This is no less applicable to the divine Spirit, than to the Father, or to the Son; the works of his power and of his love, deciding the question of who is the author of their production? by their surpassing the utmost capabilities of human agency. For what human agent could regenerate the depraved heart of man; and fit man to appear in the immediate presence of the “**Holy One**,” without his being overwhelmed by the majestic splendor of his glory, like the Prophet when he saw him in a vision.⁹

We are warranted, then, on the authority of the word of God, in saying that the Spirit enlightens and renews all to whom the blood of atonement has been applied; that he infuses a new life into all who are delivered from a state of condemnation; and effects a gradual meetness, in all the heirs of salvation, who are “to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.” If then a believer in Christ, can discover in his own heart, those unmistakable signs of the Spirit’s workmanship, which to the men of the world, are “the hidings of his power,” he can labor under no delusion, when entertaining the fullest assurance that his sins are forgiven, and that his final salvation is absolutely certain. Because there is produced in him that great change, which all must undergo to fit them for the kingdom of heaven, and which he knows he could not have produced himself: — that astounding transformation, which brings him into fellowship with God, which disposes him to delight in him, and to live devoted to his service.

If a condemned traitor, on whom the penal sentence has been inflicted, were raised from the dead; if he repossessed the use of his senses, and his mental faculties; if he were put into possession of a small portion of his forfeited estates, under an assurance from his gracious sovereign, that after the lapse of a few years, he should be allowed to appear at court arrayed in the robes of dignity and honor, and that then the entire inheritance should be assigned to him; would it be possible for any species of artifice to convince him that all these wondrous occurrences were so many illusive phantoms passing and repassing in strange review before his imagination? Impossible.

He would refer to the tragic scene of his actual and degrading death; to his extraordinary reappearance into life; to his consciousness of actual existence; to his possession of the earnest of his inheritance; as so many palpable evidences of the certainty of his attaining the glory, and the riches in reserve for him. The case before us, is somewhat analogous to this. Here is a man who, a few years ago, was dead in trespasses and sins; he is made alive from the dead; he is endowed with new and extraordinary powers of mental perception, of taste, and of feeling; he enjoys the earnest, and even the foretaste of the happiness he has forfeited; and his Father, who is the King of kings, has given him a promise and a pledge, that after he has “suffered awhile,” he shall be admitted into his divine presence, and dwell with him for ever in a state of purity and blessedness. You accuse such a man of laboring under a delusion, if you hear him speak of what has occurred, or of what he expects to enjoy; but he repels the charge. He appeals to his former condition, when living dead in trespasses and sins; he appeals to his being made alive from the dead; he appeals to his consciousness of living in a new condition of spiritual existence; he appeals to what he enjoys in possession, and in anticipation; and he concludes by saying, “If I am laboring under a delusion in my belief and expectations, it is the sweetest delusion that ever beguiled a human spirit; and one from which I would not be disturbed, for any possession inferior in value, or shorter in duration, than that on which my imagination dwells with such ineffable delight.”

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1. See John 17.↩
 2. John 17:13.↩
 3. John 17:26.↩
 4. Heb. 7:25.↩
 5. Ephes. 3:18,19.↩
 6. John 6:39, 40; 11:25, 26.↩
 7. Howe.↩
 8. Howe.↩

9. Isaiah 6.↩

Chapter 4. Conclusion.

1. An appeal to those who possess a knowledge of the remission of their sins, and an assurance of their eternal salvation.

The exterior appearance and condition of a believer, like that of his divine Lord, may be comparatively mean and unenviable. But when we contemplate him through the medium of those inspired oracles, which 'account for his origin, and foretell his destiny, and which open up to our view the indissoluble alliances which he has formed with the great and holy spirits of the celestial world, we feel that we are contemplating a being of no vulgar birth, or insignificant order. "Preordained before heaven and earth were created, to enjoy a felicity which shall continue when heaven and earth have passed away; ransomed by the blood of no earthly sacrifice;"¹ renewed and transformed by the Spirit of the Holy One; watched over by that omniscient eye which never slumbers nor sleeps; for whose good all things work in apparent confusion, but in unbroken harmony; endowed with a mental capacity to hold intimate and blissful fellowship with the Great Invisible; before whom, ere long, he will be presented faultless with exceeding joy; he occupies a rank and a position in relation to the visible and invisible world, as far above the most distinguished potentates of earth, as the sublimity and grandeur of eternity surpass the fading beauties of time. Whether we contemplate such men in the individuality of their existence, or group them together as "the faithful in Christ Jesus," we are reminded of the concluding words of the address which Moses delivered to his countrymen, just before he was parted from them: "Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency! and thine enemies shall be

found liars unto thee; and thou shalt tread upon their high places.” Deut. 33:29.

