
S E R M O N III.

PRACTICAL USES

FROM THE NATURE AND EXCELLENCY
OF SAVING FAITH.

BY

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2 Pet. i. 1.

—To them that have obtained like precious faith with us.

1 John iii, 23.

And this is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ.

HAVING in the preceding discourses explained the nature and excellency of saving faith, and made a few practical reflections, I proceed to a more full improvement of the subject.

I. I beseech you, brethren, most seriously and deliberately, to *examine whether ye be in the faith, prove your own-selves;*

selves; know ye not your ownelves, how that Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates. It is a matter of the greatest moment, and ~~should be attended to with the~~ greatest care. A deception here will be of everlasting and most terrible consequence to your souls. To assist you in this important duty, to what hath ~~already been suggested~~ in illustrating the doctrine, we shall add the following characters of a living faith*.

1. If ye be indeed in the faith, your faith hath an influence upon all your religious duties; as Abel's who offered a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, as having respect to the atoning sacrifice of Christ. You fall at Jehovah's feet humble and self-emptied, as nothing, and less than nothing, before him who *putteth no trust in his saints, and chargeth his angels with folly.* Your only confidence in approaching a holy God, is the throne sprinkled with the blood of the Lamb, and his gracious invitation to draw near to it for mercy and grace. Your only trust for the acceptance of your services, as well as your persons, is the righteousness of Christ, and in his strength alone you attempt every duty. Sensible of your insufficiency for any spiritual exercise, and encouraged by the promise of his grace, you look up to him for the gracious aids of the Holy Spirit. In duties performed from such a spiritual principle, petitions are put up with desire for the blessings requested; sins confessed with sorrow for them; and mercies acknowledged with thankful hearts. Very different from this is the sacrifice of ungodly worshippers. They pray without desire; confess

* The marks of faith we have taken from the characters of the worthies recorded in the sacred pages, as well because they were of the cloud of witnesses, whose faith is held up for our example, as because in them we have the most lively picture of the native operations and effects of saving faith.

confess without sorrow; and offer praise on a thoughtless tongue. Nay, their hearts are opposed to the answer of their own prayers, except it be for temporal favours, or merely to be saved from wrath; as Augustine's in the days of his unregeneracy, when he prayed to be made chaste, his heart saying "Not yet, Lord, not yet." O ye mockers of God! who expect favours for your polluted services, can such hypocritical suits succeed with him? Will hypocrisy and lies procure his favour? Is it any wonder if God cast the dung of your sacrifice in your face, saying, *Who hath required this at your hands?*

2. Your faith, like Enoch's, will appear in a life of communion and holy walking with God. By believing views of his amiable glories shining in the face of Christ, your souls are drawn to him in holy affections, correspondent to his divine glories, in which the life of communion with God consists. And, impressed with a sense of his immediate presence and universal providence, you walk before him to all well pleasing, as always in his sight. Your conversation is in heaven, from whence you look for the Saviour; and your souls thirst for God, the living God. But graceless professors, alienated from the life of God, are strangers to those devout breathings of a pious heart.

3. Your faith, as Noah's, will operate in an holy fear of God. This is frequently laid down in the word of God as a character of the faithful. Not the fear of a slave, who only dreads correction. Not the sottish soul-hardening despair of *the fearful and unbelieving, who shall have their part in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone*, unless they shall speedily obtain repentance unto life: But such an awe of the majesty, righteousness and goodness of the Lord, as will make you tremble at his judgments, while you confide in his mercy, and betake yourselves to Christ for safety from the deluge of deserved wrath. The fear of the reprobate

probate drives him from the Saviour, and torments his soul with horror and dread of God as an avenging judge. This consists with the power and love of sin reigning in the heart. But the pious soul dreads sinning more than suffering, and says, with faithful Joseph, *How shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?* His fear, as in the dutiful child, operates as well in love and holy obedience to his God and father, as in religious caution, lest he should give him any offence in thought, in word, or in deed.

