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On Self-examination.

1. **A**MONG the various duties of the Christian life, it is generally agreed that self-examination has an important place.

The great subject of enquiry is, whether we are the true children of God, and so heirs of eternal life, through Christ Jesus, or, in the apostolic language, "whether we are in the faith." Because all true believers in Christ, are, indeed, the children of God and have, in the gospel, a sure title to eternal life.

The enquiry supposes the subject to be capable of a rational investigation and decision, on proper evidence, and that Christians have the means and abilities to examine and decide.

2. The duty and importance of self-examination, appears from various considerations. It respects the salvation of the soul, and is so intimately connected with it, that we may reasonably suppose it to be practised by all who are the heirs of salvation, and possessed of the abilities and means for this duty. The subject is so exceedingly interesting and important in itself, and in the

view of all Christians, that none can be supposed to neglect this enquiry.

It is a subject capable of investigation. Those who are in a state of salvation may obtain satisfying evidence of it, by proper examination. If this were not the case it would be improper to urge it. In temporal concerns, where truth is attainable, men are disposed to discover it, in some proportion to its importance, their interest in it, and the means they possess for the discovery.

In the progress of this discussion it will appear that the important question of our title to heaven, may be decided on good scriptural evidence.

A false hope is exceedingly dangerous. Sad is the prospect of a man's future state who thinks himself to be something when he is nothing. He is hardened against all divine warnings to the wicked. Nothing short of a conviction that his hope is unfounded will awaken him to fly from the wrath to come; and so bring him within the reach of a hope which shall not make him ashamed at last. This conviction may be produced by

self-examination. Without this there is little ground to expect it.

“Now is the accepted time and the day of salvation.” Whatever is done for the salvation of the soul must be done speedily.

Neither self-examination or any other mean of salvation, will be of any avail after death. The retributions of eternity will be “according to the things done in the body.” Hence all the truly wise consider this subject to be of the highest importance, and attend to it, as being intimately connected with their eternal concerns. They feel the need of divine teaching, and say with the psalmist, “examine me, O Lord, and prove me. Try my reins and my heart;”* and they submit, with alacrity, to the apostolic injunction, “Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves, know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you except ye be reprobates.”†

3. We must endeavor to prepare our minds for this duty, by deep and solemn contemplation on the importance of it, as probably extending its influence to our eternal state. We must enter upon it with serious deliberation, as far as possible with a mind sequestered from the cares of this life, and the concerns of time.

We must have, fixed in our mind, the most distinguishing scriptural marks of a gracious state, and be well established in the belief of the truth and divinity of the sacred writings, and in a full conviction of the principal doctrines, institutions and duties of Christianity, for it is by evidence of our conformity to these in heart and life, that our title to future happiness is to be proved to ourselves.

The importance of this work, our inefficacy in ourselves, and great liability to self-deception, will lead us to humble, fervent and persevering prayer, to the God of all grace, that he will enlighten our darkness, make us truly willing and desirous to know the truth of our state and character, and assist us in the work, and bring us to such a decision as will stand the test of his all-searching eye.

4. At our entrance on this work, we must examine ourselves, what we believe concerning God and religion, and on what evidence.

For as “all people will walk after the name of their God,” if our views of the divine character are essentially wrong, our religion will be so likewise; and our conformity to the character and institutions of the object of our worship, however exact, will be so far from proving our scriptural title to eternal life, that it will prove directly the reverse.

Will a belief of the character and institutions of the God exhibited in the Koran of Mahomet, and a conformity to it secure to the subjects the eternal life which the gospel promises to all true Christians?

Again, we must enquire on what evidence we believe the holy scriptures and the doctrines, institutions and duties which they teach.

A belief founded on the proper divine evidence is, itself, a good proof of our title to eternal life, for the scriptures assure us that “he that believeth shall be saved,” but there are many who have some kind of faith and yet draw back to perdition. Such are those in the parable of the sower represented by the stony ground and the thorny ground.

We first observe here, that the faith of the gospel, which is con-

* Psalm xxvi. 2. † 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

connected with the salvation of the believer, receiveth divine truth on the testimony of God, submits to it, and embraces it, and is governed by it, and endures to the end. This implies that it is a fruit of renewing grace, that it involves reconciliation to God, repentance for sin, approbation of the law and gospel, and essentially, all Christian graces, and is productive of a course of persevering obedience to divine commands to the end of life.

5. We must examine, whether we experience the exercise of the Christian graces, in particular, whether we truly love the ever blessed God? This must be determined primarily, by a consciousness of what passes in our own minds. If this be determined in the affirmative, the enquiry may be extended thus, is the present consciousness of love to God a solitary experience, or have we a consciousness of a series of like exercises, from the time that we have hoped that we were the children of God?