A. Gratitude

How intense, O believer, ought to be your gratitude to him, who has chosen you, and redeemed you, and set you apart for himself! How thrilling is the language of the Apostle: “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time.” 1 Pet. 1:2-5. Why did he love you? Why was the blood of atonement shed for you? Why were you made alive from the dead; and brought into a state of reconciliation and fellowship with God? Why has the Lord, the Spirit, made known to you the forgiveness of your sins; and given to you the earnest of your future inheritance? Why were not these extraordinary indications of the divine favor bestowed on others, rather than on you? You can conceive no other reason, than his own sovereign and unmerited grace. Often meditate on this. It will excite your astonishment. Give vent to your feelings in language which is consecrated to the service of gratitude: “What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me?” Ps. 116:12; Ps. 103:1-4.

B. Be not high minded.

When any great distinctions are created in favor of the obscure and worthless, they are exposed to the dangerous influence of self-gratulation. Be on your guard. You may have the feeling, when you dare not embody it in language. The look of contempt when you see others, may displace the look of compassion: and the prayer of the publican may be exchanged for the vaunting of the Pharisee: “God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.” Luke 18:11. Often ponder over the piercing interrogations of the Apostle, and cherish

the spirit they are intended to superinduce: "For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now, if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?" 1 Cor. 4:7. Think of David, who, under the delusions of his vain imagination, and in the proud confidence of his heart said — "In my prosperity I shall never be moved;" but the Lord hid his face, and then he was troubled. The confidence of Peter in his own self-sufficiency, led to his fall. Never forget the wise man's proverb: "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall." Prov. 16:18.

C. Hold fast your profession.

Do you know that your sins are forgiven? be thankful; but be cautious. It is possible to lose this knowledge, and the loss to you, would be as great as the loss of Eden was to our first parents. Can you anticipate with confidence, an entrance into the joy of your Lord? be thankful, but guard against vain boasting. This confidence may be shaken; it may be broken up; and you may be left to all the gloomy apprehensions of coming woe. It is not without reason the Apostle urged on the Corinthians, and urges on you, the soul-awakening exhortation: "Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." 1 Cor. 10:12 To retain your knowledge and assurance,

You must keep the love of iniquity out of your heart.

You may not be able to root out iniquity; but you must not cherish it. Iniquity may dwell in your heart, as an invading army sometimes dwells in a country, being too strong for expulsion, but you must form no alliance with it. You must watch against it; you must strive against it; pray against it; and possibly you may feel some evil tendencies so strong, as to remind you of the language, which our Lord once addressed to his disciples: "Howbeit this kind goeth not out (but by prayer and fasting.)" Matt. 17:21. Then pray, and fast. Bring the power of strong cries and tears, to bear down upon the uprising and restless evil propensities of the heart. " Search me, O God, and my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Ps. 139:23, 24.

Walk in close fellowship with Christ.

I like the Apostolic expression, "Looking unto Jesus." He means, having the mind intensely and constantly meditating on Christ, — His sufferings — His death, — His intercession, — His sympathetic love, — His power to save, — on that hallowed moment, when you shall see him as he is, and be like him. There is a charm, a power, and an unction in these themes of meditation which you will find in no other. They will elevate the soul far above the vain pursuits of time; extend the range of its intellectual vision; shed a purifying influence over the imagination and the heart; and by the power of association, will keep you — " Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Titus 2:13, 14.

D. Be considerate, and kind to others.

You may meet with some who hold the same faith with yourself; who worship in the same temple; and who commune at the same table; lint who possess not your knowledge, and who have not your assurance. They hope in the mercy of the Lord; but a sense of guilt and unworthiness, makes fear preponderate. They are more prone to decipher the meaning of the threatenings, than to plead the promises of the word of the Lord. They cannot go back, but they are always dreading apostasy. They can talk fluently, and reason correctly on the great facts and doctrines of the Christian revelation; but they shrink from appropriating anyone truth for their own consolation. Do not scowl on such. Do not speak harshly. Do not refuse to listen, when they appear anxious to narrate their disquietudes and griefs. Imitate your divine Master, who handled the bruised reed so delicately, as not to break it; and stepped so cautiously near the smoking flax, as not to quench it. They need your sympathy, and your advice; give it. They need all the encouragement you can supply, to induce them to follow on that they may know the Lord; and therefore it would be an act of cruelty on your part to withhold it. Are not the members of Christ to have "care one for another;" and if one member safer, are not all the members to safer with it? Give a practical proof that this is not an obsolete law; but a law in which you take delight, as in the other precepts of the divine code.

