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**Communications.**

*Revelation accordant with Reason.*

Paganism in ancient and modern times, is equally calculated to enhance the guilt, and multiply the miseries of men. Mahometanism, though grafted upon revelation, is a monstrous corruption, evidently aiming at political subjugation, and the debasement of the human mind. The philosophy of Zeno had little influence upon the world; and that of Epicurus rendered its votaries addicted to the vilest practices. The schemes of modern infidelity have derived their lustre from light purloined from the gospel; they are, in all their forms, the offspring of prejudice and pride, and exist by excluding the truth.

Having the idea of God, our reason can establish the truth of his existence, ascertain many of his perfections, natural and moral, discern our dependance on and obligations to him, and discover outlines of his law, or rules of moral conduct, which we ought to pursue. Those, who are not able to think, or speak clearly of the nature of virtue, and the origin of vice, can nevertheless distinguish right from wrong, and feel a sense or consciousness of guilt, as well as infer from their miseries, a state of opposition to the Creator. In apostasy, it is fit we should be separated from holy and happy beings, and deprived of the sensible presence of the perfectly pure and holy God.

The degradation of an innocent creature implies losses which are immense. Immured in the dark prison of the body, we are excluded from intercourse with separate spirits, and justly treated as convicts, banished from the presence of the Judge. Repentance and faith are at best an imperfect righteousness, and accompanied by propensities to sin, which deserve misery and death.

Against death, the probable evidence of immortality affords, to mere human reason, very slight grounds of comfort. Without a hereafter, man is indeed a mystery; justice has failed; the idea of a future life a tantalizing evil; the faculties of the human mind are misplaced and useless. Yet immortality admitted, a future state, without a revelation, must fill the mind with fearful apprehensions. For although justice requires a distinction to be made between characters, yet the universality of guilt, and the strictness of the claims of justice, seem to exclude hope.

Reason admits, that he who formed the mind, can reveal himself to it; and that he may, if he chooses, remove our uncertainties and fears. The goodness of the Creator, evinced by our present comforts, and even the miseries of man warrant some expectation, that he would do this. The books, which claim the character of a revelation, receive the fullest support from the history of past ages, the manners and languages of the nations. The simplicity of their unadorned narratives, their impar-

tiality, their purity, and tendency to promote holiness, the accomplishment of their prophecies, the miracles which they have recorded, their influence upon the hearts, lives and hopes of men, all lead to the duty of giving them a strict and fair examination. When we explore by candid and diligent investigation their real meaning, they give those views both of God and man, which our reason must approve, and which neither the writers of those books, had they been left to themselves, nor any other set of men, would have been able to have furnished. Whilst they represent true religion, the same thing in every period of the world, they also exhibit it in the different forms, which divine wisdom had adapted to the times and ignorance of the respective ages. A pompous worship was long in use, the rites of which being but the images of good things to come, were superseded by the presence of the things themselves; and when the whole plan of salvation had been opened, the same worship of the heart, which had always been demanded, was required also as the religion of the gospel. We are now taught, that salvation is from the mercy of God in Christ, and that none are saved, unless made meet for heaven. The gospel exhibits the pardon of sin, without which we could have no hope; and promises the aids of the Spirit, which, though sovereign and gratuitous, are all important to us in the work of opposing our own corruptions. The doctrines of the resurrection, and the judgment, excite the languishing energies of the feeble saint, animate to further efforts, and fire his zeal. That the work of judgment should be committed to him, who bore our likeness and obeyed for us; that he who assumed the work of a Redeemer should possess the divine nature, and be thus able to procure for his people eternal life, is highly consolatory to the humble disciple. That there might be full

reliance upon him, the earliest intimations were given of him. Prophecies of his family, the time and circumstances of his advent, the particulars of his birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension, had been given and were fulfilled. His resurrection has been confirmed by numerous and credible witnesses. His doctrines have had the effects, which he foretold. And the opposition to them has been such, as he described. The poverty, obscurity, and want of education in his disciples; the prevalence of the truth against the wisdom, learning, power and malice of the world; and the influence of their doctrines and manners upon the nations, all show that this salvation was of God. Truth requires neither artifice nor violence to support it; but spiritual truth, though shown by the strongest evidence, is nevertheless effectually resisted by the heart of man, until changed, in some unknown manner, by the same Power by which it was at first created.

The gospel exhibits at the same time the indefectible rectitude, and astonishing mercy of the divine character, and their reconciliation, in the redemption of guilty man; evincing, to the surprise of angelic natures, that God can maintain his justice, support the dignity of his government, and yet save the guilty believer. It discovers full scope to have been given to moral agency, and that nevertheless all the glory of man's salvation belongs to God. It breathes peace, promotes the love of God and man, casts a light upon the path of life, and gives a solid ground of hope, opening to our view an eternity of happiness, and rendering even death itself a victory.

