

INSTITUTES  
OF  
THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

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BOOK THIRD.

THE MODE OF OBTAINING THE GRACE OF CHRIST. THE BENEFITS IT CONFERS, AND THE EFFECTS RESULTING FROM IT.

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CHAPTER XIII.

TWO THINGS TO BE OBSERVED IN GRATUITOUS JUSTIFICATION.

The divisions of this chapter are,—I. The glory of God, and peace of conscience, both secured by gratuitous justification. An insult to the glory of God to glory in ourselves and seek justification out of Christ, whose righteousness, apprehended by faith, is imputed to all the elect for reconciliation and eternal salvation, sec. 1, 2. II. Peace of conscience cannot be obtained in any other way than by gratuitous justification. This fully proved, sec. 3-5.

*Sections.*

1. The glory of God remains untarnished, when he alone is acknowledged to be just. This proved from Scripture.
2. Those who glory in themselves glory against God. Objection. Answer, confirmed by the authority of Paul and Peter.
3. Peace of conscience obtained by free justification only. Testimony of Solomon, of conscience itself, and the Apostle Paul, who contends that faith is made vain if righteousness come by the law.
4. The promise confirmed by faith in the mercy of Christ. This is confirmed by Augustine and Bernard, is in accordance with what has been above stated, and is illustrated by clear predictions of the prophets.
5. Farther demonstration by an Apostle. Refutation of a sophism.

1. HERE two ends must be kept specially in view, namely, that the glory of God be maintained unimpaired, and that our consciences, in the view of his tribunal, be secured in peaceful rest and calm tranquillity. When the question relates to righteousness, we see how often and how anxiously Scripture exhorts us to give the whole praise of it to God. Accordingly, the Apostle testifies that the purpose of the Lord in conferring righteousness upon us in Christ, was to demonstrate his own righteousness. The nature of

this demonstration he immediately subjoins, viz., “that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus,” (Rom. iii. 25.) Observe, that the righteousness of God is not sufficiently displayed, unless He alone is held to be righteous, and freely communicates righteousness to the undeserving. For this reason it is his will, that “every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God,” (Rom. iii. 19.) For so long as a man has any thing, however small, to say in his own defence, so long he deducts somewhat from the glory of God. Thus, we are taught in Ezekiel how much we glorify his name by acknowledging our iniquity: “Then shall ye remember your ways and all your doings, wherein ye have been defiled; and ye shall loathe yourselves in your own sight, for all your evils that ye have committed. And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have wrought with you for my name’s sake, not according to your wicked ways, nor according to your corrupt doings,” (Ezek. xx. 43, 44.) If part of the true knowledge of God consists in being oppressed by a consciousness of our own iniquity, and in recognising him as doing good to those who are unworthy of it, why do we attempt, to our great injury, to steal from the Lord even one particle of the praise of unmerited kindness? In like manner, when Jeremiah exclaims, “Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory” in the Lord, (Jer. ix. 23, 24,) does he not intimate, that the glory of the Lord is infringed when man glories in himself? To this purpose, indeed, Paul accommodates the words when he says, that all the parts of our salvation are treasured up with Christ, that we may glory only in the Lord, (1 Cor. i. 29.) For he intimates, that whosoever imagines he has any thing of his own, rebels against God, and obscures his glory.

2. Thus, indeed, it is: we never truly glory in him until we have utterly discarded our own glory. It must, therefore, be regarded as a universal proposition, that whoso glories in himself glories against God. Paul indeed considers, that the whole world is not made subject to God until every ground of glorying has been withdrawn from men, (Rom. iii. 19.) Accordingly, Isaiah, when he declares that “in the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified,” adds, “and shall glory,” (Isa. xlv. 25;) as if he had said, that the elect are justified by the Lord, in order that they may glory in him, and in none else. The way in which we are to glory in the Lord he had explained in the preceding verse, “(Unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear “Surely, shall one say, in the Lord have I righteousness and strength, even to him shall men come.” Observe, that the thing required is not simple confession, but confession confirmed by an oath, that it might not be imagined that any kind of fictitious humility might suffice. And let no man here allege that he does not glory, when without arrogance he rec-