4. Your faith, as Abraham's, will be productive of self-denial, and a ready obedience to the divine commands, even those that are most difficult and cross to flesh and blood. Trusting the power, mercy and truth of a promising God, he left his own country and kindred at the call of heaven, and sojourned in a land of strangers and enemies; and (which was still more trying to nature) he attempted at the command of God to offer his beloved Isaac in sacrifice.—Isaac, the son of promise, the son of his old age, the only son of his beloved Sarah; *accounting that God was able to raise him up from the dead, from whence also he received him in a figure.* If ye are Christ's, many sacrifices have you made for his name's sake.—Husbands, wives, parents, children, brothers, sisters, houses, lands; yea, and are determined to part with your own lives, rather than deny his name and religion. Not that piety gives a disrelish for lawful enjoyments, or lessens our affections for, much less makes us bitter against, our relatives. It rather sweetens them to us by the lawful enjoyment of them; and excites our gratitude for them, as the undeserved gifts of heaven to us. I doubt not but Adam loved his Eve with a manifold purer and stronger flame before, than ever he did after his fall. But grace will make your hearts say, *These are not my gods.* Giving Christ the throne in your hearts, it will dispose you to leave earth, with all its enjoyments, or yield them up at his call. Yes!

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it will cause you to *pluck out a right eye, and cut off a right hand, for his sake*; i. e. not only to part with allurements of the world, but with sins as dear and as pleasant to you as those members of the body. *What have I to do any more with idols?* speaks the resolution of a truly penitent and believing heart.

But the mere nominal or temporary believer is still wedded to his lusts and carnal pleasures, and by repeatedly turning a deaf ear to the calls and warnings of heaven, is in danger of having the fearful, but just sentence, pronounced against him, *Ephraim is joined to his idols, let him alone*. Freely would he embrace houses, lands, and carnal enjoyments as his only portion, did he not fear the wrath of God. Take these from him, and his heart cries with Micah, *Ye have taken away my gods, and what have I more?* But to the sincere believer these are all tasteless without the Lord. Nay, heaven itself would be emptiness to him, should he not find his Saviour there. *To be with Christ, which is far better,* is a leading reason of his desire to be absent from the body. *Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth I desire beside thee,* is the native breathing of a gracious soul.

5. Believers, when it is just and necessary, choose a lot with the despised and afflicted people of God before any earthly pomp and riches. *By faith Moses refused to be called the Son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt.* All the power and wealth, the honours and pleasures of the world are empty bubbles, passing shadows, in their esteem, compared with the unsearchable riches and honours of Christ. Communion with him *one day in his courts* is to them *better than a thousand spent* in all the tents of vanity and sin. The saints, of whatever condition or degree, they esteem as *the excellent of the earth, in whom*

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is all their delight. His cause they set before any worldly or private interest: *If I forget thee, O Jerusalem! let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem before my chief joy.* Christ's people are their people, his interest theirs, and what gives a wound to it, toucheth the apple of their eye. The stumbles and falls of religious professors, and the unavoidable weakness and infirmities of the righteous, are their distress, because a wicked world takes occasion from thence to reproach the cause of Christ, and make themselves easy in their sinning. But they rejoice in the prosperity of Zion; they long, they pray for a revival of religion in churches, and the spread of the gospel in power throughout the whole earth.

Widely different from this is the character of faithless professors, however sober some of them may appear before men. They choose religion when she treads in her silver slippers; but are unwilling to take up their cross, and *follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth*, in good report and in bad. A blast of persecution would soon blow multitudes of those hypocrites off from Christ, and turn them to be bitter enemies to his cause. Give to some of them titles, honours, pleasures and riches, with an empty parade of language or plausible elocution in the pulpit; give to others of them, though it were but a beggarly portion of this world, with dull formality, flimsy dissertations, or dry speculation, or dark, unintelligible and spurious novelties in the pulpit, and they may continue to make some kind of religious professions. But they will not interest themselves about the power of godliness, except it be in opposition to it. True zeal for God they detest; spiritual and zealous Christians, especially ministers, are apt to become objects of their jealousy, their sneer, or their malignant reproaches; and the more so, the more eminent they are for piety, or success; except convictions in

in their conscience and judgment may be so strong as to suppress their visible opposition. Instead of being grieved, they watch with an eagle's eye for the accidental slips, or unavoidable infirmities of pious people, and magnify their pimples into blotches, as a cover to their own offensive sores; not considering that *their spots are not the spots of God's people*. And, if they cannot get visible blemishes to hold up, they will, with diabolical calice and subtlety, twist and turn every word and action into every shape in order to make some. Like their predecessors of old, they clothe the saints in bear skins, and then hunt them with dogs. Instead of laying it to heart, as an evidence of God's controversy with the church, when the righteous, especially able and faithful ministers, are taken from the earth, these hypocrites rejoice, as though the day would be all their own, these troublers of Israel being removed out of the way. This is the temper especially of ungodly clergymen.