E. Anticipate with gratitude and joy, the end of your faith.

It may be near; it may be distant; but it is certain. Your salvation is nearer than when you first believed; and every day, and every hour, brings it still nearer. A few more rising atoms, and a few more threatening waves, and you will enter the peaceful haven, where stormy winds and foaming waves, are known no more. A few more instances of human unkindness, and treachery, and cruelty, to try your faith and patience; and then you will go, to mingle for ever amongst “the spirits of the just made perfect.” A few more privations; a few more disappointments; a few more dark and mysterious events of providence; and a few more contests with the world, the flesh, and the Devil, and you will go, where “the Lamb shall lead you unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from your eyes.”

Press on, O believer, from youth to manhood, from manhood to riper years, and from riper years to old age; and as you go, serve your generation according to the will of God; take with gratitude the blessings, whether few, or many, which may be allotted to you; but always “keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.” Jude 21.

It is true, before you enter into rest, you must pass the Jordan of separation; ere you take possession of that endless life, over which death hath no power, you must die: but why should you fear to die? Has not Jesus said, and does he not say to you: “I am the resurrection and the life he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth, and believeth in me, shall never die. Believest thou this?” John 11:25, 26. There may be a momentary suspension of life, when crossing the narrow isthmus of time, that — “divides that heavenly land from ours:” but it will be only momentary, for to be “absent from the body, is to be present with the Lord.” What a splendid scene will then burst upon you! but it will not dazzle by excess of brightness; because your powers of vision will be equal to the occasion of their exercise. You will see God. You will behold the Lamb, in the midst of the throne. The redeemed and the angels of light, will, with raptures of joy, hail your entrance amongst them. You will gaze, wonder, and adore. The mysteries of time will soon be unraveled; and the bliss of eternity will be more than an adequate recompense for all your earthly sorrow.

“There shall you see, and hear, and know,
All you desir’d, or wished below;
And every power find sweet employ,
In that eternal world of joy.
Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Amen.”

2. An appeal to those who admit the possibility of attaining a knowledge of the actual remission of their sins, and the certainty of their salvation: but who have not yet attained it.

I shall notice,

A. The causes, to which its non-attainment may be attributed.

It may be owing to a natural diffidence, and timidity of disposition. We often see the constitutional tendency of the mind, putting out its strength, or betraying its weakness, in the development of its religious principles, and in the discharge of its most sacred obligations. Hence the bold, who are endowed with great moral courage, usually attain an assurance, that their sins are forgiven, and that their eternal salvation is absolutely certain; whilst the nervous and the timid, yield to hesitation and doubt. The one resemble the Syrophenician woman, whose importunity was increased by the repulses she met with, and which ceased not till her faith was honored, by obtaining the blessing she solicited; the other, appear governed by the misgiving spirit of the woman, who for twelve years had labored under a painful disease, despairing of relief unless she obtained it from Jesus Christ; and yet she could not make a personal appeal, unable to do more than touch the hem of his garment: but the touch cured her. And why should you fear to come to him; and make your appeal to him? Did he ever, when on earth, disdain to notice, or refuse to relieve and to save, even the most guilty, the most worthless, the most wretched sinner, that implored his aid? No, never.

The penitent sinner, whose constitutional timidity keeps him from making a direct application to Jesus Christ, is in danger of yielding to the influence of a self-righteous spirit — tarrying till he finds himself somewhat better fitted to come to Jesus Christ to be saved, before he will venture to come. This is forcibly exemplified in the following simple, and touching narrative: — “An Indian and a white man, being at worship together, were both brought under conviction by the same sermon. The Indian was shortly after led to rejoice in pardoning mercy. The white man, for a long time, was under distress of mind, and at times, almost ready to despair; but at length he was also brought to a comfortable experience of forgiving love. Some time after, meeting his red brother, he thus addressed him:”How is it, that I should be so long under conviction, when you found comfort so soon?” “O, brother,” replied the Indian, "me tell you: there come along a rich prince, he promise to give you a new coat; you look at your coat and say, I don't know; my coat pretty good, I believe it will do a little longer.