ognises his own righteousness; such a recognition cannot take place without generating confidence, nor such confidence without begetting boasting. Let us remember, therefore, that in the whole discussion concerning justification the great thing to be attended to is, that God's glory be maintained entire and unimpaired; since, as the Apostle declares, it was in demonstration of his own righteousness that he shed his favour upon us; it was "that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus," (Rom. iii. 26.) Hence, in another passage, having said that the Lord conferred salvation upon us, in order that he might show forth the glory of his name, (Eph. i. 6,) he afterwards, as if repeating the same thing, adds, "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast," (Eph. ii. 8.) And Peter, when he reminds us that we are called to the hope of salvation, "that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light," (1 Pet. ii. 9,) doubtless intends thus to proclaim in the ears of believers only the praises of God, that they may bury in profound silence all arrogance of the flesh. The sum is, that man cannot claim a single particle of righteousness to himself, without at the same time detracting from the glory of the divine righteousness.

3. If we now inquire in what way the conscience can be quieted as in the view of God, we shall find that the only way is by having righteousness bestowed upon us freely by the gift of God. Let us always remember the words of Solomon, "Who can say I have made my heart clean, I am free from my sin?" (Prov. xx. 9.) Undoubtedly, there is not one man who is not covered with infinite pollutions. Let the most perfect man descend into his own conscience, and bring his actions to account, and what will the result be? Will he feel calm and quiescent, as if all matters were well arranged between himself and God; or will he not rather be stung with dire torment, when he sees that the ground of condemnation is within him if he be estimated by his works? Conscience, when it beholds God, must either have sure peace with his justice, or be beset by the terrors of hell. We gain nothing, therefore, by discoursing of righteousness, unless we hold it to be a righteousness stable enough to support our souls before the tribunal of God. When the soul is able to appear intrepidly in the presence of God, and receive his sentence without dismay, then only let us know that we have found a righteousness that is not fictitious. It is not, therefore, without cause, that the Apostle insists on this matter. I prefer giving it in his words rather than my own: "If they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of no effect," (Rom. iv. 14.) He first infers that faith is made void if the promise of righteousness has respect to the merit of our works, or depends on the observance of the law. Never could any one rest securely in it, for never could he feel fully assured that he had fully sat-

isfied the law; and it is certain that no man ever fully satisfies it by works. Not to go far for proof of this, every one who will use his eyes aright may be his own witness. Hence it appears how deep and dark the abyss is into which hypocrisy plunges the minds of men, when they indulge so securely as, without hesitation, to oppose their flattery to the judgment of God, as if they were relieving him from his office as judge. Very different is the anxiety which fills the breasts of believers, who sincerely examine themselves.\* Every mind, therefore, would first begin to hesitate, and at length to despair, while each determined for itself with how great a load of debt it was still oppressed, and how far it was from coming up to the enjoined condition. Thus, then, faith would be oppressed and extinguished. To have faith is not to fluctuate, to vary, to be carried up and down, to hesitate, remain in suspense, vacillate, in fine, to despair; it is to possess sure certainty and complete security of mind, to have whereon to rest and fix your foot.

4. Paul, moreover, adds, that the promise itself would be rendered null and void. For if its fulfilment depends on our merit, when, pray, will we be able to come the length of meriting the favour of God? Nay, the second clause is a consequence of the former, since the promise will not be fulfilled unless to those who put faith in it. Faith therefore failing, no power will remain in the promise. "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace, to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed," (Rom. iv. 16.) It was abundantly confirmed when made to rest on the mercy of God alone, for mercy and truth are united by an indissoluble tie; that is, whatever God has mercifully promised he faithfully performs. Thus David, before he asks salvation according to the word of God, first places the source of it in his mercy. "Let, I pray thee, thy merciful kindness be for my comfort, according to thy word unto thy servant," (Ps. cxix. 76.) And justly, for nothing but mere mercy induces God to promise. Here, then, we must place, and, as it were, firmly fix our whole hope, paying no respect to our works, and asking no assistance from them. And lest you should suppose that there is any thing novel in what I say, Augustine also enjoins us so to act. "Christ," says he, "will reign forever among his servants. This God has promised, God has spoken; if this is not enough, God has sworn. Therefore, as the promise stands firm, not in respect of our merits, but in respect of his mercy, no one ought to tremble in announcing that of which he cannot doubt," (August. in Ps. lxxxviii. Tract. 1.) Thus Bernard also, "Who can be saved? ask the disciples of Christ. He replies, With men it is impossible, but not with God. This is our whole confidence; this our only consolation; this the whole ground of our hope: but being assured of the possibility, what are we to say as to his willingness? Who knows whether he is deserving of love or ha-