6. In the last place, a steady perseverance and progress in piety are among the best evidences of saving faith. The hearty friends of Christ go from *strength to strength, till they appear before God in Zion*. Of the patriarchs the apostle says, *If they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned; but now they desire a better country, that is an heavenly*. A lively emblem this of the character of the godly in all ages and places of the world, who, as Paul, *forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God which is in Christ Jesus*. Their backslidings and returns again to God, they will have their winters and their summers, their nights as well as their days. Yet, in general, *the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day*. And the express testimony of Christ himself is, *Every branch in me that beareth fruit,*

fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. They may not always feel the same sensible affections, as at their first acquaintance with Christ; yet their views of divine objects will be more spiritual and distinct, their faith more steady, their love more solid, their humility more deeply rooted, and their obedience more uniform. Their life is a life of faith on the Son of God, and by repeated acts of faith they grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

But they who stop in their course, or turn back, have never set their foot upon the narrow way which leadeth unto life. And they who think they have religion enough, or content themselves with just as much of it as they suppose will barely take them to heaven, or save them from hell, have never as yet had a taste of the pleasures of piety. For there is every motive in faith's object and the experience of grace, to excite those who have obtained it, to press for a more full enjoyment of its comforts. Many who have all the visible marks of believers in Christ, know no more of religious impressions upon their minds, than those they felt many years since.—To them they are obliged to recur back, in order to support their false hope. Or, perhaps, to this end they try to work up in their souls impressions similar to those they felt when they first made an attempt to set out in religion; and there they rest, though their impressions quickly die away, without leaving any lasting change upon their minds. Dangerous deception!

II. Is faith a most excellent gift? Then let those of you who have obtained it, learn your advantages and obligations to make a due improvement of the talent God has graciously put into your hand. He hath bestowed on you an holy principle, the exercise of which will produce a gradual assimilation to himself, and meetness for heaven; and, for those
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very purposes, hath promised the influences of his Holy Spirit. You ought therefore to endeavour most carefully to have your faith invigorated and strengthened. In order to this, be constant in the exercise of faith; for every habit grows by repeated acts. Be diligent in your attendance on all the means of grace for the cultivation of faith. *For the hand of the diligent maketh rich.* Pray earnestly, as the apostles did, *Lord, increase our faith.* Get clear and distinct views of the nature and design of the plan of salvation, with the nature, extent and freedom of gospel-promises; as well those made to Christ in your name, as those made to you for his sake.

For motives to excite you to those improving exercises, consider that a strong faith gives glory to God, and will enable you to live becoming your high calling. It will silence your unbelieving fears, and produce for you strength in weakness, light in darkness, comfort in sorrow, and relief in all your straits. It will make your journey to Zion easy, and smooth all the rugged steps of your way, open for you a comfortable passage *through the valley of the shadow of death,* and *a joyful entrance into eternal life.* And this will enable you with humble boldness to approach the divine throne for mercy and grace to help you in every time of need.

To plead for purchased mercies upon the strength of a promise, is a most useful exercise of faith for promoting the spiritual life, and obtaining all the precious fruits and comforts of it. Did'time allow, I would point out the usefulness, and give directions for the exercise of faith in every circumstance in which you can be placed, and to obtain every mercy you crave for time or eternity, for yourselves or others, for individuals or for the church in general. There is not a single case with respect to which your prayers are required, but there is something in the promises suited to it, which you ought to hold up as a plea in prayer.

To illustrate this in a few instances only. Do you want pardon for backsliding, and the cure of a backsliding temper? Plead that gracious promise, *I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely.* Do you lament that your souls are as the barren heath in the desert, *which does not see when good cometh?* Plead this and such like words of grace; *Their soul shall be as a watered garden.* Do you feel your need of strength for duty and warfare? Hold up to Christ his own precious word, *My grace is sufficient for thee.* Do you long to see the prosperity of Zion, and rejoice in her joy? Plead the gracious promises of Zion's God to make her *a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of our God; To be as the dew to Israel, to make him revive as the corn, grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon.* In this soul-quickening exercise, faith, looking to the mercy from which the promise originated, and the truth engaged for the performance of it, is strengthened to take hold of the Saviour, saying, *I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.* Such a wrestling Jacob will be a prevailing Israel.