He then offer me a new coat; I look on my old blanket; I say, this good for nothing: I fling it right away; and accept the new coat. Just so, brother, you try to keep your own righteousness for some time, you loath to give . it up; but I, poor Indian, had none; therefore, I glad at once to receive the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ." I would then say, “Come to Christ at once. Renounce all dependence on your penitence, on your partial amendment, and on your newly acquired religious habits; and trust in Christ — on the merit of his death, and on his power to save; and he will not deceive you, nor disappoint you. Come with all your load of guilt; come with all your fears; come under the most humiliating sense of your unworthiness, he will not reject you, nor will he overlook you; but he will give you rest and peace. You must come at last, or you never can be saved, or have peace of soul: why then not come at once? Now is the accepted time: come now: put your trust in Christ; and then you may calmly wait the issue.”

Or it may be owing to the indulgence of some secret sin. The Psalmist said, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.” Ps. 66:18. Yes, the indulgence of sin in the heart, deafens the ear of mercy, and causes her to keep silence. Have you, O man, no vain imaginations, which you have neglected to repress? No evil tempers and dispositions, which you

have neglected to curb? Have you no sinful propensities, which you have neglected to subdue? Are you indulging no undue attachment to the world; — its wealth, its honors, or its sources of amusement? Is there no household image, standing as the rival to the Prince of Peace? Is there no offending brother, no calumniating enemy, against whom you are cherishing the feeling of revenge or malice? Do you never disguise your religious profession, when mingling with the men of the world; never trespass on forbidden ground, when far away from the inspecting eye of your minister, or your pious friends? Do you never attempt to extenuate the evil of sin, or to palliate the enormity of its guilt, or to find out some excuses which tend to reconcile you to the manifold imperfections, which disfigure your Christian character? Be more frequent in the act of self-examination, and more cautious; go deeper into the dark recesses of your deceitful heart, and ascertain what principles rule there; and by what motives you are uniformly influenced, in all you do, and in all you leave undone.

Or it may be owing to the omission of some duty. Are the exercises of the closet attended to regularly; and does the spirit of devotion enliven them? Do you walk with God? Is your fellowship with him intimate, and habitual? Do you delight to meditate on him — on his majesty — his purity, his love of righteousness, his faithfulness, his condescension; and on “the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness towards you through Christ Jesus P” Do you observe family prayer; and is the prayer you offer in the morning and in the evening, in the presence of your household, the prayer of faith, and of importunity; or is it a mere tribute which you pay to the law of custom? Do you keep holy the Sabbath? Do you attend its public services punctually, and regularly? Do you anticipate them, with eagerness? do you prepare, by reading the word of God — by prayer and by meditation — for their profitable observance? do you attend on them in a devotional spirit? and have you made the prayer of the Psalmist your own, “speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth?” Do you, when you retire from them, endeavor to ascertain whether they have engaged your affections; whether they have brought you into closer contact with the spiritual world, and whether they have had the slightest influence in investing the glorious truths of revelation with a more commanding, and more elevating power of impression over your imagination and your heart? Do you habitually cherish an exquisitely tender compassion for the salvation of those who are ready to perish? — for the unrenewed members of your household — for your friends, for your

enemies — for the myriads who are living and dying in the dark empire of idolatry; and under the delusions of Mahometan fatality, and Catholic and Protestant superstition? Do you pray for their salvation, as you pray for your own, when awestruck with the terrors of the world to come? Do you consecrate an equitable portion of your time and influence to serve the cause of your divine Master? or is the entire of it employed in advancing your own secular aggrandizement? Do you ever go about doing good? Do you ever seek after a wanderer from the fold of the great Shepherd, and try to bring him back; or do you ever seek out one in a hapless or destitute condition, to administer relief, doing it in the ' name of Christ? You may have wealth; but what is the proportion of it which you cast into the treasury of the temple? is it such a proportion, as your Lord has a right to require: — such a proportion, as you, when on your knees at his footstool, deem equitable? You may have zeal; but is your zeal employed in extending the spiritual dominion of the Lord Jesus Christ, or employed merely to augment the number of your own denomination? Have you — and I would press these concluding interrogations close home on your conscience — have you made that surrender of your heart to the Lord, which you know he so rightfully demands? and is it with you, the great end of your existence to know him, to serve him, and to enjoy him?

It may be owing to comparative indifference. You may at times have longed for it: and prayed for it; and felt, when under the momentary terrors of death, and the final judgment, willing to make any sacrifices to attain it; but have you longed for it, as the Psalmist longed, when he said — “My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning.” Ps. 130:6. Have you prayed for it, as Jacob prayed, when he wrestled through the night, even till break of day; saying with reverential determination — “I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.” Gen. 32:26. Have you made that sacrifice of time, for self-examination, for prayer, for reading the word of God, and for devout meditation, which its attainment may require? Is it not true, that other possessions have excited deeper interest; and awakened more intense longings of heart, than the possession of the good hope through grace? Is it not true, that you are so engaged in the affairs of domestic life; or so entangled in the commerce of the world; or so fully occupied by the claims of various religious institutions; that you have felt unable to give the subject that degree of attention which it demands? — presuming, like Felix, that the

days of futurity will bring along with them the more convenient season, when you may be both enabled and disposed, to give all diligence to make your calling and election sure.

