

THE
WORKS
OF
THE REV . JOHN NEWTON

LATE RECTOR OF THE UNITED PARISHES OF
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LOMBARD STREET, LONDON.

CONTAINING

AN AUTHENTIC NARRATIVE, &C., LETTERS ON RELIGIOUS SUBJECTS,
CARDIPHONIA, DISCOURSES INTENDED FOR THE PULPIT,
SERMONS PREACHED IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF OLNEY,
A REVIEW OF ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY, OLNEY HYMNS, POEMS,
MESSIAH, OCCASIONAL SERMONS, AND TRACTS.

TO WHICH ARE PREFIXED

MEMOIRS OF HIS LIFE, &c.

BY THE REV. R. CECIL, A. M.

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LETTERS

TO

THE REVEREND MR. S——

LETTER I.

June 23, 1775.

DEAR SIR,

I HAVE met with interruptions till now or you would have heard from me sooner. My thoughts have run much upon the subject of your last, because I perceive it has a near connection with your peace. Your integrity greatly pleases me; far be it from me to shake the principle of your conduct, yet in the application I think there is a possibility of carrying your exceptions too far.

From the account you give me of your sentiments, I cannot but wonder you find it so difficult to accede to the Athanasian Creed, when it seems to me you believe and avow what that Creed chiefly sets forth. The doctrine of the Trinity, some explication of the terms being subjoined, is the catholic faith, without the belief of which a man cannot be saved. This damnatory clause seems to me proved by Mark xvi. 16, “He that believeth shall be saved,” &c. The object of faith must be truth. The doctrine of the deity of Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, in union with the Father, so that they are not three Gods, but one God, is not merely a proposition expressed in words, to which our assent is required, but is absolutely necessary to be known, since without it no one truth respecting salvation can be rightly understood, no one promise duly believed, no one duty spiritually performed. I take it for granted, that this doctrine must appear irrational and absurd in the eye of reason, if by reason we mean the reason of man in his fallen state, before it is corrected and enlightened by a heavenly teacher. No man can say Jesus is Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.

I believe, with you, that a man may be saved who never heard of the Creed, who never read any book but the New Testament, or perhaps a single Evangelist; but he must be taught of God the things that accompany salvation, or I do not think he can be saved. The mercies of God in Christ will not save any, as I apprehend, but according to the method revealed in his word, that is, those who are truly partakers of faith and holiness. For, as the religion of the New Testament ascribes all power to God, and considers all goodness in us as the effect of his communication, we being by nature destitute of spiritual life or light, so those whom God himself is pleased to teach, will infallibly attain the knowledge of all that they are concerned to

know. This teaching you are waiting for, and it shall be given you; yea the Lord, I trust, has begun to teach you already; but if you consider yourself as a learner, and that it is possible, under the Spirit's increasing illumination, you may hereafter adopt some things which at present you cannot approve, I should think it too early as yet to prescribe to yourself rules and determinations for the government of your future life. Should the will of God appoint you a new path for service, he may, sooner than you are aware, quiet your mind, and enable you to subscribe with as full a persuasion of mind as you now object to subscription. If it depended upon me, I could be content that the Creed should rest at the bottom of the sea, rather than embarrass a single person of your disposition. Nor am I a warm stickler for subscription in itself; but something of this kind seems necessary, upon the supposition of an establishment.

When I think of an enclosure, some hedge, wall, bank, ditch, &c is of course included in my idea; for who can conceive of an enclosure without a boundary? So, in a national church, there must be, I apprehend, something marked out, the approbation or refusal of which will determine who do or do not belong to it; and for this purpose articles of some kind seem not improper. You think it would be better to have these articles in scriptural expressions. But if it be lawful to endeavour to exclude from our pulpits men who hold sentiments the most repugnant to the truth, I wish you to consider, whether this can be in any measure secured by articles in which the scripture-doctrines are not explained and stated, as well as expressed. This proposal is strenuously pleaded for by many in our day, upon views very different from yours. The Socinians, for instance, would readily subscribe a scriptural declaration of the high priesthood, atonement, and intercession of Christ (while they are allowed to put their own sense upon the terms), though the sense they maintain be utterly inconsistent with what those who are enlightened by the Holy Spirit learn from the same expressions.

I acknowledge, indeed, that the end is not answered by the present method; since there are too many, like the person you mention, who would easily subscribe nine hundred articles, rather than baulk his preferment: yet the profligacy of some seems to be no just reason why the church, why any church, should not be at liberty to define the terms upon which they will accept members or teachers, or why conscientious persons should object to these terms (if they think them agreeable to the truth), merely because they are not expressed in the precise words of scripture. If allowance may be made for human infirmity in the Liturgy, I see not why the Articles may not be entitled to the same privilege. For it seems requisite that we should be as well satisfied with the expressions we use with our lips, in frequent solemn prayer to God, as in what we subscribe with our hands. I am persuaded that the leaders of the Association at the Feathers Tavern, some of them at least, though they begin with the affair of subscription, would not (if they might

have their wish) stop there, but would go on with their projected reform, till they had overturned the Liturgy also, or at least weeded it from every expression that bears testimony to the deity of the Saviour, and the efficacious influence of the Holy Spirit. I bless God that you are far otherwise minded.

I hope, however, though you should not think yourself at liberty to repeat your subscription, the Lord will make you comfortable and useful in your present rank as a curate. Preferment is not necessary, either to our peace or usefulness. We may live and die contentedly, without the honours and emoluments which aspiring men thirst after, if he be pleased to honour us with a dispensation to preach his gospel, and to crown our endeavours with a blessing. He that winneth souls is wise; wise in the choice of the highest end he can propose to himself in this life; wise in the improvement of the only means by which this desirable end can be attained. Wherever we cast our eyes, the bulk of the people are ignorant, immoral, careless. They live without God in the world; they are neither awed by his authority, nor affected by his goodness, nor enabled to trust to his promises, nor disposed to aim at his glory. If perhaps, they have a serious interval, or some comparative sobriety of character, they ground their hopes upon their own doings, endeavours or purposes; and treat the inexpressible love of God revealed in Christ, and the gospel-method of salvation by faith in his name, with neglect, often with contempt. They have preachers, whom perhaps they hear with some pleasure, because they neither alarm their consciences by insisting on the spirituality and sanction of the divine law, nor offend their pride by publishing the humiliating doctrines of that gospel, which is the power of God through faith unto salvation. Therefore what they do speak, they speak in vain; the world grows worse and worse under their instructions; infidelity and profligacy abound more and more; for God will own no other doctrine but what the apostle calls the truth as it is in Jesus; that doctrine which drives the sinner from all his vain pleas, and points out the Lord Jesus Christ as the only ground of hope, the supreme object of desire, as appointed of God to be wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, to all who believe in his name. When ministers themselves are convinced of sin, and feel the necessity of an almighty Saviour, they presently account their former gain but loss, and determine, with the apostle, to know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified. In proportion as they do this, they are sure to be wondered at, laughed at, and railed at, if the providence of God and the constitution of their country, secure them from severer treatment. But they have this invaluable compensation, that they no longer speak without effect. In a greater or less degree a change takes place in their auditories; the blind receive their sight, the deaf hear, the lepers are cleansed;—sinners are turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God;—sinful practices are forsaken; and a new course of life in the converts, evidences that they

have not followed cunningly-devised fables, or taken up with uncertain notions; but that God has indeed quickened them by his Spirit, and given them an understanding to know him that is true. The preachers, likewise, while they attempt to teach others, are taught themselves: a blessing descends upon their studies and labours, upon their perusal of the scriptures, upon their attention to what passes within them and around them. The events of every day contribute to throw light upon the word of God: their views of divine truth grow more enlarged, connected and comprehensive; many difficulties, which perplexed them at their first setting out, trouble them no more; the God whom they serve, and on whom they wait, reveals to them those great things, which, though plainly expressed in the letter of scripture, cannot be understood and realized without divine teaching. 1 Cor. ii. 9. to 15. Thus they go on from strength to strength; hard things become easy, and a divine light shines upon their paths. Opposition from men perhaps may increase; they may expect to be represented, as those who turn the world upside down; the cry, "*Great is Diana*" [in Greek, Acts xix. 28.] will be raised against them, the gates of the temple of preferment will be seldom open to them; but they will have the unspeakable consolation of applying to themselves those lively words of the apostle, "*As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.*" [in Greek, 2 Cor. vi. 10.]

It is the strain of evident sincerity which runs through your letters, that gives me a pleasing confidence the Lord is with you. A disinterested desire of knowing the truth, with a willingness to follow it through all disadvantages, is a preparation of the heart which only God can give. He has directed you to the right method, searching the scriptures, with prayer. Go on, and may his blessing attend you. You may see, from what I have written above, what is the desire of my heart for you. But I am not impatient. Follow your heavenly leader, and in his own time and manner he will make your way plain. I have travelled the path before you, I see what you yet want; I cannot impart it to you, but he can, and I trust he will. It will rejoice my soul to be any way assistant to you; but I am afraid I should not afford you much, either profit or satisfaction, by entering upon a dry defence of creeds and articles.

The truths of scripture are not like mathematical theorems, which present exactly the same ideas to every person who understands the terms. The word of God is compared to a mirror, 2 Cor. iii. 18.: but it is a mirror in which the longer we look the more we see; the view will be still growing upon us; and still we shall see but in part while on this side eternity. When our Lord pronounced Peter blessed, declaring he had learnt that which flesh and blood could not have taught him, yet Peter was at that time much in the dark. The sufferings and death of Jesus, though the only and necessary means of his salvation, were an offence to him. But he lived to glory in what he once could

not bear to hear of. Peter had received grace to love the Lord Jesus, to follow him, to venture all, and to forsake all for him; these first good positions were of God, and they led to further advances. So it is still. By nature, self rules in the heart: when this idol is brought low, and we are truly willing to be the Lord's, and to apply to him for strength and direction, that we may serve him, the good work is begun; for it is a truth that holds universally and without exception, a man can receive nothing except it be given him from heaven. The Lord first finds us when we are thinking of something else, Isaiah lxv. 1.; and then we begin to seek him in good earnest, and he has promised to be found of us. People may, by industry and natural abilities, make themselves masters of the external evidences of Christianity, and have much to say for and against different schemes and systems of sentiments; but all this while the heart remains untouched. True religion is not a science of the head, so much as an inward and heartfelt perception, which casts down imaginations, and every *ὕψωμα* ["high thing" 2 Cor. 10:5.] that exalteth itself in the mind, and brings every thought into a sweet and willing subjection to Christ by faith. Here the learned have no real advantage above the ignorant; both see when the eyes of the understanding are enlightened; till then both are equally blind. And the first lesson in the school of Christ is to become a little child, sitting simply at his feet, that we may be made wise unto salvation.