Some of you, perhaps, are saying, "I fear I have no right to plead the promises. Had I tender and spiritual affections, or assurance of my personal interest in Christ, I might venture to rest in him, and plead the promises of his grace. But, alas! my heart is so dark and cold, and so stupid, I dare not, I cannot approach him with confidence." Your fears, brethren, indicate that you labour under mistakes injurious to your comfort and progress in piety. You wish to know how good you are, and look for spiritual affections, or assurance of actual interest in Christ, as your warrant, at least in part, to apply to him for pardon and grace. But he will let you see how bad you are, and make you come self-empty to the fountain of free grace for all your supplies. Your hesitation about your right to come, because of your want of powerful spiritual affections, is a dreg of that pride and

and unbelief, which at first held you off from a closure with Christ, until you should be better prepared to apply to him. You should come immediately to him for those affections, which you wish for as your encouragement or warrant to come. It will be useful for you to take notice of the distinction between an actual right in the blessings of the promise, and a right to come to Christ for them; between the grounds of trust; and an assurance of actual interest in him. Assurance of actual interest is founded, in part, upon pious exercises of the heart as evidences of a gracious state, the agreement of which, with the marks of true piety laid down in the word of God, is cleared and confirmed by the witness of the Spirit. But the sole ground of trust in Christ for pardon and grace is the full and free tender thereof in the offers and promises of the gospel. Therefore, if you cannot ascertain your actual interest in these; yet you may be assured they give you a right or warrant to apply for the blessings contained in them. Therefore, if you cannot come as a sinner, come at the call of the gospel as a sinner, as one of Adam's needy and ruined family. The judicious and spiritual Doctor Owen observes, that "the grounds and essential acts of faith are always the same." In every succeeding act, as well as in its first act, you must come to Christ for grace and salvation as guilty, unworthy and helpless sinners, upon the encouragement of gospel overtures only, without respect to any goodness that is in you, or done by you, as giving you a right to the blessings of the promise, or to apply for them. And as long as you attempt to come upon any other footing, so long will you be disappointed, so long will your perplexing doubts and fears remain.

A present direct act of faith, upon the encouragement of the gospel offer alone, is the way of safety, and the only way of relief from all your complaints. This will make what was darkness before shine with evidence as noon day. And

without this, in vain will you look for spiritual affections, or assurance of personal interest in Christ and his salvation.

III. Is it the command of God to believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ? and is the grace of believing his unmerited gift? what a precious door of hope does this open to the convinced sinner, who is solicitously enquiring, *What shall I do to be saved?* The answer is ready; *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.* Here you have the encouragement of a command with a promise. The command is much; for it makes it your duty to believe, and secures you against a charge of presumption for attempting your duty. A promise united with the command much more; for it secures the blessing, when by grace you shall have complied with the order. **BELIEVE AND THOU SHALT BE SAVED.** Enter in at this door, take hold of this hope, and you shall have inheritance with apostles themselves, in the same manner they obtained it, and upon the very same grounds.

Perhaps some afflicted soul may be saying, "What grounds have I to expect that the Lord would make me welcome? Although he be able and willing to save other penitent and tender hearted sinners. I fear he will never save me, my heart is so vile, my practice has been so base, and my sins so heinous, being committed against much light and love, many strivings of the Holy Spirit with my conscience, and many calls of grace repeatedly refused. What shall I do? If I knew that my name was written in the Lamb's book of life; or if I had a broken heart and tender affections, I would venture to believe on Christ. But how can I trust that he will receive me, hardened as I am, filthy as I am, guilty, uncommonly guilty, as I am? ah, my heart is harder than adamant, viler, if possible, than hell itself!" Pitiable case indeed, but not desperate. Your objections,

objections, however, arise from some mistakes dishonouring to Christ, and injurious to your own souls. (1.) You place the decree of God as a bar in the way of your duty, and wish for the knowledge of your election as your encouragement to believe; whereas faith is the way to assure a soul of its calling and election. Was there but one elect vessel upon earth, it is your duty to believe at the divine command, and prove by your faith that you are that one. You refuse to obey the revealed will of God, which makes it your duty to believe in the name of his Son, unless he will disclose unto you his secret counsel. This is rebellion, and a bold invasion of JEHOVAH'S right. *For secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but revealed, unto us and to our children.* By all the regard you owe to his authority and your own salvation, I beseech you to invade the divine prerogative no longer, nor refuse the mercy so graciously tendered to you.