B. There are many intimations in the word of God, which evidently imply, that it is the duty of believers to labor after the highest attainments in knowledge and in grace.

“Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if you do these things, ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” 2 Pet. 1:10, 11. “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.” 1 John 5:13.

You should believe in the certainty of its attainment. Our Lord, when on earth, embodied the great principles of his mediatorial administration, in the miraculous facts of his history. "And when Jesus departed thence, two blind men followed him, crying, and saying, Thou son of David, have mercy on us. And when he was come into the house, the blind men came to him: and Jesus saith unto them, Believe ye that I am able to do this?

They said unto him, Yea, Lord. Then touched he their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it unto you. And their eyes were opened." Matt. 9:27-30. He suspends, on the faith of the two blind men, the operation of his omnipotent power; and as they believed he was able to cure them, their eyes were immediately opened; otherwise no miracle would have been performed, unbelief invariably preventing it. It is on this wise and gracious principle he still acts,² as is evident from the following quotation: “And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.” Matt. 21:22. It is then our duty to pray for the remission of our sins; and to pray in the name of Christ; and to believe that we shall receive the blessing we pray for; **and then we shall receive it.** It is true, the Lord will reserve to himself the right to determine when, and how, the answer of peace shall be given to the prayer of faith; but the answer will come. “For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie; though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.” Hab. 2:3.

You should believe that it is your duty, to attain this knowledge. It is a duty you owe,

To your offended, but reconciled Father: because till you know he has forgiven you, you cannot repose confidence in his promises; you cannot love him, with a pure heart fervently; you cannot feel grateful to him; nor can you anticipate with any emotions of delight, the hour when you shall see him. It is a duty you owe,

To the Redeemer, because till you know that he shed his blood for the remission of your sins; that he has conferred on you the gift of eternal life; and that he is now preparing a mansion for you in the house of your Father; you cannot cherish for him those affections which he demands, as the test of your allegiance to him. It is a duty you owe,

To your Christian brethren. Each one is made responsible for his own belief, which is to be regulated by the authority of the word of God; but how often does one believer exercise a controlling power over the belief of another! If you believe that it is impossible to attain a knowledge of the remission of your sins; you may, without the formality of argument, induce your friend to adopt the same belief. He doubts, because you doubt; and he disbelieves, because you do. He remains in bondage, because you are not free. His harp of a joyous gratitude hangs unstrung on the willow of desponding grief; because you cannot join in the harmony of praise. He lives in fear, because you are not strong in faith; and may be left to die in a state of uncertainty, because you have not rejoiced in hope of the glory to be revealed in you. It is a duty which you owe,

To the unconverted. For a believer in Christ to make his experimental knowledge of “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,” the subject of free conversation in a promiscuous company, would be decidedly improper; but seasons will occur, when, by a delicate reference to it, he may produce a very favorable impression on some of his more intimate friends and relations. But if he does not know that his sins are forgiven, if he does not enjoy peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, and if he cannot anticipate his final salvation, as an event of absolute certainty, he cannot make any such impressive references; but must seal up his lips in profound silence. Will his silence produce on them no painfully pernicious effect? They have been taught to believe that a truly pious man knows more, and

enjoys more, and looks forward to eternity with greater confidence, than any who are irreligious or undecided. They know that their pious friend can defend, with great readiness and force, the divine origin of the Christian faith, or the reputation of its institutions, or its ministry, when they are assailed; but if they never hear him make an allusion to any specific effect produced on his heart, by what he believes to be a sublime revelation of mercy and of grace; will it not excite their astonishment? They know he can be loquacious enough on all matters coming within the range of his knowledge, that have a relation to the occurrences of time; but if on the solemn and momentous questions which relate to the soul and eternity, they never hear him speak as a man ought to speak, who regards them as taking the precedence, in importance of all other questions; will it not induce them to think, that after all, there is no essential difference between a man who professes to be pious, and one who makes no such profession? Will it not tend to lull to sleep their occasional suspicions of their own safety; and will it not reconcile them to the fatal habit of living without remorse or anxiety, while living without repentance, and without trusting in Christ, for forgiveness, and the hope of eternal life? Indeed, is not his silence likely to entail on them more moral injury, than all the arguments against the Christian faith, which can be supplied from the press of infidelity, or the chair of the scorner?