There is indeed a time when the true Christian has the first experience of love to God, at the time of his saving conversion; but this can never be his case but once, and therefore doth not materially affect the present enquiry.

If we are unconscious of a series of exercises of love to God, from the time that we supposed ourselves to be renewed, no present impression of that aspect can give well grounded evidence that we are passed from death to life. If our love to God be genuine it is persevering.

This being found on examination, we enquire after the objective ground of our love to God. Does it rest on impressions of divine favor only? In a belief that God has

given us some great temporal or spiritual good, or that he will do it hereafter? Or is it the result of a view of the real excellence, or beauty of the divine character, as holy, just, good and glorious, exhibited in the works or word of God, directly to the mind, without any respect to self or self-interest? For though true gratitude for divine favors is a spiritual and holy exercise of heart, totally different from selfish rejoicing in our own private advantage, and the consequent selfish affection to the benefactor, yet, the nature of gracious affection, is more easily discerned and distinguished when excited by direct views of the moral beauty or loveliness of divine objects as they are in themselves.

This distinction is exceedingly important. "Sinners love those who love them." A heart entirely sinful, may be deeply affected with the reception of personal favors, and this affection to the benefactor will be proportioned to the impression of the greatness of the evil to which the subject was exposed, and the greatness of the good bestowed. Hence the sinner, who is awakened to a realizing sense of the wrath of God and his extreme exposedness to eternal misery, and is suddenly impressed, (by whatever means) with a belief, that God loves him, that Christ died with a design to save him, that God has pardoned his sins, or will save him from endless torments, such a sinner will be filled with unutterable joy, and will be full of expressions of his great love to God and Christ, on the principle of perfect selfishness, and without the least degree of true holiness, or genuine love to God and Christ. Such was the case with the Israelites at the Red Sea, who "sang the praises of God

but soon forgot his works." And such is the case of the stony ground hearers in the parable of the sower.

That we may not be deceived in this important article, we should enquire, whether our love to God is excited by a view of his law, its precepts, prohibitions and sanctions, by the mediatorial character and work of Christ, as supporting it, in all those views, and even magnifying it and making it honorable?

Whether we love God when he visits us with afflictions and crosses for our sins, and whether we love him when we have the least comfortable hope of saving mercy, or only when we believe he loves us and will save us?

6. We must examine, whether our love to God be attended with corresponding exercises of other gracious affections, such as repentance for sin, self-abasement, cordial compliance with the gospel way of salvation by Christ, the meek and gentle spirit of the gospel, love to the word, ordinances, and people of God, mercy and kindness to all, submission under divine chastisement, sensible dependence on God for all things, thankfulness for his mercies, weanedness from the world and longing after conformity to God and enjoyment of him, with the other branches of Christian experience.

The renewed soul is possessed of all the graces of the spirit, or the branches of Christian holiness, and there is an agreement and proportion of all the parts. This is evident from many scripture passages, and from the nature of the case. Thus true love to God is attended with genuine repentance for sin.

The primary source of repentance is a view of the moral excellence or loveliness of the divine character, as this produces in the

mind a conviction of the excellence and perfection of the divine law, and thus shows the great evil of sin, which is "a transgression of the law." This view of personal sin, produces in the renewed soul, that self-disapprobation for it, that genuine submission to the condemning sentence of the law, and that cordial desire to return to God, which constitute the essence of true repentance and distinguish it from those legal sorrows for sin which may exist in the unsanctified heart, and which are excited by a conviction of exposedness to the wrath of God.

True love to God and repentance for sin, are attended with a conviction of our ruined state as sinners, of the righteousness of God in our condemnation, and of our perishing need of sovereign mercy; of course the mediatorial character and work of Christ appear in their glory, and the way of salvation for sinners through his atonement deeply impresses the mind, with its unrivalled perfection, as being in all respects worthy of God, suitable to the condition of man, and altogether divine. By this, especially, the mind is fully established in the truth and divinity of the gospel, embraces the salvation which it offers, and the way in which it is procured and bestowed. The believing sinner clearly sees the righteousness of God displayed and supported, in the mediatorial work of Christ, as God manifest in flesh; the law magnified and made honorable, sin condemned, and "grace reigning through righteousness to eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord." In this way of salvation his heart rests, and he has joy and peace in believing, and we are sure that he who thus believeth shall be saved.

As repentance towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus

Christ are essentially connected with genuine love to God ; even so are all the graces of the Spirit, such as Christian humility, brotherly love, good will to all men, kindness to the poor and afflicted, forgiveness to the injurious, weanedness from the world, self-denial, heavenly mindedness ; with all other branches of the Christian temper.