I was not only prevented beginning any letter so soon as I wished, but have been unusually interrupted since I began it. Often, as soon as I could well take the pen in hand, I have been called away to attend company and intervening business. Though I persuade myself, after what I have formerly said, you will put a favourable construction upon my delay, yet it has given me some pain. I set a great value upon your offer of friendship, which, I trust, will not be interrupted on either side, by the freedom with which we mutually express our difference of sentiments, when we are constrained to differ. You please me with entrusting me with the first rough draught of your thoughts; and you may easily perceive by my manner of writing, that I place equal confidence in your candour. I shall be glad to exchange letters as often as it suits us, without constraint, ceremony, or apology; and may he who is always present with our hearts make our correspondence useful. I pray God to be your sun and shield, your light and strength, to guide you with his eye, to comfort you with his gracious presence in your own soul, and to make you a happy instrument of comforting many,

I am, &c.

LETTER II.

July 14, 1775.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I GLADLY adopt your address, and can assure you that the interchange of every letter unites my heart more closely to you. I am glad to find that your views of articles and creeds are not likely to hinder you from going forward in your present situation; and if, without contracting your usefulness, they only prove a bar to your preferment, I am sure it will be no grief of mind to you at the hour of death, or the day of judgment, that you were enabled to follow the dictates of conscience, in opposition to all the pleas of custom or interest. Since, therefore, I have no desire of shaking your resolves, may we not drop this subject entirely? For, indeed, I act but an awkward part in it, being by no means myself an admirer of articles and creeds, or disposed to be a warm advocate for church-power. The propriety of our national establishment, or of any other, is what I have not much to do with; I found it as it is, nor have I influence to alter it were I willing. The question in which I was concerned was simply, Whether I, *rebus sic stantibus*, [as matters stand] could submit to it, so as conscientiously to take a designation to the ministry under it? I thought I could; I accordingly did, and I am thankful that I never have seen cause to repent it.

You seem gently to charge me with a want of candour in what I observed or apprehended concerning the gentlemen of the Feathers Tavern. If I mistake not (for I retain no copies of my letters), I expressed myself with a double restriction, by first saying “the leaders of that society,” and then adding, “or some of them at least.” I apprehend your candour will hardly lead you to suppose that there are none amongst them who would pull down the whole fabric, that is, I mean so far as it crosses the Socinian scheme, if it was left to their choice. I apprehend, I may, without the least breach of candour, suppose that the exceptions which Mr. Lindsay has made to the Liturgy are not peculiar to himself. It seems plain in his case, and from his own writings, that the mere removal of subscriptions, which is the immediate and ostensible object of the clerical petition, could not have satisfied him; and it is past a doubt with me, that there are others of the clergy like-minded with him. Indeed, I could wish to be thought candid by you; though, I confess, I am not a friend to that lukewarmness and indifference for truth, which bears the name of candour among many in the present day. I desire to maintain a spirit of candour and benevolence to all men, to wish them well, to do them every good office in my power, and to commend what appears to me commendable in a Socinian, as readily as in a Calvinist. But with some people I can only go *usque ad aras* [as far as the altars]. I must judge of principles by the word of God, and of the tree by its fruit. I meddle with no man’s final state; because I know that he who is exalted to give repentance

and remission of sins, can do it whenever, and to whomsoever he is pleased: yet I firmly believe, and I make no scruple of proclaiming it, that swearers, drunkards, adulterers, continuing such, cannot inherit the kingdom of God; and I look with no less compassion upon some persons, whose characters in common life may be respectable, when I see them unhappily blinded by their own wisdom; and while they account themselves, and are accounted by many others, master-builders in Zion, rejecting the only foundation upon which a sinner's hope can be safely built.

I am far from thinking the Socinians all hypocrites, but I think they are all in a most dangerous error; nor do their principles exhibit to my view a whit more of the genuine fruits of Christianity than deism itself. You say, "If they be sincere, and fail not for want of diligence in searching, I cannot help thinking, that God will not condemn them for an inevitable defect in their understandings." Indeed, my friend, I have such a low opinion of man in his depraved state, that I believe no one has real sincerity in religious matters till God bestows it; and when he makes a person sincere in his desires after truth, he will assuredly guide him to the possession of it in due time, as our Lord speaks, John vi. 44, 45. To suppose that any persons can sincerely seek the way of salvation, and yet miss it through an inevitable defect of their understandings, would contradict the plain promises of the gospel, such as Matth. vii. 7, 8, John vii. 16, 17; but to suppose that nothing is necessary to be known which some persons who profess sincerity cannot receive, would be in effect to make the scriptures a nose of wax, and open a wide door for scepticism. I am not a judge of the heart; but I may be sure, that whoever makes the foundation-stone a rock of offence cannot be sincere in his inquiries. He may study the scriptures accurately, but he brings his own preconceived sentiments with him, and, instead of submitting them to the touchstone of truth, he makes them a rule by which he interprets. That they who lean to their own understandings should stumble and miscarry, I cannot wonder; for the same God who has promised to fill the hungry with good things, has threatened to send the rich empty away. So Matth. xi. 25. It is not through defect of understanding, but a want of simplicity and humility, that so many stumble like the blind at noon-day, and can see nothing of those great truths which are written in the gospel; as with a sun-beam.

You wish me to explain myself concerning the doctrine of the Trinity. I will try; yet I know I cannot, any farther than as he who taught me shall be pleased to bear witness in your heart to what I say. My first principle in religion is what the scriptures teach me of the utter depravity of human nature, in connection with the spirituality and sanction of the law of God. I believe we are by nature sinners, by practice universally transgressors; that we are dead in trespasses and sins; and that the bent of our natural spirit is enmity against the holiness, government, and grace of God. Upon this ground, I see, feel, and acknowledge the necessity of such a salvation as the

gospel proposes, which, at the same time that it precludes boasting, and stains the pride of all human glory, affords encouragement to those who may be thought, or who may think themselves, the weakest or the vilest of mankind. I believe, that whatever notions a person may take up from education or system, no one ever did, or ever will feel himself and own himself to be such a lost, miserable, hateful sinner, unless he be powerfully and supernaturally convinced by the Spirit of God. There is, when God pleases, a certain light thrown into the soul, which differs, not merely in degree but in kind, *toto genere* [in every respect], from anything that can be effected or produced by moral suasion or argument. But (to take in another of your queries) the Holy Spirit teaches or reveals no new truths, either of doctrine or precept, but only enables us to understand what is already revealed in the scriptures. Here a change takes place; the person that was spiritually blind begins to see. The sinner's character, as described in the word of God, he finds to be a description of himself; that he is a far off, a stranger, a rebel; that he has hitherto lived in vain. Now he begins to see the necessity of an atonement, an advocate, a shepherd, a comforter; he can no more trust to his own wisdom, strength, and goodness, but, accounting all his former gain but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, he renounces every other refuge, and ventures his all upon the person, work, and promise of the Redeemer. In this way, I say he will find the doctrine of the Trinity not only a proposition but a principle; that is, from his own wants and situation he will have an abiding conviction that the Son and Holy Spirit are God, and must be possessed of the attributes and powers of Deity, to support the offices the scriptures assign them, and to deserve the confidence and worship the scriptures require to be placed in them, and paid to them. Without this awakened state of mind, a divine, reputed orthodox, will blunder wretchedly even in defending his own opinions. I have seen laboured defences of the Trinity, which have given me not much more satisfaction than I should probably receive from a dissertation upon the rainbow, composed by a man blind from his birth. In effect, the knowledge of God cannot be attained by studious discussion on our parts; it must be by a revelation on his part, Matth. xi. 27. and xvi. 17; a revelation, not objectively of new truth, but subjectively of new light in us. Then he that runs may read. Perhaps you may not quite understand my meaning, or not accede to my sentiments at present; I have little doubt, however, but the time is coming when you will. I believe the Lord God has given you that sincerity which he never disappoints.

Far be it from me to arrogate infallibility to myself, or to any writer or preacher; yet, blessed be God, I am not left to float up and down the uncertain tide of opinion, in those points wherein the peace of my soul is nearly concerned. I know, yea I infallibly know whom I have believed. I am under no more doubt about the way of salvation than of the way to London. I cannot be deceived, because the word of God cannot deceive me. It is impossible,

however, for me to give you, or any person, full satisfaction concerning my evidence, because it is of an experimental nature, Rev. ii. 17. In general, it arises from the views I have received of the power, compassion, and grace of Jesus, and a consciousness that I, from a conviction of my sin and misery, have fled to him for refuge, entrusted and devoted myself and my all to him. Since my mind has been enlightened, everything within me, and everything around me, confirms and explains to me what I read in scripture; and though I have reason enough to distrust my own judgment every hour, yet I have no reason to question the great essentials, which the Lord himself hath taught me.

Besides a long letter, I send you a great book. A part of it, for I do not ask you to read the whole, may perhaps explain my meaning better than I have leisure to do myself. I set a high value upon this book of Mr. Halyburton's; so that, unless I could replace it with another, I know not if I would part with it for its weight in gold. The first and longest treatise is, in my judgment a masterpiece; but I would chiefly wish you to peruse the Essay concerning Faith, towards the close of the book. I need not beg you to read it carefully, and to read it all. The importance of the subject, its immediate connection with your inquiries, and the accuracy of the reasoning, will render the motive of my request unnecessary. I cannot style him a very elegant writer; and, being a Scotchman, he abounds with the Scottish idiom; but you will prefer truth to ornament. I long to hear your opinion of it. It seems to me so adapted to some things that have passed between us as if written on purpose.