But how are such tremendous evils to be avoided? This is a grave question; yet it is one which can be easily solved. The silence of the lips must be broken, and they must “speak the praise of the Lord, that others may bless his holy name.” But to speak effectively, it will be necessary for you, O believer, to feel intensely; and before you can declare, without any misgiving, that “the Lord is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy.” Ps. 145:8: you must know, that his “grace,” and his “great mercy,” have been extended to you. If then a believer in Christ, is anxious to avoid entailing moral injury on those who move within the sphere of his more immediate intimacy; and equally anxious to be made a blessing to them; he must awake out of his spiritual slumbers, and give the Lord no rest day or night, till he enjoys the “blessedness of the man whose transgression is forgiven, and whose sin is covered.” Thus the prompt decision of the wavering; and the actual conversion of the anxious enquirer may, by the inscrutable arrangements of infinite wisdom and benevolence, be delayed, till their pious friend is liberated from all his doubts; and is

enabled to “joy in God through the Lord Jesus Christ, by whom he has now received the atonement.”

3. An appeal to those professors of the Christian faith, who think that no one, during his residence on earth, can attain a knowledge that his sins are forgiven, and that his salvation is absolutely certain.

A. Suppose I admit this opinion to be a correct one, I would ask, if it be possible to find language sufficiently strong to express the deep and pungent sorrow which it ought to occasion to every man who believes in the divine origin of the Christian revelation.

A traitor is condemned, but is allowed, under certain restrictions, to range at large. He is permitted to form alliances, to accumulate wealth, and to gain distinction in any department of social or literary life; but the sentence of death still hangs over him, and he knows not whether it will be repealed or carried into execution. How bitterly would he deplore, at every turning point of his history, especially when any new scene of happiness or of honor opens on him, the inflexible determination of his offended sovereign, to keep him ignorant of his future destiny! When surveying the pleasant things of his contracted, or extended inheritance; when looking on the “desire of his eyes,” or embracing the living images of his own person; when moving with graceful dignity in the circle of friendship, or issuing from the press some mental production which is to charm the present age, or enlighten a future; how deep would be the sigh that would accompany the heart-rending exclamation — What awaits me? confiscation and death; or life and affluence? Yet this touching spectacle of human wretchedness, but faintly shadows forth the more fearful condition of that man who deems it impossible to know, till the crisis comes, whether eternal death, or eternal life awaits him. If grief ever seeks the most desolate spot in the province of misery to shed her tears, and utter her deep sepulchral groans, she ought to

go and take possession of the soul of such a man. She ought to allow no smile to play on his countenance, no indulgence to gratify his taste, no voice of cheering friendship to enliven his spirits during the period, however prolonged, in which he deems it impossible to ascertain whether the God of mercy will forgive and save him, or doom him to endless perdition.

B. Ought any professor of the Christian faith to hold such an opinion, unless it be forced on him by a weight of evidence which he cannot withstand?

But where can we find such evidence? Can we find it in the word of God? No. That holy word, from the time the first promise was given in Eden, till the last vision of the Apocalypse disappeared in the darkness of unexplained prophecy, is the living voice of mercy offering forgiveness and salvation to the chief of sinners.

It has been said, that men are slow of heart to believe what militates against their welfare, but they embrace with eagerness what proves conducive to it. The remark is just. Go to the mansion of greatness; survey the rich scenery around it, and observe the stately dignity of its lordly proprietor. A report is in circulation that he is to be dispossessed by a menial neighbor. Does he catch the flying report, and attempt to make it a true saying? Go into the prison; see the inmate doomed to die, reading the proclamation of mercy bearing the royal signature. Does he cast it from him, and evince an eagerness to believe it to be a forgery? No. In both cases, the interest which is felt in self-possession, is strong enough to keep off from the susceptibilities of the heart, any vague utterances which may tend to place them in danger. How is it, I now ask, that the order of nature is inverted, when man is brought into contact with a richer inheritance, and a more momentous act of mercy, than was ever possessed or exercised on earth?

I will now strip the objection to a knowledge of the actual forgiveness of sin, and the certainty of our final salvation, of the technical language in which it is usually arrayed, and reduce it, in a popular style of speech, to its proper meaning.

“I am guilty and I am condemned; but I will not believe that God will forgive me, even though he has told me that he delights in mercy, and waits to be gracious. No. I will impeach his integrity, rather than I will believe this.”

