

**INSTITUTES**  
**OF THE**  
**CHRISTIAN RELIGION.**

**BY**  
**JOHN CALVIN.**

**TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL LATIN, AND COLLATED WITH  
THE AUTHOR'S LAST EDITION IN FRENCH,**

**BY JOHN ALLEN**

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Non tamen omnino potuit mors invida totum  
Tollere Calvinum terris ; æterna manebunt  
Ingenii monumenta tui : et livoris iniqui  
Languida paulatim cum flamma resederit, omnes  
Religio qua pura nitet se fundet in oras  
Fama tui. . . . . BUCHANAN

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# INSTITUTES

OF THE

## CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

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### BOOK III.

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#### CHAPTER XIV.

##### THE COMMENCEMENT AND CONTINUAL PROGRESS OF JUSTIFICATION

For the further elucidation of this subject, let us examine what kind of righteousness can be found in men during the whole course of their lives. Let us divide them into four classes. For either they are destitute of the knowledge of God, and immersed in idolatry; or, having been initiated by the sacraments, they lead impure lives, denying God in their actions, while they confess him with their lips, and belong to Christ only in name; or they are hypocrites, concealing the iniquity of their hearts with vain disguises; or, being regenerated by the Spirit of God, they devote themselves to true holiness. In the first of these classes, judged of according to their natural characters, from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot there will not be found a single spark of goodness; unless we mean to charge the Scripture with falsehood in these representations which it gives of all the sons of Adam — that “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked;” (*w*) that “every imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth;” (*x*) that “the thoughts of man are vanity; that there is no fear of God before his eyes;” (*y*) that “there is none that understandeth, none that seeketh after God;” (*z*) in a word, “that he is flesh,” (*a*) a term expressive of all those works which are enumerated by Paul — “adultery, forni-

(*w*) Jer. xvii. 9.      (*z*) Gen. vi. 5; viii. 21.  
(*z*) Psalm xiv. 1—3. Rom. iii. 11.

(*y*) Psalm xciv. 11; xxxvi.  
(*a*) Gen. vi. 3

cation, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditious, heresies, envyings, murders," (b) and every impurity and abomination that can be conceived. This is the dignity, in the confidence of which they must glory. But if any among them discover that integrity in their conduct which among men has some appearance of sanctity, yet, since we know that God regards not external splendour, we must penetrate to the secret springs of these actions, if we wish them to avail any thing to justification. We must narrowly examine, I say, from what disposition of heart these works proceed. Though a most extensive field of observation is now before us, yet, since the subject may be despatched in very few words, I shall be as compendious as possible.

II. In the first place, I do not deny, that whatever excellences appear in unbelievers, they are the gifts of God. I am not so at variance with the common opinion of mankind, as to contend that there is no difference between the justice, moderation, and equity of Titus or Trajan, and the rage, intemperance, and cruelty of Caligula, or Nero, or Domitian; between the obscenities of Tiberius and the continence of Vespasian; and, not to dwell on particular virtues or vices, between the observance and the contempt of moral obligation and positive laws. For so great is the difference between just and unjust, that it is visible even in the lifeless image of it. For what order will be left in the world, if these opposites be confounded together? Such a distinction as this, therefore, between virtuous and vicious actions, has not only been engraven by the Lord in the heart of every man, but has also been frequently confirmed by his providential dispensations. We see how he confers many blessings of the present life on those who practise virtue among men. Not that this external resemblance of virtue merits the least favour from him; but he is pleased to discover his great esteem of true righteousness, by not permitting that which is external and hypocritical to remain without a temporal reward. Whence it follows, as we have just acknowledged, that these virtues, whatever they may be, or rather images of virtues, are the gifts of God; since there is nothing in any respect laudable which does not proceed from him.

III. Nevertheless the observation of Augustine is strictly true — that all who are strangers to the religion of the one true God, however they may be esteemed worthy of admiration for their reputed virtue, not only merit no reward, but are rather deserving of punishment, because they contaminate the pure gifts of God with the pollution of their own hearts. For

(b) Gal. v. 19. &c.