The Inquiry concerning Regeneration and Justification, which stands last in the book, I do not desire, or even wish you to read; but if you should, and then think that you have read a speculation more curious than useful, I shall not contradict you. I think it must appear to you in that light; but it was bound up with the rest, and therefore could not stay behind; but I hope the Essay on Faith will please you.

I take great pleasure in your correspondence, still more in the thought of your friendship, which I hope to cultivate to the utmost, and to approve myself sincerely and affectionately yours.

LETTER III.

August 11, 1775.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

NEXT week I go to London, where I purpose, if nothing unforeseen prevents, to stay a month. Many things, which must necessarily be attended to before my departure, abridge me of that leisure which I could wish to employ in answering your last. However, I will spare you what I can. I thank you for yours. Your objections neither displease nor weary me. While truth is the object of your inquiry, the more freedom you use with me the better. Nor do they surprise me; for I have formerly made the like objections myself. I have stood upon your ground, and I continue to hope you will one day stand upon mine. As I have told you more than once, I do not mean to dictate to you, or wish you to receive anything upon my *ipse dixit* [he said]; but, in the simplicity of friendship, I will give you my thoughts from time to time upon the points you propose, and leave the event to the divine blessing.

I am glad you do not account the Socinians master-builders. However, they esteem themselves so, and are so esteemed, not only by a few, as you think, but by many. I fear Socinianism spreads rapidly amongst us, and bids fair to be the prevailing scheme in this land, especially with those who profess to be the thinking part. The term Arminian, as at present applied, is very indiscriminate, and takes in a great variety of persons and sentiments, amongst whom, I believe, there are many who hold the fundamental truths of the gospel, and live a life of faith in the Son of God. I am far from supposing that God will guide every sincere person exactly to adopt all my sentiments. But there are some sentiments which I believe essential to the very state and character of a true Christian. And these make him a Christian, not merely by being his acknowledged sentiments, but by a certain peculiar manner in which he possesses them. There is a certain important change takes place in the heart, by the operation of the Spirit of God, before the soundest and most orthodox sentiments can have their proper influence upon us. This work, or change, the scriptures describe by various names, each of which is designed to teach us the marvellous effects it produces, and the almighty power by which it is produced. It is sometimes called a new birth, John iii. 3; sometimes a new creature, or a new creation, as 2 Cor. v. 17; sometimes the causing light to shine out of darkness, 2 Cor. iv. 6; sometimes the opening the eyes of the blind, Acts xxvi. 18; sometimes the raising the dead to life, Ephes, ii. 5. Till a person has experienced this change, he will be at a loss to form a right conception of it: but it means, not being proselyted to an opinion, but receiving a principle of divine life and light in the soul. And till this is received, the things of God, the truths of the gospel cannot be rightly discerned or understood by the utmost powers of fallen man, who, with all his wisdom, reason, and talents, is still but what the apostle calls the natural man, till the power of God visits his heart, 1 Cor. ii. 14. This work is

sometimes wrought suddenly, as in the case of Lydia, Acts xvi. 14; at other times very gradually. A person who before was a stranger even to the form of godliness, or, at best, content with a mere form, finds new thoughts arising in his mind, feels some concern about his sins, some desire to please God, some suspicions that all is not right. He examines his views of religion, hopes the best of them, and yet cannot rest satisfied in them. To-day, perhaps, he thinks himself fixed; to-morrow he will be all uncertainty. He inquires of others; weighs, measures, considers, meets with sentiments which he had not attended to, thinks them plausible; but is presently shocked with objections or supposed consequences, which he finds himself unable to remove. As he goes on in his inquiry, his difficulties increase. New doubts arise in his mind; even the scriptures perplex him, and appear to assert contrary things. He would sound the depths of truth by the plummet of his reason; but he finds his line is too short. Yet even now the man is under a guidance, which will at length lead him right. The importance of the subject takes up his thoughts, and takes off the relish he once had for the things of the world. He reads, he prays, he strives, he resolves; sometimes inward embarrassments and outward temptations bring him to his wits end. He almost wishes to stand where he is, and inquire no more; but he cannot stop. At length he begins to feel the inward depravity, which he had before owned as an opinion; a sense of sin and guilt cuts him out new work. Here reasoning will stand him in no stead. This is a painful change of mind; but it prepares the way for a blessing. It silences some objections better than a thousand arguments, it cuts the comb of his own wisdom and attainments, it makes him weary of working for life, and teaches him, in God's due time, the meaning of that text, "To him that worketh not, but believeth in him who justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." Then he learns that scriptural faith is a very different thing from a rational assent to the gospel,—that it is the immediate gift of God (Ephes, ii. 8); the operation of God (Col. ii. 12); that Christ is not only the object, but the author and finisher of faith (Heb. xii. 2); and that faith is not so properly a part of that obedience we owe to God, as an inestimable benefit we receive from him, for Christ's sake (Phil. i. 29), which is the medium of our justification (Rom. v. 1), and the principle by which we are united to Christ, as the branch to the vine (John xvii. 21). I am well aware of the pains taken to put a different sense upon these and other seemingly mysterious passages of scripture; but thus far we speak that which we know, and testify that which we have seen. I have described a path in which I have known many led, and in which I have walked myself.

The gospel, my dear Sir, is a salvation appointed for those who are ready to perish, and is not designed to put them in a way to save themselves by their own works. It speaks to us as condemned already, and calls upon us to believe in a crucified Saviour, that we may receive redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of our sins. And the Spirit of God, by the gospel,

first convinces us of unbelief, sin, and misery; and then, by revealing the things of Jesus to our minds, enables us, as helpless sinners, to come to Christ, to receive him, to behold him, or, in other words, to believe in him, and expect pardon, life, and grace from him; renouncing every hope and aim in which we once rested, and accounting all things loss and dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, John vi. 35; Is. xlv. 22, with John vi. 40; Col. ii. 6. In some of Omicron's letters you will find my thoughts more at large upon these subjects than I have now time to write them. For a farther illustration, I refer you to the MSS. sent herewith. The first part, written in short hand, does not so immediately concern our present point as the second, which you may read without a key. It relates to a matter of indisputable fact, concerning a person with whom, as you will perceive, I was well acquainted. You may depend upon the truth of every tittle. I entrust it to you in the confidence of friendship, and beg that it may not go out of your hands, and that, when you have perused it, you will return it, sealed up, by a safe conveyance, to my house. You will see in it the sentiments of a man of great learning, sound reasoning, an amiable and irreproachable character, and how little he accounted of all these advantages, when the Lord was pleased to enlighten his mind.

Though we have not exactly the same views of human depravity, yet as we both agree to take our measure of it from the word of God, I trust we shall not always differ about it. Adam was created in the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness, Ephes, iv. 24. This moral image, I believe, was totally lost by sin. In that sense he died the day, the moment, he ate the forbidden fruit. God was no longer his joy and delight; he was averse from the thoughts of his presence, and would, if possible, have hid himself from him. His natural powers, though doubtless impaired, were not destroyed. Man, by nature, is still capable of great things. His understanding, reason, memory, imagination, &c. sufficiently proclaim that the hand that made him is divine. He is, as Milton says of Beelzebub, majestic, though in ruins. He can reason, invent, and, by application, attain a considerable knowledge in natural things. The exertions of human genius, as specified in the characters of some philosophers, poets, orators, &c. are wonderful. But man cannot know, love, trust, or serve his Maker, unless he be renewed in the spirit of his mind. God has preserved in him likewise some feelings of benevolence, pity, some sense of natural justice and truth, &c. without which there could be no society: but these, I apprehend, are little more than instincts, by which the world is kept in some small degree of order; but, being under the direction of pride and self, do not deserve the name of virtue and goodness; because the exercise of them does not spring from a principle of love to God, nor is directed to his glory, or regulated by the rule of his word, till a principle of grace is superadded. You think I will not say, "that God judicially, in punishment of one man's sin, added these corruptions to all his posterity."

Let us suppose, that the punishment annexed to eating the forbidden fruit had been the loss of Adam's rational powers, and that he should be degraded to the state and capacity of a brute. In this condition, had he begotten children, after the fall, in his own likeness, his nature being previously changed, they must have been of course brutes like himself; for he could not convey to them those original powers which he had lost. Will this illustrate my meaning? Sin did not deprive him of rationality, but of spirituality. His nature became earthly, sensual, yea devilish; and this fallen nature, this carnal mind, which is enmity against God, which is not subject to his law, neither indeed can be (Rom. viii. 7), we universally derive from him. Look upon children; they presently show themselves averse from good, but exceedingly propense to evil. This they can learn even without a master; but ten thousand instructors and instructions cannot instil good into them, so as to teach them to love their Creator, unless a divine power co-operates. Just as it is with the earth, which produces weeds spontaneously; but if you see a cabbage, or an apple-tree, you are sure it was planted or sown there, and did not spring from the soil. I know many hard questions may be started upon this subject; but the Lord, in due time, will clear his own cause, and vindicate his own ways. I leave all difficulties with him. It is sufficient for me that scripture asserts, and experience proves, that it is thus in fact, Rom. iii. 9–21; Job. xiv. 4. Thus we have not only forfeited our happiness by transgression, but are, by our depravity, incapable of it, and have no more desire or taste for such a state as the scriptures describe heaven to be, than a man born deaf can have for a concert of music. And therefore our Lord declares, that except a man be born again, he not only shall not, but cannot, see the kingdom of God. Hence a twofold necessity of a Saviour—his blood for the pardon of our sins, and his life, spirit, and grace, to quicken our souls, and form us anew for himself, that we may feel his love, and show forth his praise.

St. Paul, before his conversion, was not sincere, in the sense I hope you to be. He thought himself in the right, without doubt, as many have done when they killed God's servants, John xvi. 2. He was blindly and obstinately zealous. I think he did not enter into the merits of the cause, or inquire into facts with that attention which sincerity would have put him upon. You think that his sincerity and zeal were the very things that made him a chosen instrument; he himself speaks of them as the very things that made him peculiarly unworthy of that honour (1 Cor. xv. 9.); and he tells us, that he was set forth as a pattern of the Lord's long-suffering and mercy, that the very chief of sinners might be encouraged, 1 Tim. i. 15, 16. Had he been sincerely desirous to know whether Jesus was the Messiah, there was enough in his character, doctrines, miracles, and the prophecies concerning him, to have cleared up the point; but he took it for granted he was right in his opinion, and hurried blindly on, and was, as he said himself, exceedingly mad against them. Such a kind of sincerity is common enough. People

believe themselves right, and therefore treat others with scorn or rage, appeal to the scriptures, but first lay down their own preconceived sentiments for truths, and then examine what scriptures they can find to countenance them. Surely a person's thinking himself right, will not give a sanction to all that he does under that persuasion.