“I am mortal, and I must soon die, and I am liable to perish for ever in a state of hopeless misery; but though Jesus Christ has told me that he is willing to save me, and bestow the gift of eternal life, yet I will not believe that he will do it, even if I ask him. No. I will rather impeach his love and his integrity, than I will believe it.”

“I have heard that some of my fellow-sinners have obtained mercy, and that they speak with confidence of attaining a state of future happiness; yet I would rather believe that they think and feel and speak under the spell of some fanatical delusion, than I would believe that they have found the Faithful and True witness, faithful to his own promises.”

To bring out the objection in a still stronger, and more repulsive form, I ask the man who entertains it, if he can venture to embody it in a solemn address when kneeling down at the throne of grace. “Thou, Lord, hast promised in thy holy word, to forgive sinners who repent; but I cannot believe thee. Thou hast promised to save them that trust in Christ; but I cannot believe thee.” Who dare venture on doing this? I appeal to the reader,

C. Whether the adoption of such an opinion does not tend to allay all anxiety on the question of personal security and salvation.

For if it be utterly impossible to attain a knowledge of the actual remission of our sins, and of the certainty of our salvation during our residence on earth, are we not reduced to the necessity of living in a state of uncertainty; and in that state shall we not inevitably die? This, to a man of calm reflection, must prove a fearful, if not a perilous condition of existence. “I have sinned against God, and incurred his displeasure; but I know not whether he has forgiven me, or whether he will forgive me. Hell, I know, is a place of torment, and heaven, I know, is a place of happiness; but I know not in which place I shall have to live for ever. I may be forgiven, and I may

be saved; but I cannot know what my final destiny will be, till I hear the decisive sentence:”Come, thou blessed, enter into the joy of thy Lord ,or depart, thou accursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.” It is true that this state of fearful uncertainty ought to excite a degree of anxiety which no ordinary sources of gratification should be allowed to moderate; but unhappily, it too often has a contrary effect, by preventing the feeling from springing up in the mind, or allaying it, as soon as it does spring up. “How useless,” says such a man, “to be anxious on a question which no one can solve; or to expect a blessing which no one will or can confer. The issue must be left to the decision of the Judge of all, who may forgive, but who may not; who may, but who may not save.”

The following sketch, taken from real life, may possibly awaken a degree of solicitude which no didactic statement, or hypothetical reasoning, however strong and conclusive, could produce: — I knew an elder of a Scottish church, who, for a long series of years, sustained an honorable reputation in the circle in which he moved. He was kind in his spirit, and generous in his disposition: a faithful friend: he discharged the duties of domestic life with scrupulous exactness; and stood high in the estimation of all who were engaged with him in commercial transactions; and in the capacity of an elder, by his prudence, his activity, and his love of peace, he secured the affection of his pastor and his flock. But having imbibed the opinion, that it was absolutely impossible to obtain a knowledge of the forgiveness of his sins, during his residence on earth, he became comparatively indifferent on the question, often saying — “the day will declare it.”

At length having arrived at a good old age, and feeling the infirmities of age coming upon him, he took the advice of his friends, closed his commerce with the world, purchased a country villa, to which he retreated, expecting to live out the residue of his days free from perplexity and anxiety. His thoughts, now he had more time for reflection, soon became more powerfully concentrated on eternity; — on heaven and hell; on death, its near approach, and its solemnity; and on his own forlorn condition, not knowing what his final destiny would be. Yes, and I have seen him pacing slowly along and alone, amidst the wild and magnificent scenery of his own country, with his head hanging down, and his eyes fixed on the ground; the sigh occasionally giving an audible utterance, when making its escape from

his greatly agitated and troubled soul; the scene reminding me of the man amongst the tombs, who sought for a quiet resting-place, but who sought it in vain.

Venerable man! Thou hast been a pillar in the church of the living God; but not a living stone. Thou hast believed the truth; but thou hast never felt its renovating power. Thou hast eaten and drunk the sacramental memorials of the Saviour's death; but thou knowest not that his blood was shed for the remission of thy sins. Thou art standing on the verge of an eternal world, but the voice of the Son of God glides not across the breakers, saying — "I will come again and receive thee to myself." Soon, and perhaps very soon, the summons to depart will be heard.

"Will it be morning then with thee?
Awak'd to hail the glorious light:
Or will thy doleful destiny
Be endless night?"

Yes, the day will declare it; but now a terrific uncertainty sits brooding over thy troubled spirit.