though they are instruments used by God for the preservation of human society, by the exercise of justice, continence, friendship, temperance, fortitude, and prudence, yet they perform these good works of God very improperly; being restrained from the commission of evil, not by a sincere attachment to true virtue, but either by mere ambition, or by self-love, or by some other irregular disposition. These actions, therefore, being corrupted in their very source by the impurity of their hearts, are no more entitled to be classed among virtues, than those vices which commonly deceive mankind by their affinity and similitude to virtues. Besides, when we remember that the end of what is right is always to serve God, whatever is directed to any other end, can have no claim to that appellation. Therefore, since they regard not the end prescribed by Divine wisdom, though an act performed by them be externally and apparently good, yet, being directed to a wrong end, it becomes sin. He concludes, therefore, that all the Fabricii, Scipios, and Catos, in all their celebrated actions, were guilty of sin, inasmuch as, being destitute of the light of faith, they did not direct those actions to that end to which they ought to have directed them; that consequently they had no genuine righteousness; because moral duties are estimated not by external actions, but by the ends for which such actions are designed.

IV. Besides, if there be any truth in the assertion of John, that "he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life;" (c) they who have no interest in Christ, whatever be their characters, their actions, or their endeavours, are constantly advancing, through the whole course of their lives, towards destruction and the sentence of eternal death. On this argument is founded the following observation of Augustine: "Our religion discriminates between the righteous and the unrighteous, not by the law of works, but by that of faith, without which works apparently good are perverted into sins." Wherefore the same writer, in another place, strikingly compares the exertions of such men to a deviation in a race from the prescribed course. For the more vigorously any one runs out of the way, he recedes so much the further from the goal, and becomes so much the more unfortunate. Wherefore he contends, that it is better to halt in the way, than to run out of the way. Finally, it is evident that they are evil trees, since without a participation of Christ there is no sanctification. They may produce fruits fair and beautiful to the eye, and even sweet to the taste, but never any that are good. Hence we clearly perceive that all the thoughts, meditations, and actions of man

antecedent to a reconciliation to God by faith, are accursed, and not only of no avail to justification, but certainly deserving of condemnation. But why do we dispute concerning it as a dubious point, when it is already proved by the testimony of the apostle, that "without faith it is impossible to please God" (d)

V. But the proof will be still clearer, if the grace of God be directly opposed to the natural condition of man. The Scripture invariably proclaims, that God finds nothing in men which can incite him to bless them, but that he prevents them by his gratuitous goodness. For what can a dead man do to recover life? But when God illuminates us with the knowledge of himself, he is said to raise us from death, and to make us new creatures. (e) For under this character we find the Divine goodness towards us frequently celebrated, especially by the apostle. "God," says he, "who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ," &c. (f) In another place, when, under the type of Abraham, he treats of the general calling of believers, he says, It is "God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were." (g) If we are nothing, what can we do? Wherefore God forcibly represses this presumption, in the Book of Job, in the following words: "Who hath prevented me, that I should repay him? Whatsoever is under the whole heaven is mine." (h) Paul, explaining this passage, concludes from it, that we ought not to suppose we bring any thing to the Lord but ignominious indigence and emptiness. (i) Wherefore, in the passage cited above, in order to prove that we attain to the hope of salvation, not by works, but solely by the grace of God, he alleges, that "we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." (k) As though he would say, Who of us can boast that he has influenced God by his righteousness, since our first power to do well proceeds from regeneration? For, according to the constitution of our nature, oil might be extracted from a stone sooner than we could perform a good work. It is wonderful, indeed, that man, condemned to such ignominy, dares to pretend to have any thing left. Let us confess, therefore, with that eminent servant of the Lord, that "God hath saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace;" (l) and that "the kindness and love of God our Saviour towards man appeared," because "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to

(d) Heb. xi. 6.  
(e) John v. 25.

(f) Eph. ii. 4, 5.  
(g) Rom. iv. 17.

(h) Job xli. 11.  
(i) Rom. xi. 35.

(k) Ephes. ii. 10  
(l) 2 Tim. i. 9.

his mercy he saved us; that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs of eternal life." (m) By this confession we divest man of all righteousness, even to the smallest particle, till through mere mercy he has been regenerated to the hope of eternal life; for if a righteousness of works contributed any thing to our justification, we are not truly said to be "justified by grace." The apostle, when he asserted justification to be by grace, had certainly not forgotten his argument in another place, that "if it be of works, then it is no more grace." (n) And what else does our Lord intend, when he declares, "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners?" (o) If sinners only are admitted, why do we seek to enter by a counterfeit righteousness?