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\* The two previous sentences are omitted in the French.

tred? (Eccles, ix. 1.) ‘Who hath known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?’ (1 Cor. ii. 16.) Here it is plain, faith must come to our aid: here we must have the assistance of truth, in order that the secret purpose of the Father respecting us may be revealed by the Spirit, and the Spirit testifying may persuade our hearts that we are the sons of God. But let him persuade by calling and justifying freely by faith: in these there is a kind of transition from eternal predestination to future glory,” (Berd, in Dedic. Templi, Serm. 5.) Let us thus briefly conclude: Scripture indicates that the promises of God are not sure, unless they are apprehended with full assurance of conscience; it declares that wherever there is doubt or uncertainty, the promises are made void; on the other hand, that they can only waver and fluctuate if they depend on our works. Therefore, either our righteousness must perish, or without any consideration of our works, place must be given to faith alone, whose nature it is to prick up the ear, and shut the eye; that is, to be intent on the promise only, to give up all idea of any dignity or merit in man. Thus is fulfilled the celebrated prophecy of Zechariah: “I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day. In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, shall ye call every man his neighbour under the vine, and under the fig-tree,” (Zech. iii. 9, 10.) Here the prophet intimates that the only way in which believers can enjoy true peace, is by obtaining the remission of their sins. For we must attend to this peculiarity in the prophets, that when they discourse of the kingdom of Christ, they set forth the external mercies of God as types of spiritual blessings. Hence Christ is called *the Prince of Peace, and our peace*, (Isaiah ix. 6; Eph. ii. 14,) because he calms all the agitations of conscience. If the method is asked, we must come to the sacrifice by which God was appeased, for no man will ever cease to tremble, until he hold that God is propitiated solely by that expiation in which Christ endured his anger. In short, peace must be sought no where but in the agonies of Christ our Redeemer.

5. But why employ a more obscure testimony? Paul uniformly declares that the conscience can have no peace or quiet joy until it is held for certain that we are justified by faith. And he at the same time declares whence this certainty is derived, viz., when “the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost,” (Rom. v. 5;) as if he had said, that our souls cannot have peace until we are fully assured that we are pleasing to God. Hence he elsewhere exclaims in the person of believers in general, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” (Rom. viii. 35.) Until we have reached that haven, the slightest breeze will make us tremble, but so long as the Lord is our Shepherd, we shall walk without fear in the valley of the shadow of death, (Ps. xxiii.) Thus those who pretend that justification by faith consists in being regenerated and made just, by living spiritually, have never tasted the sweetness of grace in trusting that God will be propitious.

Hence also, they know no more of praying aright than do the Turks or any other heathen people. For, as Paul declares, faith is not true, unless it suggest and dictate the delightful name of Father; nay, unless it open our mouths and enable us freely to cry, Abba, Father. This he expresses more clearly in another passage, “In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him,” (Eph. iii. 12.) This, certainly, is not obtained by the gift of regeneration, which, as it is always defective in the present state, contains within it many grounds of doubt. Wherefore, we must have recourse to this remedy; we must hold that the only hope which believers have of the heavenly inheritance is, that being ingrafted into the body of Christ, they are justified freely. For, in regard to justification, faith is merely passive, bringing nothing of our own to procure the favour of God, but receiving from Christ every thing that we want.