Unhappy man! The sun of thy profession, which once cast its radiant lustre over thy character, is going down under an ominous cloud. No light, emanating from the source of all consolation, irradiates the dark valley of the shadow of death. Eternity unveils not its glory to elevate and entrance thy spirit. The rolling of the thundering sentence, "depart, I never knew thee," is heard in the distance; hell from beneath is moving to meet thee at thy coming; and unless an extraordinary act of grace intervene to prevent it, thou wilt perish, not as an unbeliever, but as a castaway.

If we were living in some island, whose varying seasons resemble those of our own; subjected to alternate visitations of sickness and of health, to the gales of prosperity, and the storms of adversity; and found that our relatives and our friends disappeared one after another, without leaving a trace of their departure, to lead to any discovery of what becomes of them, what a feeling of terror for our own safety would this occasion. If, after the lapse of a few years, a rumor should spread through the little colony, that some were taken to dwell with an august monarch, and were advanced to high posts of honor in his peaceful dominions; and others were sent into the

land of perpetual slavery; with what intense solicitude should we trace this report to its origin; and if satisfied on the question of its authenticity, what overwhelming anxiety should we feel to ascertain what destiny awaited us. This would be to us an all-absorbing question; every other question in comparison with this, would sink into oblivion. The intensity of our solicitude for our personal destiny would become still more intense, and would awaken fresh and more throbbing emotions of dismay and of terror, every time we heard of the departure of another of our select number. We should dread the approach of night, lest during its darkness, we should disappear; and we should turn pale on the dawn of morning light, lest we should never see the eve of another day. This would be natural. Indeed I know not how it could be otherwise, unless the passion of self-love were uprooted from the heart, or reason were expelled from the government of the mind.

Reader, this imaginative condition of existence is an awfully real one. Where are the mighty men, and the mean men, of past generations? Our fathers, where are they; and the prophets, do they live for ever? They are gone; they are gone into eternity; some to heaven, and some to hell; and you must soon follow. Yes, you must soon pass the line which separates the two worlds; and soon, and possibly very, soon, the sentence will be pronounced, which will fix you for ever, in raptures, or in woe.

“Oh what a place will you be shortly in, of joy or torment! Oh what a sight will you shortly see, in heaven or hell! Oh what thoughts will shortly fill your hearts with unspeakable delight or horror! What work will you soon be employed in? to praise the Lord with saints and angels, or to cry out in fire unquenchable with devils, and lost souls? And should all this be forgotten? And all this will be endless. Eternity, eternity will be the measure of your joys or sorrows, and can this be forgotten? When you have gone up and down a little longer, and slept and waked a few times more, you will be dead and gone, and find all true that I now tell you. And yet will you forget it; and criminally disregard it?”³

O reader, a short but uncertain respite is granted to you; and your offended Lord assures you, that he willeth not your death — that he waits to be gracious; and that he is exalted to show mercy. Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation. But not an hour should be lost. Now fall upon your knees, and plead for mercy. Delay no longer,

“Nor vain excuses make.”

I went some few years ago, to visit one of my own hearers, who was so far gone, that his physician pronounced him to be beyond the reach of human recovery. On offering him my hand, he shook his venerable head, covered with the silvery hairs of age, and said, with a tremulous voice, “It is too late now, Sir.” I endeavored to shake his confidence in the impossibility of his salvation, by arguments drawn from the design of our Lord’s mission and death; and from his power and willingness to save the chief of sinners. He listened with profound attention to all I said, but to every argument he replied, “It is too late now, Sir. I have loved my money, and neglected my soul. Yes, Sir, it is too late now.” I varied my method of appeal, and multiplied my arguments of encouragement, but the monotonous reply came, with still stronger force of utterance; “It is too late now, Sir.” I proposed praying with him; he objected, saying, “It is too late now, Sir.” After a kind and lengthened remonstrance, he consented; we knelt together at the throne of grace; and when we arose, he said, with a look and with an accent I shall never forget, “It is too late now, Sir.” With this horrifying sentence vibrating in my ear, I descended from his bedroom; and walked away, sighing as I walked; occasionally turning, as I passed onwards, to look on the dwelling, in which still lived a sinner, who could utter only one sentence, and that one sentence proclaiming his fixed belief that it was too late for him to hope for his salvation. He survived this heart-rending interview only a few hours, and then expired —

“Without one cheerful beam of hope,
Or spark of glimm’ring day.”

Reader, now is the accepted time; and again I urge you, on closing this book, to kneel, and pray for mercy. **It may be too late tomorrow.**

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1. Macaulay.↩
 2. Mark 11:24; John 16:23; James 1:6, 7.↩
 3. Baxter.↩

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Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen. (Jude 1:24-25)

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