(2.) You look for encouragement to believe, in part at least, from yourselves, and not wholly from the Lord. You seek for religious frames as your recommendation to Christ; whereas you should come to him without money and without price. You must come to him just as you are, or never come at all—come as hard hearted, polluted, guilty and helpless sinners, upon the encouragement of free grace only. But you try to wash yourselves, that you may come to the fountain to be washed more clean—to heal yourselves, in part, and then come to a physician to perfect the cure. (3.) This implies a secret distrust of the power and grace of Christ to save sinners so guilty and vile as you are, unless you do something to lessen the aggravations, and diminish the strength of your sins. I ask you, brethren, Is Christ an imperfect Saviour? Can he only save sinners of a smaller size? Is the efficacy of his blood and grace limited? Do they need the aid of your obedience and merit? Is he a liar, and his word a lie? All these blasphemies your unbelieving hearts

impute to the Lord. To say you are willing to be saved by Christ, but he is unwilling to save you, is a slander thrown out against the heavens—Yes, it is a lie! For *he that believeth not the record God gave of his Son, hath made him a liar.* And this is his record, that Christ is able and willing to save the chief of sinners. *Ye will not come unto me, that ye might have life,* is the testimony of the blessed Jesus himself. *How often,* says he, *would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not.* These, with many other divine testimonies, charge the unwillingness wholly to the sinner's account. Christ is willing to save you; but you are unwilling to be saved by him on his own terms. The enmity of your hearts against God and the scheme of salvation by Christ is the sole cause of your non-compliance with the calls of the gospel.

Cease then to cast stumbling blocks in your own way. The command of God to sinners without exception to believe, is a sufficient warrant for you to go upon, and there is every motive in the glorious object of faith held up to you, **THE NAME OF HIS SON JESUS CHRIST,** to excite your trust in him. He is Emmanuel, God in our nature; therefore complete in office-characters, and there is an infinite virtue in each of them for your salvation. *In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily; for he is the LORD, the LORD GOD, merciful and gracious, long suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgressions, and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty.* This is his name; for God's name is in him. Are you most wretched and miserable? He is most **MERCIFUL!** And his mercy reacheth down to the very border of hell, to raise up objects of its eternal praise. Are you most undeserving and hell-deserving? He is most **GRACIOUS!** and his grace waits not for the creature's goodness, but bestows it, and infinitely rises above all the deserts of sin. *For where sin abounded, grace did much*
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more abound. Have you long withstood all the calls of grace, and all the persuasives of redeeming love? He is **LONG SUFFERING!** his calls continue until the eleventh hour, and till the last moment of that hour. In the same hour he raised the penitent thief from the cross to the crown. Has your life been a scene of countless and most base abominations? every action, every word, and every thought a polluted stream! He is **ABUNDANT IN GOODNESS:** Infinitely great in goodness, and infinitely good in greatness! His pardoning love and goodness is an ocean without a bottom, a sea without a shore. It purged a Magdalene of seven devils, and formed her into a shining star of glory. It washed the blood of persecution out of Saul's guilty conscience, and changed him from a persecuting Saul into a preaching Paul. It has saved millions of Adam's ruined family; and is it not sufficient for the salvation of one perishing sinner? Were you chargeable with the guilt, and infected with the stain, of the whole fallen race, the blood and grace of Christ are infinitely more powerful to save, than all this would be to destroy you. And he who is **ABUNDANT IN TRUTH,** has pledged his faithful word, that if ye be obedient to the call of grace, *though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red as crimson, they shall be as wool.* He invites him that willeth, to take *the water of life freely.* Do you want salvation? come and take it as the gift of God. How extensive that generous call, *Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth?* If ye be in the earth at all, this gracious invitation takes you in. Do not then cast yourselves out by unbelief. He counsels you to buy of him *gold tried in the fire, white raiment, and eye salve.* Did this wonderful Counsellor ever give wrong advice? He entreats you *to be reconciled to God.* Shall the heavens come down to you in supplications? and will not you cry to the heavens, and trust an entreating Saviour for grace?—It is his own