VI. The same thought frequently recurs to me, that I am in danger of injuring the mercy of God, by labouring with so much anxiety in the defence of this doctrine, as though it were doubtful or obscure. But such being our malignity, that, unless it be most powerfully subdued, it never allows to God that which belongs to him, I am constrained to dwell a little longer upon it. But as the Scripture is sufficiently perspicuous on this subject, I shall use its language in preference to my own. Isaiah, after having described the universal ruin of mankind, properly subjoins the method of recovery. "The Lord saw it, and it displeased him that there was no judgment. And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore his own arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness it sustained him." (p) Where are our righteousnesses, if it be true, as the prophet says, that no one assists the Lord in procuring his salvation? So another prophet introduces the Lord speaking of the reconciliation of sinners to himself, saying, "I will betroth thee unto me for ever, in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies. I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy." (q) If this covenant, which is evidently our first union with God, depend on his mercy, there remains no foundation for our righteousness. And I should really wish to be informed by those, who pretend that man advances to meet God with some righteousness of works, whether there be any righteousness at all, but that which is accepted by God. If it be madness to entertain such a thought, what that is acceptable to God can proceed from his enemies, who, with all their actions, are the objects of his complete abhorrence? And that we are all the inveterate and avowed enemies of our God, till we are justified and received into his friendship, is an undeniable truth. (r) If justification be the

(m) Titus iii. 4, 5, 7.

(n) Rom. xi. 6.

(o) Matt. ix. 13.

(p) Isaiah lix. 15, 16.

(q) Hosea ii. 19, 23.

(r) Rom. v. 6, 10. Col. i. 21.

principle from which love originates, what righteousnesses of works can precede it? To destroy that pestilent arrogance, therefore, John carefully apprizes us that "we did not first love him." (s) And the Lord had by his prophet long before taught the same truth: "I will love them freely," saith he, "for mine anger is turned away." (t) If his love was spontaneously inclined towards us, it certainly is not excited by works. But the ignorant mass of mankind have only this notion of it — that no man has merited that Christ should effect our redemption; but that towards obtaining the possession of redemption, we derive some assistance from our own works. But however we may have been redeemed by Christ, yet till we are introduced into communion with him by the calling of the Father, we are both heirs of darkness and death, and enemies to God. For Paul teaches, that we are not purified and washed from our pollutions by the blood of Christ, till the Spirit effects that purification within us. (u) This is the same that Peter intends, when he declares that the "sanctification of the Spirit" is effectual "unto obedience, and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." (x) If we are sprinkled by the Spirit with the blood of Christ for purification, we must not imagine that before this ablution we are in any other state than that of sinners destitute of Christ. We may be certain, therefore, that the commencement of our salvation is, as it were, a resurrection from death to life; because, when "on the behalf of Christ it is given to us to believe on him," (y) we then begin to experience a transition from death to life.

VII. The same reasoning may be applied to the second and third classes of men in the division stated above. For the impurity of the conscience proves, that they are neither of them yet regenerated by the Spirit of God; and their unregeneracy betrays also their want of faith: whence it appears, that they are not yet reconciled to God, or justified in his sight, since these blessings are only attained by faith. What can be performed by sinners alienated from God, that is not execrable in his view? Yet all the impious, and especially hypocrites, are inflated with this foolish confidence. Though they know that their heart is full of impurity, yet if they perform any specious actions, they esteem them too good to be despised by God. Hence that pernicious error, that though convicted of a polluted and impious heart, they cannot be brought to confess themselves destitute of righteousness; but while they acknowledge themselves to be unrighteous, because it cannot be denied, they till arrogate to themselves some degree of righteousness. This

(s) 1 John iv. 10.

(x) 1 Peter i. 2.

(t) Hosea xiv. 4.

(u) 1 Cor. vi. 11

(y) Phil. i. 29.

vanity the Lord excellently refutes by the prophet. "Ask now," saith he, "the priests, saying, If one bear holy flesh in the skirt of his garment, and with his skirt do touch bread, or any meat, shall it be holy? And the priests answered and said, No. Then said Haggai, If one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of these, shall it be unclean? And the priests answered and said, It shall be unclean. Then answered Haggai, and said, So is this people, and so is this nation before me, saith the Lord; and so is every work of their hands; and that which they offer there is unclean." (z) I wish that this passage might either obtain full credit with us, or be deeply impressed on our memory. For there is no one, however flagitious his whole life may be, who can suffer himself to be persuaded of what the Lord here plainly declares. The greatest sinner, as soon as he has performed two or three duties of the law, doubts not but they are accepted of him for righteousness; but the Lord positively denies that any sanctification is acquired by such actions, unless the heart be previously well purified; and not content with this, he asserts that all the works of sinners are contaminated by the impurity of their hearts. Let the name of righteousness, then, no longer be given to these works which are condemned for their pollution by the lips of God. And by what a fine similitude does he demonstrate this! For it might have been objected that what the Lord had enjoined was inviolably holy. But he shows, on the contrary, that it is not to be wondered at, if those things which are sanctified by the law of the Lord, are defiled by the pollution of the wicked; since an unclean hand cannot touch any thing that has been consecrated, without profaning it.