Hence if we find in ourselves an habitual and persevering love to God, from views of his moral excellence, we must enquire whether this love is attended with the corresponding graces, which have been named ; for if this be not the case we have no just ground to conclude that we are the children of God, because there is an inseparable communion in the nature of all holy affections, and the holy scriptures abundantly teach, that all true Christians receive from Christ, grace for grace, and have the same mind which was also in him.

7. We must examine, whether our love to God, and to spiritual and divine objects be supreme. Our blessed Saviour has abundantly taught us that except we love him, more than all created objects, so as to part, willingly, from them all for his sake, when they are in competition with him ; we cannot be his disciples, and that except we deny ourselves and take up our cross daily, and follow him, we have no part in him.*

If our love to God be supreme, it will be attended with the corresponding views and affections which have been named, and we shall abide the test of those discriminating declarations of the divine Saviour. But if not, we shall, when "weighed in the balance, be found wanting."

* Mat. x. 37, 38. and xvi. 24. Mark viii. 34. Luke ix. 23. & xiv. 26, *et passim.*

That self-denial which Jesus ascribes us is essential to discipleship, consists not, as many misguided zealots have supposed, in tormenting the body, or excluding ourselves from those innocent enjoyments of life which God graciously gives us, and which are "to be received with thanksgiving, of those who believe and know the truth." But it consists in that experimental and practical religion, in which a supreme, governing love to God and divine things bears us on through all opposition from within and without, in the service of God, with a steady aim at his glory and the good of his kingdom, in contradiction to all the selfish and narrow pursuits of the carnal mind, which are ever directed to some private, personal advantage, without any respect to public good and which are not subordinate but ultimately opposed to it.

8. We must enquire, whether our internal views and exercises in religion, are attended and followed with the corresponding fruits of obedience, in a practical regard to all divine institutions and commands.—This is the last and crowning evidence of our discipleship, and title to eternal life, for "this is the love of God that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not grievous."*

This subject of enquiry might be considered in relation to our whole life, since we have professed to know the truth : As it is connected with all our relations to God, as a being of infinite perfection, our creator and preserver, our law-giver, and judge,—as our Redeemer and sanctifier, our providential governor, and the object of our worship ;—as it relates to

* 1 John v. 3. and 2 John 6.

all the relative duties which we owe to our fellow creatures, and to our present and future lives.—If our religion be genuine, it causeth us to have respect to all God's commandments, and produceth universal obedience, attended indeed, with sinful imperfection, for in every thing we come short, but still we aim at perfection, and are longing, praying and striving after it.—Our sinful imperfection in every duty is a source of humiliation before God, and we watch and pray lest we enter into temptation.

That spirit of Christian obedience which animates the true Christian, is not less sincerely engaged in the discharge of the common duties of life, in our domestic and other relations, than in those which are the most public and splendid; for it esteems the divine commands concerning all things to be right, and hates every false way. To persons of this description, the word of God is precious as a daily companion, and guide. The Lord's day, and other divine institutions are highly regarded, and practically improved,—they strive to advance in Christian knowledge and grace themselves, and as far as may be to be useful to the best interests of others. This renders them faithful in all relations, and teaches them to “Do to others in all things, as they would that others should do to them.” They live mindful of death and the future state, and unite in the prayer of the psalmist, “Lord teach us so to number our days that we may apply our hearts to wisdom.”

PHILANDER.

FOR THE CONNECTICUT EVANGELICAL MAGAZINE.

Quest. *Why is the regenerated man subject to any remainder of sin?*

When God wrought the work of sanctification in his heart, and had the power, why did he not render him perfectly holy?

SUCH is the language of Infidels, who often make enquiries like these, with an expectation that they are unanswerable, and that they shall enjoy a certain triumph over the Christian, whose belief involves in it such supposed unanswerable absurdities. More reflection is necessary to answer the subtle questions of an Infidel, than is commonly bestowed on the subject of Christianity, even by professing Christians. The Infidel hardly appears as an interrogating champion, 'till he has, with some subtle inconsistency, settled his plan; through which its fallacy would not immediately appear. Having thus prepared himself, the Infidel comes forth to puzzle believers; and the subject of the foregoing enquiry, is one often resorted to, and one, on which he plumes himself. I will, therefore, endeavor to furnish the reasons to those who have not time to search them out.

The two questions I shall consider as implying the same thing; because the work of Regeneration and Sanctification, involving each other, and being solely the work of God, who certainly has the power to perform it in a different manner, if he will; it is plain that the enquiry implies this; why has not God taken away all sin from the hearts of those whom he has chosen, and completed them in holiness? In answering this I would observe the following things:

1st. I take it for granted that all, who allow of the existence of God, also allow him to be perfect. If he is not perfect, he is not God. If he is perfect, then he must be perfectly wise, else he is perfect,