gracious PROMISE, *Him that cometh, I will in no wise cast out.* Shall THE AMEN, *the faithful and true witness*, be exposed to the disadvantage of man, to say, and not to do; to promise, and not perform? Unbelief says, he will cast you out; the promise says, he will not cast you out. Satan says, he will cast you out; Christ says, *Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out.* Now, which is to be credited, unbelief, or the promise?—Satan, or Christ? and his promise he has sealed with his OATH, *that by (these) two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us.* Here you have the promise of Jehovah, sanctioned by his eternal oath, to excite you to flee to Christ for refuge from the pursuit of avenging justice. *As I live saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live.* As though Jehovah had said, I pledge my eternal life upon it, I forfeit all the glories of Godhead, if ye fail of eternal life, who turn to me by faith and repentance. Search all the records of earth and heaven, and will you, can you, find security equal to this.

Let unbelief then hide its head, and never more utter its reproaches against the God of truth and grace. I beseech you by all the tears and blood of the Son of God, by all his gracious characters, by all his gracious offers, by all his pressing calls, by all his alluring invitations, by all his moving entreaties, by all his tender mercies, by all his redeeming love, and by all the strength of his promise, confirmed with his almighty oath:—by all these I beseech, I obtest, I adjure you, in his great name, no longer to refuse the tenders of rich grace; but give glory to God by believing the record he hath given of his Son, and embrace him as your Saviour with all your heart.

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It may be, some of you are saying, These messages of peace and love are joyful tidings indeed; but, alas! my stupid heart will not receive them. Ah! this heart, this hard, this unbelieving heart! Ten thousand worlds for an heart cordially disposed to embrace Christ as my Lord and my Saviour! *O ye afflicted, tossed with tempest and not comforted; lay your hearts at the foot of the cross, and see if pardoning blood and love will not melt and soften them. Earnestly and incessantly plead the promise of the Holy Spirit, to create in you a new heart, and take the heart of stone out of your flesh. O Lord! heal me, and I shall be healed; turn me, and I shall be turned.* Beware of suffering your convictions to die, lest, like Ephraim, ye be unwise sons, *tarrying long in the dangerous place of the breaking forth of children.* Steadily persevere in importunate suits, until ye obtain the blessing.

Grace, indeed, is sovereign, and nothing done by the creature can deserve it. This you must know and acknowledge. At the same time, continue to plead the riches and freedom of it, with humble hope in divine mercy. To this end were all the examples and overtures of it exhibited in the gospel. Did you ever read, is there any record in the sacred oracles of one spurned from the feet of mercy, who would abide by her door posts, and would not go without a blessing? Did not the publican, pleading mercy, go to *his house justified rather than the other?* rather than the self-righteous pharisee? When Ephraim, bemoaning himself, and struggling with a perverse heart, *as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke,* prayed, *Turn thou me, and I shall be turned;* the Lord answers, *Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For since the day that I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him, I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord.* And when the perishing, self-condemned prodigal

gal resolved to confess his guilt, and plead grace, the father of mercy *saw him a great way off, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.* Did you follow the allusion here, you might (so to speak) see the quick eye of mercy discerning the first movements of a returning sinner towards God, the swift feet of mercy running to meet him, the kind arms of mercy extended to receive him, a kiss of mercy to hail him, and seal a sense of pardoning love upon his heart. May the Lord encrease your sense of the need of mercy, excite your hope of it, aid your wrestling for it, and receive you with the like distinguishing marks of favour and love.

IV. In the last place, from the nature and excellency of the grace and duty of faith, let unbelievers learn their guilt, their danger, their remedy, and their duty. Faith is a most excellent grace; unbelief, therefore, which is its direct opposite, must be a most heinous sin. When Christ promiseth the Holy Spirit to *convince the world of sin*, he adds, with peculiar emphasis, *Of sin, because they believe not in me*; as though it were, as indeed it is, the basest, the most dangerous crime. Of all others, it is a sin of the highest aggravation. For while other sins strike at the law of God, this strikes more immediately at the grace of the gospel: It denieth all the perfections of God, especially his mercy and truth: It refuseth Christ the honour of your salvation: It contemneth his threatenings, discrediteth his promises, rejecteth his grace, slighteth his love, insulteth his pangs, and, with infidel Jews, cries, *Crucify him, crucify him.* It opens his closed wounds, and makes them bleed afresh! What a dismal tragedy is acted over again, in all our congregations, every sabbath, and every sacrament! every unbeliever coming with the dagger concealed in his heart, to thrust into the heart of the Lord of glory! The privacy of the enemy