VIII. He excellently pursues the same argument also in Isaiah: "Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth; they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. When ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings." (a) What is the reason that the Lord is so displeased at an obedience to his law? But, in fact, he here rejects nothing that arises from the genuine observance of the law; the beginning of which, he every where teaches, is an unfeigned fear of his name. (b) If that be wanting, all the oblations made to him are not merely trifles, but nauseous and abominable pollutions. Let hypocrites go now, and, retaining depravity concealed in their hearts, endeavour by

(z) Hag. ii. 11—14.

(a) Isaiah i. 13—16.

(b) Deut. iv. 6 Psalm cxi. 10. Prov. i. 7; ix. 10.

their works to merit the favour of God. But by such means they will add provocation to provocation; for "the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord; but the prayer of the upright" alone "is his delight." (c) We lay it down, therefore, as an undoubted truth, which ought to be well known to such as are but moderately versed in the Scriptures, that even the most splendid works of men not yet truly sanctified, are so far from righteousness in the Divine view, that they are accounted sins. And therefore they have strictly adhered to the truth, who have maintained that the works of a man do not conciliate God's favour to his person; but, on the contrary, that works are never acceptable to God, unless the person who performs them has previously found favour in his sight. And this order, to which the Scripture directs us, is religiously to be observed. Moses relates, that "The Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering." (d) Does he not plainly indicate that the Lord is propitious to men, before he regards their works? Wherefore the purification of the heart is a necessary prerequisite, in order that the works which we perform may be favourably received by God; for the declaration of Jeremiah is always in force, that the "eyes of the Lord are upon the truth." (e) And the Holy Spirit has asserted by the mouth of Peter, that it is "by faith" alone that the "heart" is "purified," (f) which proves that the first foundation is laid in a true and living faith.

IX. Let us now examine what degree of righteousness is possessed by those whom we have ranked in the fourth class. We admit, that when God, by the interposition of the righteousness of Christ, reconciles us to himself, and having granted us the free remission of our sins, esteems us as righteous persons, to this mercy he adds also another blessing; for he dwells in us by his Holy Spirit, by whose power our carnal desires are daily more and more mortified, and we are sanctified, that is, consecrated to the Lord unto real purity of life, having our hearts moulded to obey his law, so that it is our prevailing inclination to submit to his will, and to promote his glory alone by all possible means. But even while, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we are walking in the ways of the Lord, — that we may not forget ourselves, and be filled with pride, we feel such remains of imperfection, as afford us abundant cause for humility. The Scripture declares, that "there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good and sinneth not." (g) What kind of righteousness, then, will even believers obtain from their own works? In the first place, I assert, that the best of their performances are tarnished and corrupted by some carnal impurity

(c) Prov. xv. 8.

(f) Acts xv. 9.

(d) Gen. iv. 4.

(g) Eccles. vii. 20.

(e) Jer. i. 3.

and debased by a mixture of some alloy. Let any holy servant of God select from his whole life that which he shall conceive to have been the best of all his actions, and let him examine it with attention on every side; he will undoubtedly discover in it some taint of the corruption of the flesh; since our alacrity to good actions is never what it ought to be, but our course is retarded by great debility. Though we perceive that the blemishes which deform the works of the saints, are not difficult to be discovered, yet suppose we admit them to be very diminutive spots, will they not be at all offensive in the sight of God, in which even the stars are not pure? We have now ascertained, that there is not a single action performed by the saints, which, if judged according to its intrinsic merit, does not justly deserve to be rewarded with shame.