Ignorance and obstinacy are in themselves sinful, and no plea of sincerity will exempt from the danger of being under their influence, Is. xxvii. 11, Luke vi. 39. It appears to me, that, though you will not follow any man implicitly, you are desirous of discovering your mistakes, supposing you are mistaken in any point of importance. You read and examine the word of God, not to find arms wherewith to defend your sentiments at all events, but to know whether they are defensible or not. You pray for God's light and teaching, and in this search you are willing to risk what men are commonly much afraid of hazarding—character, interest, preferment, favour, &c. A sincerity of this kind I too seldom meet with: when I do, I account it a token for good, and am ready to say, "No man can do this, except God be with him." However, sincerity is not conversion; but I believe it is always a forerunner of it.

I would not be uncharitable and censorious, hasty and peremptory in judging my fellow-creatures. But if I acknowledge the word of God, I cannot avoid forming my judgment upon it. It is true, I cannot look into people's hearts; but hearts and principles are delineated to my hand in the scriptures. I read, that no murderer has eternal life in him; I read likewise, "if any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema;" and therefore I conclude, that there are speculative errors, as heinous in their guilt, as destructive in their effects, as murder; and that the most moral, regular man, as to social life, if he loves not the Lord Jesus Christ, is in the sight of God, the judge of all, as displeasing as a murderer. It has pleased God, for the peace and support of society, to put a black mark upon those sins which affect the peace and welfare of our neighbour, such as adultery and murder. But undoubtedly the sins committed immediately against himself must be more heinous than any which offend our fellow-creatures. The second commandment (Matth. xxii. 39.), is like the first; but it depends upon it, and is therefore inferior to it. Men ordinarily judge otherwise. To live regardless of God and the gospel is looked upon as a mere peccadillo in comparison with offences against society. But sooner or later it will appear otherwise to all. A parcel of robbers may pique themselves upon the justice, honour, and truth they observe towards one another; but, because they set up a petty interest, which is inconsistent with the public good, they are deservedly accounted villains, and treated as such, notwithstanding their petty morality among themselves. Now such a company of robbers bears a much greater proportion to a whole nation, than a nation, or all the nations of the earth, bears to the great God. Our dependence upon him is absolute, our obligations

to him infinite. In vain shall men plead their moral discharge of relative duties to each other, if they fail in the unspeakably greater relation under which they stand to God; and therefore, when I see people living without God in the world, as all do till they are converted, I cannot but judge them in a dangerous state;—not because I take pleasure in censuring, or think myself authorised to pass sentence upon my fellow-creatures, but because the scriptures decide expressly on the case, and I am bound to take my sentiments from thence.

The jailor was certainly a Christian when baptised, as you observe. He trembled; he cried out, “What must I do to be saved?” Paul did not bid him amend his life, but believe in the Lord Jesus. He believed and rejoiced. But the Lord blessed the apostle’s words, to produce in him that saving faith which filled him with joy and peace. It was, as I observed before, something more than an assent to the proposition, that Jesus is the Christ; a resting in him for forgiveness and acceptance, and a cleaving to him in love. No other faith will purify the heart, work by love, and overcome the world.

I need not have pleaded want of leisure as an excuse for a short letter, for I have written a long one. I feel myself much interested in your concerns; and your unexpected frank application to me (though you well know the light in which I appear to some people) I consider as a providential call, which binds me to your service. I hope our correspondence will be productive of happy effects, and that we shall both one day rejoice in it.

I am, &c.

LETTER IV.

September 6, 1775.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I BEGIN to fear I shall fall under a suspicion of unkindness and forgetfulness towards you, and therefore I am willing to write a line by way of prevention, though I have not leisure to attempt anything like an answer to the letter you put into my hand the evening before I left O——; I must therefore content myself with a tender of affection and respect, and an inquiry after your welfare.

Your letter will give me an opportunity of saying something farther when time shall admit; but an endeavour to answer all the objections that may be started between us, in a way of reasoning, would require a volume, and would likewise interfere with the leading principle upon which my hope of giving you satisfaction in due time is grounded. You seem to expect that I should remove your difficulties; but it is my part only to throw in a word occasionally, as a witness of what the Lord has been pleased to teach me from the scriptures, and to wait for the rest till he (who alone is able) shall be pleased to communicate the same views to you: for, till we see and judge by the same medium, and are agreed in the fundamental point, that faith is not the effect of reasoning, but a special gift of God, which he bestows when and to whom he pleases, it will not be possible for me to convince you by dint of argument. I believe, as I have observed before, that he has already given you a desire to know his will, and therefore I trust he will not disappoint your search. At present I think you want one thing, which it is not in my power to impart, I mean, such a sense of the depravity of human nature, and the state of all mankind considered as sinners, as may make you feel the utter impossibility of attaining to the peace and hope of the gospel in any other way, than by renouncing all hope of succeeding by any endeavours of your own, farther than by humbly waiting at the throne of grace, for power to cast yourself, without terms and conditions, upon him who is able to save to the uttermost. We must feel ourselves sick, before we can duly prize the great Physician, and feel a sentence of death in ourselves, before we can effectually trust in God, who raiseth the dead.

I have not brought your sermons with me, for I thought I should not have time to read them attentively while in this hurrying place. I purpose to consider them with care, and to give you my thoughts with frankness, when I return. However, if they are upon the plan intimated in your letter, I will venture to say one thing beforehand, that they will not answer your desired end. I am persuaded you wish to be useful—to reclaim sinners from their evil ways—to inspire them with a love to God, and a sincere aim to walk in obedience to his will. May I not venture to appeal to yourself, that you meet with little success,—that the people to whom you preach, though they perhaps give you a patient hearing, yet remain as they were, unchanged, and

unholy? It must be so: there is but one sort of preaching which God blesses to these purposes, that which makes all the world guilty before God, and sets forth Jesus Christ, as the brazen serpent was proposed by Moses, that guilty and condemned sinners, by looking to him, and believing on his name, may be healed and saved. The most pressing exhortations to repentance and amendment of life, unless they are enforced in a certain way, which only God can teach, will leave our hearers much as they find them. When we meet, or when I have leisure to write from home, I will trouble you with my thoughts more at large. Till then, permit me to assure you of my sincere regard and best wishes, and that

I am, &c.

LETTER V.

October 21, 1775.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

THE calls and engagements which I told you engrossed and anticipated my time when I wrote last, have continued without any intermission hitherto, and I am still far behind hand with my business. I am willing to hope, that the case has been much the same with you, and that want of leisure has been the only cause of my not having been pleased with so much as a note from you since my return from London.

I am loath, for my own sake, to charge your silence to any unwillingness of continuing that intercourse which I have been, and still find myself, desirous to improve on my part. For though we are not agreed in our views; yet, while our preliminary agreement, to allow mutual freedom, and to exercise mutual candour, in expressing our sentiments, subsists, we may, and I hope shall be glad to hear from each other. It may seem to intimate I have a better opinion of myself than of you, that while I seem confident your freedom will not offend me, I feel now and then a fear, lest mine should prove displeasing to you. But friendship is a little suspicious when exercised with long silence, and a plain declaration of my sentiments has more than once put amiable and respectable persons to the full trial of their patience.

I now return your sermons; I thank you for the perusal; I see much in them that I approve, and nothing in them but what I formerly espoused. But in a course of years, a considerable alteration has taken place in my judgment and experience, I hope, yea, I may boldly say, I am sure, not for the worse. Then I was seeking, and now, through mercy, I have found, the pearl of great price. It is both the prayer and the hope of my heart, that a day is coming when you shall make the same acknowledgement. From your letters and sermons, I am encouraged to address you in our Lord's words, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God." I am persuaded the views you have received will not suffer you to remain where you are. But fidelity obliges me to add, "Yet one thing thou lackest." That one thing, I trust the Lord will both show you, and bestow upon you, in his due time. You speak somewhere of "atoning for disobedience by repentance." Ah! my dear Sir, when we are brought to estimate our disobedience, by comparing it with such a sense of the majesty, holiness, and authority of God, and the spirituality, extent, and sanction of his holy law, as he, and he only, can impress upon the heart of a sinner, we shall be convinced, that nothing but the blood of the Son of God can atone for the smallest instance of disobedience.

I intimated, in my letter from London, one defect of your scheme, which will probably be the first to engage your notice. I am sure you have a desire to be useful to the souls of men, to be an instrument of reclaiming them from that course of open wickedness, or lifeless formality, in which you see them enslaved; and, in a word, to prevail with them to live soberly, righteously,

and godly, according to the just and comprehensive sense you have given of those words, in your sermon on Tit. ii. 11, 12. Now, inward experience, and a pretty extensive observation of what passes abroad, have so perfectly convinced me there is but one mode of preaching which the Holy Spirit owns to the producing of these effects, that I am not afraid to pronounce confidently, you will not have the desires of your heart gratified upon your present plan. The people will give you a hearing, and remain just as they are, till the Lord leads you to speak to them as criminals condemned already, and whose first essential step it is, to seek forgiveness by the blood of Jesus, and a change of heart and state by his grace, before they can bring forth any fruit acceptable to God.

As I have little time for writing, and little hope of succeeding in a way of argumentation, I have substituted, instead of a longer letter, the heads of some sermons I preached nine or ten years ago, on our Lord's discourse with Nicodemus. However, when I have heard that you are well, and that you are still disposed to correspond with me, I shall be ready to give a more particular answer to the subjects you pointed out to me in the letter you favoured me with the day before I left London. I pray God to bless you in all your ways, and beg you to believe, that I am, with sincerity, &c.

LETTER VI.