J. P. WILSON.

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*On proclaiming and hearing the Gospel.*

A religion without moral purity, can neither please the righteous Governor of the universe, nor secure

any lasting benefit to the worshipper. His laws are spiritual, and require no duties, but such as are from proper motives and to proper ends; without faith it is impossible to please God.

To persuade men, that they can be saved, either for their works, or faith, is to reject the only sacrifice for sin. To teach, that men can be saved, either without works, or faith, is equally an error, if there be a capacity of, and an opportunity for them. Men are not to be advised to amend their ways as a preparation for faith; their duty is nothing short of coming immediately to Christ. To tell men, that because they are unable to believe, they must perform duties in hope of grace, is to offer them an excuse for unbelief, and to misrepresent their want of inclination, as physical, not moral. To encourage men to improve common, that they may obtain special assistance from the Holy Spirit, is to exhort them to work for life, and so to attach merit to their works, as to admit boasting; whereas the true principle of obedience should be love to God, and the chief motive an aim at his glory. Every duty should be spiritual, for without the heart, it has lost its character. Men are to be enjoined to do whatever is commanded, not only with sincerity, humility, and dependance upon God for his grace, but all this from a desire of moral rectitude, and a submission to his preceptive will. The very prayer for grace, when such as it should be, is the exercise of grace, and thus ensures its own answer of peace.

The offer of salvation by Christ is not to be restricted to the chosen, but the invitation is to be made to all, even the vilest, true repentance being not in order of time, though in order of nature, antecedent to believing. Wherever there is true faith, there are also fruits of repentance. It is faith, not the offer, that secures an interest in Christ. And

every one, who thus receives him, will be saved. A persuasion that Christ is ours, is not a saving faith; it may be a fruit of it, or it may be self deception. Faith is an assent to truth; and if saving, a consent to spiritual good, with a dependance upon Christ; whether accompanied or not by an assurance of acceptance. It must exist before it is seen: "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith."

The gospel is not to be proclaimed without the law, nor the law announced without the gospel. No one will effectually apply to the Saviour, until he has discovered his need of him: this the law exhibits; its justice, spirituality and extensiveness, when seen, evince man's guilt and impotency. The written precepts are important to the saint also, to discover his duty and defects, and to lead him to humility. But to prescribe the law as a rule of duty to the unregenerate, and to encourage them to obey it, either for life, or to extenuate their guilt, is to wave repentance, and encourage sin.

Allurements and terrors have been thought to create a moral necessity and to destroy liberty. But the party still chooses, and is therefore free; nevertheless, an action arising either from mere terror, or the expectation only of advantage, has no merit in it. It may be good, if the hope and fear precede, or be concomitant unto, the love of holiness. Appeals to the affections of the unregenerate are therefore proper, as well as scriptural, and suited to the condition of human nature. They may even exhibit the mercy of God, who directs them, as a father, for our good.

The love of God which respects our own advantage alone, and not his moral excellence, may spring from a false persuasion, and have nothing spiritual in it. There may be a desire of holiness, and many and long prayers for regenerating grace, where happiness, not holi-

ness, nor the glory of God, is desired. There is a fitness and tendency in prayer, and other duties, to produce right dispositions; yet whenever the mind is so disposed, the glory belongs to grace, because man is naturally and prevailingly evil. But to suppose man is not obliged to holy duties, unless grace be given, is a monstrous perversion of the gospel, exculpation of man, and impeachment of divine justice: to ascribe holiness to man, in exclusion of the special influences of the divine spirit, is equally an error; for it is a denial of natural corruption, an idolatrous exaltation of the creature, and an invasion of the glory, which belongs to God only.

That persuasion of our own rectitude, which offers the apology of our sincerity, will not justify error, where the means exist of better information. For it supposes an honest and impartial inquiry, which is never, in such case, the fact. It also supposes, that sufficient means of discriminating truth from falsehood have not been afforded. This doctrine will justify the vilest and hardiest sinners, in their absurd claims of innocence, whilst those of more tender consciences, and greater fears of offending, will be, for these reasons, adjudged guilty. To account the want of a heart to offer right worship, a calamity rather than a crime, is to make the law and gospel void, both demanding spiritual worship. It is to justify the wicked in their opposition, and to encourage them in disobedience, because they choose it. It is to say, that unbelief is no crime, where man's prejudices exclude the truth; and that a rejection of every thing spiritual in Christianity is allowable, if the doctrines be too holy for the carnal heart. But neither doctrines, worship, nor obedience, can be deemed religion, where there is not an entire resignation to the divine will; "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Without this, there has been no submission to the

cross of Christ. Many are prepared to acknowledge their guilt by nature and practice, both in prayer and conversation, who have never felt the burden of sin, and are very comfortable in the use of means, trusting, as they think, to the mercy of God. Such are rarely, if ever, brought into the fold of Christ, whilst this hope continues. But when they consider themselves lost, that is the happy time, when the promise is fulfilled of the Holy Spirit, "to convince them of sin."