X. In the next place, even though it were possible for us to perform any works completely pure and perfect, yet one sin is sufficient to extinguish and annihilate all remembrance of antecedent righteousness, as is declared by the prophet. *(h)* With him James also agrees: "Whosoever shall offend," says he, "in one point, he is guilty of all." *(i)* Now, since this mortal life is never pure or free from sin, whatever righteousness we might acquire being perpetually corrupted, overpowered, and destroyed by subsequent sins, it would neither be admitted in the sight of God, nor be imputed to us for righteousness. Lastly, in considering the righteousness of works, we should regard, not any action commanded in the law, but the commandment itself. Therefore, if we seek righteousness by the law, it is in vain for us to perform two or three works; a perpetual observance of the law is indispensably necessary. Wherefore God does not impute to us for righteousness that remission of sins, of which we have spoken, once only, (as some foolishly imagine,) in order that, having obtained pardon for our past lives, we may afterwards seek righteousness by the law; which would be only sporting with us, and deluding us by a fallacious hope. For since perfection is unattainable by us, as long as we are in this mortal body, and the law denounces death and judgment on all whose works are not completely and universally righteous, it will always have matter of accusation and condemnation against us, unless it be prevented by the Divine mercy continually absolving us by a perpetual remission of our sins. Wherefore it will ever be true, as we asserted at the beginning, that if we be judged according to our demerits, whatever be our designs or undertakings, we are nevertheless with all our endeavours and all our pursuits, deserving of death and destruction.

*(h)* Ezek. xviii. 24

*(i)* James ii. 10.

XI. We must strenuously insist on these two points — first, that there never was an action performed by a pious man, which, if examined by the scrutinizing eye of Divine justice, would not deserve condemnation; and secondly, if any such thing be admitted, (though it cannot be the case with any individual of mankind,) yet being corrupted and contaminated by the sins, of which its performer is confessedly guilty, it loses every claim to the Divine favour. And this is the principal hinge on which our controversy [with the Papists] turns. For concerning the beginning of justification, there is no dispute between us and the sounder schoolmen, but we all agree, that a sinner being freely delivered from condemnation obtains righteousness, and that by the remission of his sins; only they, under the term *justification*, comprehend that renovation in which we are renewed by the Spirit of God to an obedience to the law, and so they describe the righteousness of a regenerate man as consisting in this — that a man, after having been once reconciled to God through faith in Christ, is accounted righteous with God on account of his good works, the merit of which is the cause of his acceptance. But the Lord, on the contrary, declares, “that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness,” (*k*) not during the time while he yet remained a worshipper of idols, but after he had been eminent during many years for the sanctity of his life. Abraham, then, had for a long time worshipped God from a pure heart, and performed all that obedience to the law, which a mortal man is capable of performing; yet, after all, his righteousness consisted in faith. Whence we conclude, according to the argument of Paul, that it was not of works. So when the prophet says, “The just shall live by his faith,” (*l*) he is not speaking of the impious and profane, whom the Lord justifies by converting them to the faith; but his address is directed to believers, and they are promised life by faith. Paul also removes every doubt, when, in confirmation of this sentiment, he adduces the following passage of David: “Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven.” (*m*) But it is certain that David spake not of impious men; but of believers, whose characters resembled his own; for he spoke from the experience of his own conscience. Wherefore it is necessary for us, not to have this blessing for once only, but to retain it as long as we live. Lastly, he asserts, that the message of a free reconciliation with God, is not only promulgated for a day or two, but is perpetual in the church. (*n*) Believers, therefore, even to the end of their lives, have no other righteousness than that which is there described. For the mediatorial office is perpetually sustained by Christ, by

(*k*) Rom. iv. 3.    (*l*) Hab. ii. 4.    (*m*) Rom. iv. 7.    (*n*) 2 Cor. v. 18, 19

whom the Father is reconciled to us; and the efficacy of whose death is perpetually the same, consisting in ablution, satisfaction, expiation, and perfect obedience, which covers all our iniquities. And Paul does not tell the Ephesians that they are indebted to grace merely for the beginning of their salvation, but that they "are saved by grace, not of works, lest any man should boast."<sup>(o)</sup>

XII. The subterfuges, by which the schoolmen endeavour to evade these arguments, are unavailing. They say, that the sufficiency of good works to justification arises not from their intrinsic merit, but from the grace through which they are accepted. Secondly, because they are constrained to acknowledge the righteousness of works to be always imperfect in the present state, they admit, that as long as we live we need the remission of our sins, in order to supply the defects of our works; but that our deficiencies are compensated by works of supererogation. I reply, that what they denominate the grace through which our works are accepted, is no other than the free goodness of the Father, with which he embraces us in Christ, when he invests us with the righteousness of Christ, and accepts it as ours, in order that, in consequence of it, he may treat us as holy, pure, and righteous persons. For the righteousness of Christ (which, being the only perfect righteousness, is the only one that can bear the Divine scrutiny) must be produced on our behalf, and judicially presented, as in the case of a surety. Being furnished with this, we obtain by faith the perpetual remission of our sins. Our imperfections and impurities, being concealed by its purity, are not imputed to us, but are as it were buried, and prevented from appearing in the view of Divine justice, till the advent of that hour, when the old man being slain and utterly annihilated in us, the Divine goodness shall receive us into a blessed peace with the new Adam, in that state to wait for the day of the Lord, when we shall receive incorruptible bodies, and be translated to the glories of the celestial kingdom.