October 28. 1775

MY DEAR FRIEND,

IT never entered my pericranium, that you expected I should fully and directly answer your letter while I was in London; and yet you reasonably might, as you knew nothing of my engagements: but, indeed, it was impracticable; I could only send you a hasty line, as a token that I remembered you. I informed you, when I returned, that I was just going out again. Since I came home the second time, I have been engrossed by things that would admit of no delay; and, at length, not having so much as a note from you, I thought I would wait till I heard farther. But, from first to last it was my intention, and I think, my promise, to answer in the manner you proposed, as soon as I could. And even now I must beg a little longer time. Believe me, that as the wise and good providence of God brought us together, without any expectation of mine, I will do all in my power to preserve the connection, and particularly by giving my thoughts on such questions as you propose. And though, to consider your questions in the manner you wish, and to point out the agreement of detached texts (as they occur) with my views, seems, in prospect, to require a volume rather than a sheet, yet I am not discouraged; only I beg you to make allowances for other things, and to be assured, that before I had the pleasure of corresponding with you, I had very little spare time. Expect then the best satisfaction I am able to give you, as soon as possible. To prepare the way, I will try hard for a little leisure, to give you a few thoughts upon yours, which came last night.

You complain that I have hitherto disappointed your expectations. If you have preserved my first papers, I believe you will find, that I apprised you this might probably be the event, and certainly must, unless it should please God to make what I should write a means of giving you the same views with myself. I only proposed, as a witness, to bear a simple testimony to what I have seen and known. So far as you believed me sincere and unwilling to impose upon you, I thought you might admit, there was perhaps some weight in what I advanced, though for the present, you could not see things in the same light. And if you allowed a possibility, that my changing the sentiments which I once held in common with yourself, might be upon sufficient grounds, you would, as I trust you do, wait upon the great Teacher for his instruction; otherwise I did not expect to convince you, nor do I yet, only I am glad to put myself in his hands as an instrument.

You quite misunderstood what I spoke of the light and influence of the Spirit of God. He reveals to me no new truths, but has only shown me the meaning of his own written word; nor is this light a particular revelation, it is common to all who are born again. And thus, though you and I cannot fully agree about it, yet I almost daily meet with persons from the east, west, north, and south, whom, though I never saw them before, I find we understand each

other at once. This (as you bid me be explicit) is the one thing which I think you at present lack. And I limited my expression to one thing, because it is our Lord's expression, and because that one thing includes many. As I said before, I cannot give it you; but the Lord can: and from the desire he has raised in your heart, I have a warm hope that he will. You place the whole stress of your inquiries upon reason: I am far from discarding reason, when it is enlightened and sanctified; but spiritual things must be spiritually discerned, and can be received and discerned no other way; for to our natural reason they are foolishness, 1 Cor. ii. 14, 15.; Matth. xi. 25. This certain something I can no more describe to those who have not experienced it, than I could describe the taste of a pineapple to a person who had never seen one. But scriptural proofs might be adduced in abundance, yet not so as to give a solid conviction of it, till we actually experience it. Thus it was with my friend, whose case I sent you. When God gave him the key, as he expressed it, then the scriptures were unlocked. His wishing himself a deist some time before, was not from any libertine exceptions he made to the precepts of the gospel, but from the perplexing embarrassments he had found, by endeavouring to understand the doctrines by dint of reason, though reason in him was as strong and penetrating as in most men I ever met with. Upon your present plan, how can I hope to satisfy you, though even St. Paul asserts it, that the carnal mind is enmity against God? You will readily agree with me to the proposition as it stands in St. Paul's words, but I think you will not so readily assent to what I have no more doubt than of my own existence, is the sense of it. That the heart of man, of any man, every man, however apparently amiable in his outward conduct, however benevolent to his fellow-creatures, however abundant and zealous in his devotions, is by nature enmity against God; not indeed, against the idea he himself forms of God, but against the character which God has revealed of himself in the scriptures. Man is an enemy to the justice, sovereignty, and law of God, and to the alone method of salvation he has appointed in the gospel by faith only; by such a faith, as it is no more in his power to contribute to the production of in himself, than he can contribute to raising the dead, or making a world. Whatever is of the flesh is flesh, and can rise no higher than its principle; but the Lord could convince you of this by a glance of thought.

But I must break off, for want both of room and time. Let me remind you of our agreement, to use and to allow the greatest freedom, and not to be offended with what is meant well on either side. Something in your last letter made me apprehensive you were a little displeas'd with me. He that knows my heart, knows that I wish you well as my own soul.

The expression, of atoning for disobedience by repentance, was in one of your sermons. I considered it as unguarded; but on my view of things, it were in a manner impossible I could use that expression, though perhaps, too often unguarded myself. I am, &c.

LETTER VII.

November 17, 1775.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

AT length I take up your favour of August 14, with design to give it a more explicit answer. My delaying hitherto has been unavoidable; I am sorry to have your patience put to so long a trial, and should be more sorry, but that I consider, that in my former papers, sermons, Omicron's letters, &c. you already possess the whole (in substance) of what I have to offer. My present part is but *actum agere* [to do what has already been done], to repeat what I have elsewhere expressed, only with some variety and enlargement. You yourself well state the situation of our debate, when you say, "Nor in truth do you offer any arguments to convince me, nor does it seem very consistent on your grounds so to do. And if this important change is to be brought about by the intervention of some extraordinary impulse of the Holy Spirit, and cannot be brought about without it; I do not see anything farther that I have to do, than to keep my mind as much unbiased as I can, and to wait and pray for it." I think my letter from London was to the purport of these your own words, though you seemed dissatisfied with it. While we see through a different medium, it will be easy for you to answer every text I might adduce in support of my sentiments, as you have those I have already brought, "That you understand them otherwise." In order to support my sense of one text, I should perhaps quote and argue from twenty more, and still "you would understand them otherwise." The life of man, yea, of Methuselah, would hardly suffice to prove, object, and defend, all that might be alleged on both sides in this way; and at last we should leave off as we began, more fully confirmed in our own opinions, unless the Lord, by his Holy Spirit, should be pleased to show the person who maintained the wrong side of the argument where his mistake lay. However, I mean to take some notice of your queries as they offer themselves.

The first which occurs is complicated. The substance I think is, Whether such belief and aims as you possess, will stand you in no stead unless you likewise believe grace irresistible, predestination absolute, faith in supernatural impulses, &c.? You may have observed, I have several times waived speaking about predestination or election, not that I am ashamed of the doctrine; because, if it be indeed absurd, shocking, and unjust, the blame will not deservedly fall upon me, for I did not invent it, but upon the scriptures, where I am sure it is laid down in as plain terms, as that God created the heavens and the earth. I own I cannot but wonder, that persons professing any reverence for the Bible should so openly and strongly declare their abhorrence of what the Bible so expressly teaches; namely, that there is a discrimination of persons by the grace and good pleasure of God, where by nature there is no difference; and that all things respecting the salvation of these persons is infallibly secured by a divine predestination.

I do not offer this as a rational doctrine, though it be highly so to me; but it is scriptural, or else the scriptures are a mere nose of wax, and without a determinate meaning. What ingenuity is needful to interpret many passages in a sense more favourable to our natural prejudices against God's sovereignty! Matth. xi. 25, 26, and xiii. 10–17; Mark xiii. 20, 22; John xvii. passim; John x. 26; Rom. viii. 28–30, and ix. 13–24, and xi. 7; Eph. i. 4, 5; 1 Pet. 1, 2. Were I fond of disputing, as I am not, I think I could put a close reasoner hard to it, to maintain the truth of scripture-prophecies, or the belief of a particular providence, unless he would admit a divine predestination of causes and events as the ground of his arguments. However, as I said, I have chosen to waive the point; because, however true and necessary in itself, the knowledge and comprehension of it is not necessary to the being of a true Christian, though I can hardly conceive he can be an established, consistent believer without it. This doctrine is not the turning point between you and me; the nature of justification, and the method of a sinner's acceptance with God, are of much more immediate importance; and therefore, if I am to speak plainly, I must say, that I look upon your present sentiments, attainments, and advances, as you describe them, to constitute that kind of gain the apostle speaks of, and concerning which I hope you will one day be of his mind, and be glad to account it all loss, that you may win Christ, and be found in him, "not having your own righteousness, which is of the law, but the righteousness which is of God by faith," Phil. iii. 4, 7–10. For, as you tell me, you never remember a time when you were not conscious before God of great unworthiness, and intervals of earnest endeavours to serve him, though not with the same success, yet something in the same way, as at present; this is but saying, in other words, you never remember a time when old things passed away, and all things became new; and yet the apostle insists much upon this, 2 Cor. iv. 6, and v. 17. The convictions of natural conscience, and those which are wrought in the heart by the Holy Spirit, are different, not only in degree, but in kind; the light of a glow-worm and of the sun do not more essentially differ. The former are partial and superficial, leave us in possession of a supposed power of our own, are pacified by some appearances of an outward change, and make us no farther sensible of the necessity of a Saviour, than to make our doings and duties (if I may so express myself) full weight, which perhaps might otherwise be a little deficient when brought to the balance of the sanctuary. But truly spiritual convictions give us far other views of sin; they lead us to a deep and awful consideration of the root, our total absolute depravity, and our utter apostasy from God by which we are as incapable of doing good, as a dead man is of performing the functions of life. They lead us to the rule and standard, the strict, holy, inflexible law of God, which reaches to the thoughts and intents of the heart; requires perfect, universal, persevering obedience; denounces a curse upon every failure (Gal. iii. 10), and affords neither place nor strength

for repentance. Thus they sweep away every hope and refuge we had before, and fix upon us a sense of guilt and condemnation, from which there is no relief, till we can look to Jesus, as the wounded Israelites did to the brazen serpent; which was not to give efficacy to medicines, and plasters of their own application, but to heal them completely of itself by looking at it. John iii. 14, 15, and vi. 40; Isaiah xliii. 22.

You wish me to explain my distinction between faith and rational assent; and though I know no two things in the world more clearly distinct in themselves, or more expressly distinguished in scripture, yet I fear I may not easily make it appear to you. You allow faith, in your sense, to be the gift of God; but in my sense, it is likewise wrought by the operation of God, Col. ii. 12, and (Eph. 1:19) “And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, that same energy of the power of his strength, . . .” [in Greek.] Can these strong expressions intend no more than a rational assent, such as we give to a proposition in Euclid? I believe fallen reason is, of itself, utterly incapable even of assenting to the great truths of revelation; it may assent to the terms in which they are proposed, but it must put its own interpretation upon them, or it would despise them. The natural man can neither receive nor discern the things of God; and if anyone would be wise, the apostle’s first advice to him is, Let him become a fool, that he may be wise; for the Wisdom of the world is foolishness with God.