my renders it the more dangerous to the soul. It lies deeply concealed in the heart under many masks; and is therefore the last foe discovered by the convinced finner. But when discovered, how horrid does the monster appear! It addeth malignity to all his other crimes; for it not only pierceth the Saviour in a peculiar sense; but bindeth all his other sins fast upon him, and puts an aggravation into all the pains due for sin. *If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins. He that believeth not, shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him. And he that believeth not shall be damned,* is the testimony of the Holy Ghost himself.

Awful condemnation! The punishment of Tyre and Sidon, of Sodom and Gomorrah, shall be light compared with yours, O ye neglecters of the great salvation, purchased with the blood of God! If ye remain in unbelief, ye shall sink down in Tophet's burning gulf, far below the vilest Sodomite. With the weight of law-curses, you shall sink under the much heavier weight of the gospel sanction, **DAMNATION FOR UNBELIEF!** Fearful sentence! Wrath aggravated to the highest by rejecting the only begotten son of God, the richest gift of everlasting love! *For if he that despised Moses' law died without mercy, of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be accounted worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing**. Dreadful, inexpressibly dreadful will be the enquiry after blood, the slighted blood of the Son of God!

Hear

* Heb. x. 28, 29. Some have adduced this text in support of their unscriptural doctrine of the saints falling totally and finally from grace. Others have been at much pains to adapt it to the common sanctification of graceless professors, from which

Hear this, ye Christ's despisers, and tremble. That blessed name, in which you are commanded to believe, proclaims joy to true believers, and opens a blessed door of relief to convinced sinners; but it speaketh terror to all who continue in impenitence and unbelief. He is *the* LORD GOD, *merciful and gracious*; but *he will by no means clear the guilty*. Beware of him, (saith his Father), and obey his voice, for he will not forgive your transgressions, for my name is in him. My justice as well as mercy is in him. These always unite in perfect harmony. Mercy will not pardon the sinner to the prejudice of justice; and justice necessarily exacteth punishment of impenitent offenders. If, therefore, ye would be saved, ye must yield obedience to the gospel call, by accepting the offer of salvation through Christ. His blood

which many fall away. But the sense of the words will appear very natural and easy by a due attention to the scope of the apostle's argument in the context, and throughout the epistle. For, as the learned and judicious DOCTORS OWEN and GUYSE observe, *the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified*, rather relates to Christ, who was consecrated to his priestly office by his own blood, than to him *who counted the blood of the covenant an unholy thing*: for the Son of God is the immediate antecedent, and the apostle's design was to aggravate the sin of apostates, from a consideration of *the worth and dignity of the person they slighted and abused*. And as the Father is said to have sanctified Christ, or set him apart to his mediatorial office, and Christ to have sanctified or dedicated and set apart himself to it by his death, (John x. 36. and xvii. 10.) so he was sanctified to his priestly office in heaven, by the blood of the new covenant, answerable to the sanctification of Aaron and his sons to the high priesthood for the service of the sanctuary, by the blood of the Mosaic covenant, Lev. viii. 30. And the scheme of this epistle for comparing Christ and the high priest under the law naturally leadeth us to this sense.

blood is the only propitiation for sin, and it is all-sufficient to save the worst of you : *For the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin*. And sinners, without exception, are commanded to believe in his name. Mercy reacheth down to you in the hand of a promise, pardon bought and sealed with the blood of Jesus !

Kiss then, O guilty sinner ! *kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way*. This blood speaketh *better things than that of Abel*. Abel's blood cried for vengeance ; Christ's blood speaks peace and good will to rebel men. But *if ye refuse him that speaketh from heaven*, presently the peace-speaking voice of the Lamb, will change into the rage of the Lion of the tribe of Judah, roaring for his prey ! Haste then, brethren, and without delay flee to Christ as your only refuge from the storm of impending wrath. May the Lord of his infinite mercy convince you of your need of the Saviour, and by the almighty power of grace persuade your reluctant hearts to believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ. AMEN.

S E R.