XIII. If these things are true, surely no works of ours can render us acceptable to God; nor can the actions themselves be pleasing to him, any otherwise than as a man, who is covered with the righteousness of Christ, pleases God and obtains the remission of his sins. For God has not promised eternal life as a reward of certain works; he only declares, that "he that doeth these things shall live,"<sup>(p)</sup> denouncing, on the contrary, that memorable curse against all who continue not in the observance of every one of his commands<sup>(q)</sup> This abundantly refutes the erroneous notion of a partial righteous-

(o) Ephes. ii. 8, 9.

(p) Lev. xviii. 5. Rom. x. 5.

(q) Deut. xxvii. 26. Gal. iii. 10.

ness, since no other righteousness is admitted into heaven but an entire observance of the law. Nor is there any more solidity in their pretence of a sufficient compensation for imperfections by works of supererogation. For are they not by this perpetually recurring to the subterfuge, from which they have already been driven, that the partial observance of the law constitutes, as far as it goes, a righteousness of works? They unblushingly assume as granted, what no man of sound judgment will concede. The Lord frequently declares, that he acknowledges no righteousness of works, except in a perfect obedience to his law. What presumption is it for us, who are destitute of this, in order that we may not appear to be despoiled of all our glory, or, in other words, to submit entirely to the Lord — what presumption is it for us to boast of I know not what fragments of a few actions, and to endeavour to supply deficiencies by other satisfactions! *Satisfactions* have already been so completely demolished, that they ought not to occupy even a transient thought. I only remark, that those who trifle in this manner, do not consider what an execrable thing sin is in the sight of God; for indeed they ought to know, that all the righteousness of all mankind, accumulated in one mass, is insufficient to compensate for a single sin. We see that man on account of one offence was rejected and abandoned by God, so that he lost all means of regaining salvation. (r) They are deprived, therefore, of the power of satisfaction, with which, however they flatter themselves, they will certainly never be able to render a satisfaction to God, to whom nothing will be pleasing or acceptable that proceeds from his enemies. Now, his enemies are all those to whom he determines to impute sin. Our sins, therefore, must be covered and forgiven, before the Lord can regard any of our works. Whence it follows that the remission of sins is absolutely gratuitous, and that it is wickedly blasphemed by those who obtrude any *satisfactions*. Let us, therefore, after the example of the apostle, “forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, press toward the mark for the prize of our high calling.” (s)

XIV. But how is the pretence of works of supererogation consistent with this injunction — “When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which was our duty to do?” (t) This direction does not inculcate an act of simulation or falsehood, but a decision in our mind respecting that of which we are certain. The Lord, therefore, commands us sincerely to think and consider with ourselves, that our services

(r) Ge i. iii.

(s) Phil. iii. 13, 14.

(t) Luke xvii. 10

to him are none of them gratuitous, but merely the performance of indispensable duties; and that justly; for we are servants under such numerous obligations as we could never discharge; even though all our thoughts and all our members were devoted to the duties of the law. In saying, therefore, "When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded," he supposes a case of one man having attained to a degree of righteousness beyond what is attained by all the men in the world. How, then, while every one of us is at the greatest distance from this point, can we presume to glory that we have completely attained to that perfect standard? Nor can any one reasonably object, that there is nothing to prevent his efforts from going beyond his necessary obligations, who in any respect fails of doing the duty incumbent on him. For we must acknowledge, that we cannot imagine any thing pertaining either to the service of God or to the love of our neighbour, which is not comprehended in the Divine law. But if it is a part of the law, let us not boast of voluntary liberality, where we are bound by necessity.