Indeed when the heart is changed, and the mind enlightened, then reason is sanctified, and if I may so say, baptized, renounces its curious disquisitions, and is content humbly to tread in the path of revelation. This is one difference; assent may be the act of our Natural reason; faith is the effect of immediate almighty power. Another difference is, faith is always efficacious, “it worketh by love;” whereas assent is often given where it has little or no influence upon the conduct. Thus, for instance, everyone will assent to this truth, All men are mortal. Yet the greatest part of mankind, though they readily assent to the proposition, and it would be highly irrational to do otherwise, live as they might do if the reverse were true. But they who have divine faith feel, as well as say, they are pilgrims and sojourners upon earth. Again, faith gives peace of conscience, access to God, and a sure evidence and subsistence of things not seen (Rom. v. 1, 2; Heb. xi. 1); whereas a calm dispassionate reasoner may be compelled to assent to the external arguments in favour of Christianity, and yet remain a total stranger to that communion with God, that spirit of adoption, that foretaste of glory, which is the privilege and portion of believers. So likewise faith overcomes the world, which rational assent will not do. Witness the lives and tempers of thousands, who yet would be affronted, if their assent to the gospel should be questioned. To sum up all in a word, “He that believes shall be saved.” But surely many who give a rational assent to the gospel live and

die in those sins which exclude from the kingdom of God, Gal v. 19–21. Faith is the effect of a principle of new life implanted in the soul, that was before dead in trespasses and sins; and it qualifies not only for obeying the Saviour's precepts, but chiefly and primarily for receiving from and rejoicing in his fulness, admiring his love, his work, his person, his glory, his advocacy. It makes Christ precious, enthrones him in the heart, presents him as the most delightful object to our meditations; as our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and strength; our root, head, life, shepherd, and husband. These are all scriptural expressions and images, setting forth, so far as words can declare, what Jesus is in himself and to his believing people. But how cold is the comment which rational assent puts upon very many passages wherein the apostle Paul endeavours, but in vain, to express the fulness of his heart upon this subject. A most valued friend of mine, a clergyman, now living, had for many years given a rational assent to the gospel. He laboured with much earnestness upon your plan, was very exemplary in his whole conduct, preached almost incessantly (two or three times every day in the week for years), having a parish in the remote parts of Yorkshire, of great extent, and containing five or six different hamlets at some distance from each other. He succeeded likewise with his people, so far as to break them off from outward irregularities; and was mentioned in a letter to the Society for propagating the Gospel, which I have seen in print, as the most perfect example of a parish-priest which this nation, or perhaps this age, has produced. Thus he went on for many years teaching his people what he knew for he could teach them no more. He lived in such retirement and recess, that he was unacquainted with the persons and principles of any who are now branded as enthusiasts and methodists. One day, reading Ephes. iii. in his Greek Testament, his thoughts were stopped by the word "unsearchable" [in Greek], in verse 8. He was struck, and led to think with himself to this purpose: — "The apostle, when speaking of the love and riches of Christ, uses remarkable expressions; he speaks of heights, depths, and lengths, and breadths, and unsearchableness, where I seem to find everything plain, easy, and rational. He finds mysteries where I can perceive none. Surely, though I use the words gospel, faith, and grace with him, my ideas of them must be different from his." This led him to a close examination of all his epistles, and, by the blessing of God, brought on a total change in his views and preaching. He no longer set his people to keep a law of faith, to trust in their sincerity and endeavours upon some general hope that Christ would help them out where they came short; but he preached Christ himself, as the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth. He felt himself, and laboured to convince others, that there is no hope for a sinner, but merely in the blood of Jesus, and no possibility of his doing any works acceptable to God, till he himself be first made accepted in the Beloved. Nor did he labour in vain. Now his preaching effected not only an outward

reformation, but a real change of heart, in very many of his hearers. The word was received, as Paul expresses it, not with a rational assent only, but with demonstration and power in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; and their endeavours to observe the gospel precepts were abundantly more extensive, uniform, and successful, when they were brought to say, with the apostle, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life I live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God."

Such a change of views and sentiments I pray God my friend may experience. These things may appear uncouth to you at present, as they have done to many, who now bless God for showing them what their reason could never have taught them. My divinity is unfashionable enough at present, but it was not so always; you will find few books written from the era of the Reformation till a little before Laud's time, that set forth any other. There were few pulpits till after the Restoration from which any other was heard. A lamentable change has indeed since taken place; but God has not left himself without witnesses. You think, though I disclaim infallibility, I arrogate too much, in speaking with so much certainty. I am fallible, indeed; but I am sure of the main points of doctrine I hold. I am not in the least doubt, whether salvation be of faith or of works; whether faith be of our own power, or of God's operation; whether Christ's obedience or our own be the just ground of our hope; whether a man can truly call Jesus Lord, but by the teaching of the Holy Ghost. I have no more hesitation about these points than I should have, were I asked, Whether it was God or man that created the heavens and the earth? Besides, as I have more than once observed, your sentiments were once my own; so that I, who have travelled both roads, may have, perhaps, some stronger reason to determine me which is the right, than you can have, who have only travelled one.

Your two sheets may lead me to write as many quires, if I do not check myself. I now come to the two queries you propose, the solution of which, you think, will clearly mark the difference of our sentiments. The substance of them is, 1st, Whether I think any sinner ever perished in his sins (to whom the gospel has been preached), because God refused to supply him with such a proportion of his assistance as was absolutely necessary to his believing and repenting, or without his having previously rejected the incitements of his Holy Spirit? A full answer to this would require a sheet. But briefly, I believe, that all mankind being corrupt and guilty before God, he might, without impeachment to his justice, have left them all to perish, as we are assured he did the fallen angels. But he was pleased to show mercy, and mercy must be free. If the sinner has any claim to it, so far it is justice, not mercy. He who is to be our Judge assures us, that few find the gate that leadeth to life, while many throng the road to destruction. Your question seems to imply, that you think God either did make salvation equally open

to all, or that it would have been more becoming his goodness to have done so.

But he is the potter, we are the clay; his ways and thoughts are above ours, as the heavens are higher than the earth. The Judge of all the earth will do right. He has appointed a day, when he will manifest, to the conviction of all, that he has done right. Till then, I hold it best to take things upon his word, and not too harshly determine what it becomes Jehovah to do. Instead of saying what I think, let it suffice to remind you of what St. Paul thought, Rom. ix. 15–21. But farther, I say, that unless mercy were afforded to those who are saved, in a way peculiar to themselves, and which is not afforded to those who perish, I believe no one soul could be saved. For I believe fallen man, universally considered as such, is as incapable of doing the least thing towards his salvation, till prevented [predisposed] by the grace of God (as our Article speaks), as a dead body is of restoring itself to life. Whatever difference takes place between men in this respect is of grace, that is, of God, undeserved. Yea, his first approaches to our hearts are undesired too; for, till he seeks us, we cannot, we will not, seek him, Psalm cx. 3. It is in the day of his power, and not before, his people are made willing. But I believe, where the gospel is preached, they who do perish, do wilfully resist the light, and choose and cleave to darkness, and stifle the convictions which the truths of God, when his true gospel is indeed preached, will, in one degree or other, force upon their minds. The cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, the love of other things, the violence of sinful appetites, their prejudices, pride, and self-righteousness, either prevent the reception, or choke the growth, of the good seed: thus their own sin and obstinacy is the proper cause of their destruction: they will not come to Christ, that they may have life. At the same time, it is true that they cannot, unless they are supernaturally drawn of God, John v. 40, vi. 44. They will not, and they cannot come. Both are equally true, and they are consistent. For a man's cannot is not a natural, but a moral inability: not an impossibility in the nature of things, as it is for me to walk upon the water, or to fly in the air; but such an inability as, instead of extenuating, does exceedingly enhance and aggravate his guilt. He is so blinded by Satan, so alienated from God by nature and wicked works, so given up to sin, so averse from that way of salvation, which is contrary to his pride and natural wisdom, that he will not embrace it, or seek after it; and therefore he cannot, till the grace of God powerfully enlightens his mind, and overcomes his obstacles. But this brings me to your second query:

2. Do I think that God, in the ordinary course of his providence, grants this assistance in an irresistible manner, or effects faith and conversion without the sinner's own hearty consent and concurrence? I rather chose to term grace invincible than irresistible: for it is too often resisted even by those who believe; but because it is invincible, it triumphs over all resistance when He is pleased to bestow it. For the rest, I believe no sinner is converted

without his own hearty will and concurrence. But he is not willing till he is made so. Why does he at all refuse? Because he is insensible of his state; because he knows not the evil of sin, the strictness of the law, the majesty of God whom he has offended, nor the total apostasy of his heart; because he is blind to eternity, and ignorant of the excellency of Christ; because he is comparatively whole, and sees not his need of this great physician; because he relies upon his own wisdom, power, and supposed righteousness. Now, in this state of things, when God comes with a purpose of mercy, he begins by convincing the person of sin, judgment, and righteousness, causes him to feel and know that he is a lost, condemned, helpless creature, and then discovers to him the necessity, sufficiency, and willingness, of Christ to save them that are ready to perish, without money or price, without doings or deservings. Then he sees faith to be very different from a rational assent, finds that nothing but the power of God can produce a well-grounded hope in the heart of a convinced sinner; therefore looks to Jesus, who is the author and finisher of faith, to enable him to believe. For this he waits in what we call the means of grace; he prays, he reads the word, he thirsts for God, as the hart pants for the water brooks; and though, perhaps, for a while he is distressed with many doubts and fears, he is encouraged to wait on, because Jesus has said, "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." The obstinacy of the will remains while the understanding is dark, and ceases when that is enlightened. Suppose a man walking in the dark, where there are pits and precipices of which he is not aware. You are sensible of his danger, and call after him: but he thinks he knows better than you, refuses your advice, and is perhaps angry with you for your importunity. He sees no danger, therefore, will not be persuaded there is any; but if you go with a light, get before him, and show him plainly, that if he takes another step he falls beyond the power of recovery; then he will stop of his own accord, blame himself for not minding you before, and be ready to comply with your farther directions. In either case man's will acts with equal freedom; the difference of his conduct arises from conviction. Something like this is the case of our spiritual concerns. Sinners are called and warned by the word; but they are wise in their own eyes, and take but little notice till the Lord gives them light, which he is not bound to give to any, and therefore cannot be bound to give to all. They who have it have reason to be thankful, and subscribe to the apostle's words, "By grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God."