Few in our churches avow a dependence upon the rectitude of their intentions and conduct; they discern, that, "by the deeds of the law, no flesh can be justified." As this hope when entertained, is without the claim of an interest in Christ, so is it without a conformity unto his image. To claim as an excuse, the want of grace, is not only to suppose the innocence of the unbeliever, it is to assume that grace is not gratuitous, but debt.

When the word and ordinances produce respectful attention, or please the hearers, without awakening a desire of salvation, or a fear of final condemnation: when we worship from week to week without knowing any more of ourselves, or possessing any anxiety about religion, there is something wrong; a false peace, or an insensibility to the motives addressed by the gospel. The worship and ordinances, which are attended without any sensible effect, leaving men still asleep in dangerous security, miss their design. But if they awaken the conscience, render guilt more conspicuous, and sin more odious, if they produce efficient resolutions, of taking up the cross, and despising the vanities of this world, they become really advantageous.

Worship on earth is often a faint representation of heaven. In both, but in different degrees, there is a vision of Christ; in the one by faith, in the other, face to face. The true worshipper, in each, bears a resem-

blance of the moral image of his Saviour. In both, the world is left out of sight. On earth, the worshipper abandons every other plea, but that of Christ's righteousness; in heaven, he gives him all the glory of his salvation, and casts his crown at his feet. On earth, the saint enters into rest, and has peace; a few weep all along the road to the heavenly Canaan. But in heaven, all is peace and joy, without temptation or interruption.

The confidence of their own safety, which some persons of defective character possess, who are evidently self deceived, possessing no more than a natural love of God, gives much encouragement to the impatient. Even the desirable experience of others, whose change is the more discernible, because they have been reclaimed from extremes of sin, and sometimes also the false raptures of enthusiasm, produce an imputation of superstition; and thus prevent the investigation of the truth. There are many whose faith is weak, love languid, joy not great, comforts few; who experience dullness in duties, and barrenness in prayer; who come to the communion, merely because afraid to abstain, and who daily doubt, whether they have been renewed and justified. Yet there may be something of the savour of spiritual things in them, and a determination, if they must perish, that it shall be in seeking Christ.

This undesirable state of weakness, which is neither remarkable for keen distress, nor exulting joys, may nevertheless, be upon the whole conducive to vigilance, and progressive in holiness. Those who are thus sensible of their imbecility, are often alert to exclude the usual encouragements and consolations of the gospel, and to decide against themselves. Nevertheless, where there is such a sense of unworthiness; where even the feebleness of hope produces an accession of humility, and leads to a closer walk: or where

the mere probability of arriving at the possession of a saving interest in Christ, animates to seek more purity of heart, and a nearer approach to God, there may be room to conclude, that the work is a saving one, which is begun in the soul, and that the individual will at length arrive at the haven of eternal rest.

When the love of public ordinances, and practice of other religious duties, with patience, perseverance, and resignation unto the divine will, are progressively advancing, and the mind becomes more weaned from the world, and fixed on heavenly objects; the proofs of justification, and acceptance, are such, that the timid believer may venture down into the shadowy valley, and not fear to find, beyond the Jordan, the promised inheritance of ceaseless joys.

J. P. WILSON.

#### *On the Importance and Practical Influence of Revealed Truth.*

Truth is a sacred thing. By many, however, it is treated in a way by no means suited to its nature and importance. Some regard it with indifference, deeming the acquisition not worthy of any pains: others deny or doubt its practical influence: while others feel disposed to call in question the practicability of obtaining the knowledge of it.

We do not intend to take any notice of those ancient philosophers, who abandoned themselves to universal skepticism, and confounded all distinction between truth and error. Few perhaps can be found in the present day who feel inclined to become disciples of Pyrrho, so far as to reject the truths of *mathematical* and *natural science*. But they are not few who wantonly indulge a skeptical turn in regard to *moral truth*. Yet moral truth rests upon as firm a basis, as *mathematical* or *natural truth*. The evidence by which it is proved, when fairly presented and duly ex-