XV. It is irrelevant to this subject, to allege the boasting of Paul. (u) that among the Corinthians he voluntarily receded from what, if he had chosen, he might have claimed as his right, and not only did what was incumbent on him to do, but afforded them his gratuitous services beyond the requisitions of duty. They ought to attend to the reason there assigned, that he acted thus, "lest he should hinder the gospel of Christ." (v) For wicked and fraudulent teachers recommended themselves by this stratagem of liberality, by which they endeavoured, both to conciliate a favourable reception to their own pernicious dogmas, and to fix an odium on the gospel; so that Paul was necessitated either to endanger the doctrine of Christ, or to oppose these artifices. Now, if it be a matter of indifference to a Christian to incur an offence when he may avoid it, I confess that the apostle performed for the Lord a work of supererogation; but if this was justly required of a prudent minister of the gospel, I maintain that he did what was his duty to do. Even if no such reason appeared, yet the observation of Chrysostom is always true — that all that we have is on the same tenure as the possessions of slaves, which the law pronounces to be the property of their masters. And Christ has clearly delivered the same truth in the parable, where he inquires whether we thank a servant, when he returns home in the evening, after the various labours of the day. (x) But it is possible that he may have laboured with greater diligence than we had ventured to require. This may be granted; yet he has done no more than, by the condition

(u) 1 Cor. ix.

(v) 1 Cor. ix. 12.

(x) Luke xvii. 9.

of servitude, he was under an obligation to do; since he belongs to us, with all the ability he has. I say nothing of the nature of the supererogations which these men wish to boast of before God; for they are contemptible trifles, which he has never commanded, which he does not approve, nor, when they render up their account to him, will he accept them. We cannot admit that there are any works of supererogation, except such as those of which it is said by the prophet, "Who hath required this at your hand?" (*y*) But let them remember the language of another passage respecting these things: "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not?" (*z*) It is easy, indeed, for these idle doctors to dispute concerning these things in easy chairs; but when the Judge of all shall ascend the judgment seat, all such empty notions must vanish away. The object of our inquiries ought to be, what plea we may bring forward with confidence at his tribunal, not what we can invent in schools and cloisters.

XVI. On this subject our minds require to be guarded chiefly against two pernicious principles — That we place no confidence in the righteousness of our works, and that we ascribe no glory to them. The Scriptures every where drive us from all confidence, when they declare that all our righteousnesses are odious in the Divine view, unless they are perfumed with the holiness of Christ; and that they can only excite the vengeance of God, unless they are supported by his merciful pardon. Thus they leave us nothing to do, but to deprecate the wrath of our Judge with the confession of David, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant; for in thy sight shall no man living be justified." (*a*) And where Job says, "If I be wicked, woe unto me; and if I be righteous, yet will I not lift up my head;" (*b*) though he refers to that consummate righteousness of God, compared to which even the angels are deficient, yet he at the same time shows, that when God comes to judgment, all men must be dumb. For he not only means that he would rather freely recede, than incur the danger of contending with the rigour of God, but signifies that he experiences in himself no other righteousness than what would instantaneously vanish before the Divine presence. When confidence is destroyed, all boasting must of necessity be relinquished. For who can give the praise of righteousness to his works, in which he is afraid to confide in the presence of God? We must therefore have recourse to the Lord, in whom we are assured, by Isaiah, that "all the seed of Israel shall be justified, and shall glory;" (*c*) for it is strictly true, as he

(*y*) Isaiah i. 12.(*z*) Isaiah iv. 2.(*a*) Psalm cxliii. 2.(*b*) Job x. 15.(*c*) Isaiah xlv. 23.

says in another place, that we are "the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified." (*d*) Our minds therefore will then be properly purified, when they shall in no degree confide nor glory in our works. But foolish men are led into such a false and delusive confidence, by the error of always considering their works as the cause of their salvation.

XVII. But if we advert to the four kinds of causes, which the philosophers direct us to consider in the production of effects, we shall find none of them consistent with works in the accomplishment of our salvation. For the Scripture every where proclaims, that the efficient cause of eternal life being procured for us, was the mercy of our heavenly Father, and his gratuitous love towards us; that the material cause is Christ and his obedience, by which he obtained a righteousness for us; and what shall we denominate the formal and instrumental cause, unless it be faith? These three John comprehends in one sentence, when he says, that "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (*e*) The final cause the apostle declares to be, both the demonstration of the Divine righteousness and the praise of the Divine goodness, in a passage in which he also expressly mentions the other three causes. For this is his language to the Romans: "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God, being justified freely by his grace:" (*f*) here we have the original source of our salvation, which is the gratuitous mercy of God towards us. It follows, "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:" here we have the matter of our justification. "Through faith in his blood:" here he points out the instrumental cause, by which the righteousness of Christ is revealed to us. Lastly, he subjoins the end of all, when he says, "To declare his righteousness; that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." And to suggest, by the way, that this righteousness consists in reconciliation or propitiation, he expressly asserts that Christ was "set forth to be a propitiation." So also in the first chapter to the Ephesians, he teaches that we are received into the favour of God through his mere mercy; that it is accomplished by the mediation of Christ; that it is apprehended by faith; and that the end of all is, that the glory of the Divine goodness may be fully displayed. (*g*) When we see that every part of our salvation is accomplished without us; what reason have we to confide or to glory in our works? Nor can even the most inveterate enemies of Divine grace raise any controversy with us concerning the efficient or the final