I have not yet half done with the first sheet: I shall consider the rest at leisure, but send this as a specimen of my willingness to clear my sentiments to you as far as I can. Unless it should please God to make what I offer satisfactory, I well know beforehand what objections and answers will occur to you, for these points have been often debated; and, after a course of twenty-seven years, in which religion has been the chief object of my

thoughts and inquiries, I am not entirely a stranger to what can be offered on either side. What I write, I write simply and in love, beseeching him who alone can set a seal to his own truth to guide you and bless you. This letter has been more than a week in hand: I have been called from it, I suppose, ten times, frequently in the middle of a period or a line. My leisure, which before was small, is now reduced almost to a nothing. But I am desirous to keep up my correspondence with you, because I feel an affectionate interest in you, and because it pleased God to put it into your heart to apply to me. You cannot think how your first letter struck me: it was so unexpected, and seemed so improbable that you should open your mind to me, I immediately conceived a hope it would prove for good. Nor am I yet discouraged.

When you have leisure and inclination, write; I shall always be glad to hear from you, and I will proceed in answering what I have already by me as fast as I can. But I have many letters now waiting for answers, which must be attended to.

I recommend you to the blessing and care of the great Shepherd, and remain, &c.

LETTER VIII.

December 8, 1775.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

ARE you willing I should still call you so, or are you quite weary of me? Your silence makes me suspect the latter. However, it is my part to fulfil my promise, and then leave the event to God. As I have but an imperfect remembrance of what I have already written, I may be liable to some repetitions. I cannot stay to comment upon every line in your letter, but I proceed to notice such passages as seem most to affect the subject in debate. When you speak of the scriptures maintaining one consistent sense, which, if the word of God, it certainly must do, you say you read and understand it in this one consistent sense; nay, you cannot remember the time when you did not. It is otherwise with me and with multitudes; we remember when it was a sealed book, and we are sure it would have been so still, had not the Holy Spirit opened our understandings. But when you add, though I pretend not to understand the whole, yet what I do understand appears perfectly consistent, I know not how far this exception may extend, for perhaps the reason why you allow you do not understand some parts, is because you cannot make them consistent with the sense you put upon other parts. You quote my words, "That when we are conscious of our depravity, reasoning stands us in no stead." Undoubtedly reason always will stand rational creatures in some stead; but my meaning is, that when we are deeply convinced of sin, all our former reasonings upon the ways of God, while we made our conceptions the standard by which we judge what is befitting him to do, as if he were altogether such an one as ourselves,—all those cobweb reasonings are swept away, and we submit to his *αυτος εφη* without reasoning, though not without reason. For we have the strongest reason imaginable to acknowledge ourselves vile and lost without righteousness and strength, when we actually feel ourselves to be so. You speak of the gospel terms of justification. This term is *faith*. Mark xvi. 16, Acts xiii. 39. The gospel propounds, admits no other term. But this faith, as I endeavoured to show in my former letter, is very different from rational assent. You speak likewise of the law of faith, by which, if you mean what some call the remedial law, which we are to obey as well as we can, and such obedience, together with our faith, will entitle us to acceptance with God, I am persuaded the scriptures speak of no such thing. Grace and works of any kind, in the point of acceptance with God, are mentioned by the apostle not only as opposites or contraries, but as absolutely contradictory to each other, like fire and water, light and darkness; so that the affirmation of one is the denial of the other. Rom. iv. 5. and xi. 6. God justifies freely, justifies the ungodly, and him that worketh not. Though justifying faith be indeed an active principle, it worketh by love, yet not for acceptance. Those whom the apostle exhorts "to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling," he

considers as justified already; for he considers them as believers, in whom he supposed God had already begun a good work; and if so, was confident he would accomplish it, Phil. i. 6. To them, the consideration that God, who dwells in the heart of believers, wrought in them to will and to do, was a powerful motive and encouragement to them to work, that is, to give all diligence in his appointed means, as a right sense of the sin that dwelleth in us, and the snares and temptations around us, will teach us still to work with fear and trembling. You suppose a difference between Christians (so called) who are devoted to God in baptism, and those who in the first ages were converted from abominable superstitions and idolatrous vices. It is true in Christian countries we do not worship heathen divinities *eo nomine* [by name]; and this is the principal difference I can find. Neither reason nor observation will allow me to think, that human nature is a whit better now than it was in the apostles time. I know no kinds or degrees of wickedness which prevailed among heathens which are not prevalent among nominal Christians, who have perhaps been baptized in their infancy; and therefore, as the streams in the life are equally worldly, sensual, devilish, I doubt not but the fountain of the heart is equally polluted and poisonous; and that is as true, as in the days of Christ and his apostles, that unless a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. You sent me a sermon upon the new birth, or regeneration, and you have several of mine on the same subject. I wish you to compare them with each other, and with scripture; and I pray God to show you wherein the difference consists, and on which side the truth lies.

When you desire me to reconcile God's being the author of sin with his justice, you show that you misunderstand the whole strain of my sentiments; for I am persuaded you would not misrepresent them. It is easy to charge harsh consequences, which I neither allow, nor indeed do they follow from my sentiments. God cannot be the author of sin in that sense you would fix upon me; but is it possible that upon your plan you find no difficulty in what the scriptures teach us upon this subject? I conceive that those who were concerned in the death of Christ were very great sinners, and that in nailing him to the cross they committed atrocious wickedness; yet, if the apostle may be believed, all this was according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, Acts ii. 23; and they did no more than what his hand and purpose had determined should be done, chap. iv. 28. And you will observe that this wicked act (wicked with respect to the perpetrators) was not only permitted, but fore-ordained in the strongest and most absolute sense of the word. The glory of God and the salvation of men depended upon its being done, and just in that manner, and with all those circumstances which actually took place, and yet Judas and the rest acted freely, and their wickedness was properly their own. Now, my friend, the arguments which satisfy you that the scriptures do not represent God as the author of this sin in this appointment, will plead for me at the same time; and when you think

you easily overcome me by asking, "Can God be the author of sin?" your imputation falls as directly upon the word of God himself. God is no more the author of sin than the sun is the cause of ice; but it is in the nature of water to congeal into ice when the sun's influence is suspended to a certain degree. So there is sin enough in the hearts of men to make the earth the very image of hell, and to prove that men are no better than incarnate devils, were he to suspend his influence and restraint. Sometimes, and in some instances, he is pleased to suspend it considerably; and, so far as he does, human nature quickly appears in its true colours. Objections of this kind have been repeated and refuted before either you or I were born; and the apostle evidently supposes they would be urged against his doctrine, when he obviates the question, "Why doth he yet find fault; who hath resisted his will?" To which he gives no other answer than by referring it to God's sovereignty, and the power which a potter has over the clay. I think I have in a former letter made some reply to the charge of positiveness in my own opinion. I acknowledge that I am fallible, yet I must again lay claim to a certainty about the way of salvation. I am as sure of some things as of my own existence: I should be so if there was no human creature upon earth but myself. However, my sentiments are confirmed by the suffrages of thousands who have lived before me, of many with whom I have personally conversed in different places and circumstances, unknown to each other; yet all have received the same views, because taught by the same Spirit. And I have likewise been greatly confirmed by the testimony of many with whom I have conversed in their dying hours. I have seen them rejoicing in the prospect of death, free from fears, breathing the air of immortality; heartily disclaiming their duties and performances; acknowledging that their best actions were attended with evil sufficient to condemn them; renouncing every shadow of hope, but what they derived from the blood of Christ, as the sole cause of their acceptance; yet triumphing in him over every enemy and fear, and as sure of heaven as if they were already there. And such were the apostle's hopes, wholly founded on knowing whom he had believed, and his persuasion of his ability to keep that which he had committed unto him. This is faith, a renouncing of everything we are apt to call our own, and relying wholly upon the blood, righteousness, and intercession of Jesus. However, I cannot communicate this my certainty to you; I only tell you there is such a thing, in hopes, if you do not think I wilfully lie both to God and man, you will be earnest to seek it from him who bestowed it on me, and who will bestow it upon all who will sincerely apply to him, and patiently wait upon him for it.

I cannot but wonder, that while you profess to believe the depravity of human nature, you should speak of good qualities inherent in it. The word of God, describes it as evil, only evil, and that continually. That there are such qualities as Stoics and infidels call virtue, I allow. God has not left man destitute of such dispositions as are necessary to the peace of society; but I

deny there is any moral goodness in them, unless they are founded in a supreme love to God, have his glory for their aim, and are produced by faith in Jesus Christ. A man may give all his goods to feed the poor, and his body to be burned, in zeal for the truth, and yet be a mere nothing, a tinkling cymbal, in the sight of him who seeth not as man seeth, but judgeth the heart. Many infidels and avowed enemies to the grace and gospel of Christ, have made a fair show of what the world call virtue; but Christian virtue is grace, the effect of a new nature and new life; and works thus wrought in God are as different from the faint, partial imitations of them which fallen nature is capable of producing, as a living man is from a statue. A statue may express the features and lineaments of the person whom it represents, but there is no life.

Your comment on the seventh to the Romans, latter part, contradicts my feelings. You are either of a different make and nature from me, or else you are not rightly apprised of your own state, if you do not find the apostle's complaint very suitable to yourself. I believe it applicable to the most holy Christian upon earth. But controversies of this kind are worn thread-bare. When you speak of the spiritual part of a natural man, it sounds to me like the living part of a dead man, or the seeing part of a blind man. Paul tells me, that the natural man, whatever his spiritual part may be, can neither receive nor discern the things of God. What the apostle speaks of himself (Rom. vii.) is no more, when rightly understood, than what he affirms of all who are partakers of a spiritual life, or who are true believers, Gal. v. 17. The carnal natural mind is enmity against God, not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. When you subjoin, "Till it be set at liberty from the law of sin," you do not comment upon the text, but make an addition of your own, which the text will by no means bear. The carnal mind is enmity. An enemy may be reconciled, but enmity itself is incurable. This carnal mind, natural man, old man, flesh (for the expressions are all equivalent, and denote and include the heart of man as he is by nature), may be crucified, must be mortified, but cannot be sanctified. All that is good or gracious, is the effect of a new creation, a supernatural principle, wrought in the heart by the gospel of Christ, and the agency of his Spirit; and, till that is effected, the *το ὑψηλο*, the highest attainment, the finest qualifications in man, however they may exalt him in his own eyes, or recommend him to the notice of his fellow-worms, are but abomination in the sight of God, Luke xvi. 15. The gospel is calculated and designed to stain the pride of human glory. It is provided, not for the wise and the righteous, for those who think they have good dispositions and good works to plead, but for the guilty, the helpless, the wretched, for those who are ready to perish; it fills the hungry with good things, but it sends the rich empty away. See Rev. iii. 17, 18.

You ask, If man can do nothing without an extraordinary impulse from on high, is he to sit still and careless? By no means—I am far from saying

man can do nothing, though I believe he cannot open his own eyes, or give himself faith. I wish every man to abstain carefully from sinful company, and sinful actions, to read the Bible, to pray to God for his heavenly teaching. For this waiting upon God he has a moral ability; and if he persevere thus in seeking, the promise is sure, that he shall not seek in vain. But I would not have him mistake the means for the end; think himself good because he is preserved from gross vices and follies, or trust to his religious course of duties for acceptance, nor be satisfied till Christ be revealed in him, formed within him, dwell in his heart by faith, and till he can say upon good grounds, "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." I need not tell you, these are scriptural expressions; I am persuaded, if they were not, they would be exploded by many as unintelligible jargon. True faith, my dear Sir, unites the soul to Christ, and thereby gives access to God, and fills it with a peace passing understanding, a hope, a joy unspeakable and full of glory; teaches us that we are weak in ourselves, but enables us to be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. To those who thus believe, Christ is precious, their beloved; they hear and know his voice: the very sound of his name gladdens their hearts, and he manifests himself to them as he does not to the world. Thus the scriptures speak, thus the first Christians experienced; and this is precisely the language, which, in our days, is despised as enthusiasm and folly. For it is now as it was then, though these things are revealed to babes, and they are as sure of them as they that see the noon-day sun, they are hidden from the wise and prudent, till the Lord makes them willing to renounce their own wisdom, and to become fools, that they may be truly wise, 1 Cor. i. 18, 19.; iii. 8.; viii. 2. Attention to the education of children is an undoubted duty; and it is a mercy when it so far succeeds as to preserve them from gross wickedness; but it will not change the heart. They who receive Christ are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God, John i. 13.

If a man professes to love the Lord Jesus, I am willing to believe him, if he does not give me proof to the contrary; but I am sure, at the same time, no one can love him in the scriptural sense, who does not know the need and the worth of a Saviour; in other words, who is not brought, as a ruined, helpless sinner, to live upon him for wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. They who love him thus will speak highly of him, and acknowledge that he is their all in all. And they who thus love him, and speak of him, will get little thanks for their pains in such a world as this: "All that live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution;" the world, that hated him, will hate them. And though it is possible, by his grace to put to silence, in some measure, the ignorance of foolish men; and though his providence can protect his people, so that not a hair of their heads can be hurt without his permission: yet the world will show their teeth, if they are not suffered to bite. The apostles were accounted babblers, *Some of the Epicurean and Stoic*

philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, "What does this babbler wish to say?" [in Greek, Acts 17:18.] I need not point out to you the force of these expressions. We are no better than the apostles; nor have we reason to expect much better treatment, so far as we walk in their steps. On the other hand, there is a sober, decent way of speaking of God, and goodness, and benevolence, and sobriety, which the world will bear well enough; nay, we may say a little about Jesus Christ, as ready to make up the deficiencies of our honest and good endeavours, and this will not displease them. But if we preach him as the only foundation, lay open the horrid evils of the human heart, tell our hearers that they are dead in trespasses and sins, and have no better ground of hope in themselves than the vilest malefactors, in order to exalt the glory of Jesus, as saving those who are saved wholly and freely for his own name's sake; if we tell the virtuous and decent, as well as the profligate, that unless they are born again, and made partakers of living faith, and count all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, they cannot be saved: this the world cannot bear. We shall be called knaves or fools, uncharitable bigots, and twenty hard names. If you have met with nothing like this, I wish it may lead you to suspect whether you have yet received the right key to the doctrines of Christ: for depend upon it, the offence of the cross is not ceased.

I am grieved and surprised that you seem to take little notice of anything in the account of my deceased friend, but his wishing himself to be a deist, and his having play-books about him in his illness. As to the plays, they were Shakespeare's, which, as a man of taste, it is no great wonder he should sometimes look in. Your remark on the other point shows that you are not much acquainted with the exercises of the human mind under certain circumstances. I believe I observed formerly, that it was not a libertine wish. Had you known him, you would have known one of the most amiable and unblemished characters. Few were more beloved and admired for an uniform course of integrity, moderation, and benevolence; but he was discouraged. He studied the Bible, believed it in general to be the word of God; but his wisdom, his strong turn for reasoning, stood so in his way, that he could get no solid comfort from it. He felt the vanity of the schemes proposed by many men admired in the world as teachers of divinity; and he felt the vanity likewise of his own. He was also a minister, and had a sincere design of doing good. He wished to reform the profligate, and comfort the afflicted by his preaching; but as he was not acquainted with that one kind of preaching which God owns to the edification of the hearers, he found he could do neither. A sense of disappointments of this kind distressed him. Finding in himself none of that peace which the scriptures speak of, and none of the influence he hoped for attending his ministry, he was led sometimes to question the truth of the scriptures. We have a spiritual enemy always near, to press upon a mind in this desponding situation: nor am I surprised that he

should then wish himself a deist; since, if there were any hope for a sinner but by faith in the blood of Jesus, he had as much of his own goodness to depend upon as most I have known. As for the rest, if you could see nothing admirable and wonderful in the clearness, the dignity, the spirituality of his expressions, after the Lord revealed the gospel to him, I can only say, I am sorry for it. This I know, that some persons of sense, taste, learning, and reason, and far enough from my sentiments, have been greatly struck with them. You say, a deathbed repentance is what you would be sorry to give any hope of. My dear friend, it is well for poor sinners that God's thoughts and ways are as much above men's, as the heavens are higher than the earth. We agreed to communicate our sentiments freely, and promised not to be offended with each other's freedom, if we could help it. I am afraid of offending you by a thought just now upon my mind, and yet I dare not in conscience suppress it: I must therefore venture to say, that I hope they who depend upon such a repentance as your scheme points out, will repent of their repentance itself upon their death-bed at least, if not sooner. You and I, perhaps, should have encouraged the fair-spoken young man, who said he had kept all the commandments from his youth, and rather have left the thief upon the cross to perish like a villain, as he lived. But Jesus thought differently. I do not encourage sinners to defer their repentance to their deathbeds. I press the necessity of a repentance this moment. But then I take care to tell them, that repentance is the gift of God; that Jesus is exalted to bestow it; and that all their endeavours that way, unless they seek to him for grace, will be vain as washing a blackmoor, and transient as washing a sow which will soon return to the mire again. I know the evil heart will abuse the grace of God; the apostle knew this likewise, Rom. iii. 8, and vi. 3. But this did not tempt him to suppress the glorious grace of the gospel, the power of Jesus to save to the uttermost, and his merciful promise, that whosoever cometh unto him, he will in no wise cast him out. The repentance of a natural heart, proceeding wholly from fear, like that of some malefactors, who are sorry, not that they have committed robbery or murder, but that they must be hanged for it; this undoubtedly is nothing worth, whether in time of health, or in a dying hour. But that that gracious change of heart, views, and dispositions, which always takes place when Jesus is made known to the soul as having died, that the sinner might live, and been wounded, that he might be healed; this, at whatever period God is pleased to afford and effect it by his Spirit, brings a sure and everlasting salvation with it.

Still I find I have not done: you ask my exposition of the parables of the talents and pounds; but at present I can write no more. I have only just time to tell you, that when I begged your acceptance of Omicron, nothing was farther from my expectation than a correspondence with you. The frank and kind manner in which you wrote presently won upon my heart. In the course of our letters upon Subscription, I observed an integrity and disinterestedness

in you, which endeared you to me still more. Since that, our debates have taken a much more interesting turn; I have considered it as a call, and an opportunity put in my hand, by the special providence of him who ruleth over all. I have embraced the occasion, to lay before you simply, and rather in a way of testimony than argumentation, what, in the main, I am sure is truth. I have done enough to discharge my conscience, but shall never think I do enough to answer the affection I bear you. I have done enough likewise to make you weary of my correspondence, unless it should please God to fix the subject deeply upon your mind, and make you attentive to the possibility and vast importance of a mistake in matters of everlasting concernment. I pray that the good Spirit of God may guide you into all truths. He only is the effectual teacher. I still retain a cheerful hope, that some things you cannot at present receive, will hereafter be the joy and comfort of your heart: but I know it cannot be till the Lord's own time. I cannot promise to give such long answers as your letters require, to clear up every text that may be proposed, and to answer every objection that may be started; yet I shall be glad to change a letter now and then. At present, it remains with you whether our correspondence continues or not, as this is the third letter I have written since I heard from you, and therefore must be the last till I do. I should think what remains might be better settled *via voce*; for which purpose I shall be glad to see you, or ready to wait on you when leisure will permit, and when I know it will be agreeable: but if (as life and all its affairs are precarious) we should never meet in this world, I pray God we may meet at the right hand of Jesus, in the great day when he shall come to gather up his jewels, and to judge the world. There is an endless diversity of opinions in matters of religion; which of them are right and safe, and will lead to eternal glory, *dies iste indicabit* [this day will tell]. I am still in a manner lost amidst more engagements than I have time to comply with; but I feel and know that I am, &c.