(*d*) Isaiah lxi. 3.(*e*) John iii. 16.(*f*) Rom. iii. 23, &c.(*g*) Ephes. i. 5—7, 13.

cause, unless they mean altogether to renounce the authority of the Scripture. Over the material and formal causes they superinduce a false colouring; as if our own works were to share the honour of them with faith and the righteousness of Christ. But this also is contradicted by the Scripture, which affirms that Christ is the sole author of our righteousness and life, and that this blessing of righteousness is enjoyed by faith alone.

XVIII. The saints often confirm and console themselves with the remembrance of their own innocence and integrity, and sometimes even refrain not from proclaiming it. Now, this is done for two reasons; either that, in comparing their good cause with the bad cause of the impious, they derive from such comparison an assurance of victory, not so much by the commendation of their own righteousness, as by the just and merited condemnation of their adversaries; or that, even without any comparison with others, while they examine themselves before God, the purity of their consciences affords them some consolation and confidence. To the former of these reasons we shall advert hereafter; let us now briefly examine the consistency of the latter with what we have before asserted, that in the sight of God we ought to place no reliance on the merit of works, nor glory on account of them. The consistency appears in this — that for the foundation and accomplishment of their salvation, the saints look to the Divine goodness alone, without any regard to works. And they not only apply themselves to it above all things, as the commencement of their happiness, but likewise depend upon it as the consummation of their felicity. A conscience thus founded, built up, and established, is also confirmed by the consideration of works; that is, as far as they are evidences of God dwelling and reigning in us. Now, this confidence of works being found in none but those who have previously cast all the confidence of their souls on the mercy of God, it ought not to be thought contrary to that upon which it depends. Wherefore, when we exclude the confidence of works, we only mean that the mind of a Christian should not be directed to any merit of works as a mean of salvation; but should altogether rely on the gratuitous promise of righteousness. We do not forbid him to support and confirm this faith by marks of the Divine benevolence to him. For if, when we call to remembrance the various gifts which God has conferred on us, they are all as so many rays from the Divine countenance, by which we are illuminated to contemplate the full blaze of supreme goodness, — much more the grace of good works, which demonstrates that we have received the Spirit of adoption.

XIX. When the saints, therefore, confirm their faith, or

derive matter of rejoicing from the integrity of their consciences, they only conclude, from the fruits of vocation, that they have been adopted by the Lord as his children. The declaration of Solomon, that "In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence;" (*h*) and the protestation sometimes used by the saints to obtain a favourable audience from the Lord, that "they have walked before" him "in truth and with a perfect heart;" (*i*) these things have no concern in laying the foundation for establishing the conscience; nor are they of any value, except as they are consequences of the Divine vocation. For there nowhere exists that fear of God which can establish a full assurance, and the saints are conscious that their integrity is yet accompanied with many relics of corruption. But as the fruits of regeneration evince that the Holy Spirit dwells in them, this affords them ample encouragement to expect the assistance of God in all their necessities, because they experience him to be their Father in an affair of such vast importance. And even this they cannot attain; unless they have first apprehended the Divine goodness, confirmed by no other assurance but that of the promise. For if they begin to estimate it by their good works, nothing will be weaker or more uncertain; for, if their works be estimated in themselves, their imperfection will menace them with the wrath of God, as much as their purity, however incomplete, testifies his benevolence. In a word, they declare the benefits of God, but in such a way as not to turn away from his gratuitous favour, in which Paul assures us there is "length, and breadth, and depth, and height;" as though he had said, Which way soever the pious turn their views, how high soever they ascend, how widely soever they expatiate, yet they ought not to go beyond the love of Christ, but employ themselves wholly in meditating on it, because it comprehends in itself all dimensions. Therefore he says that it "passeth knowledge," and that when we know how much Christ has loved us, we are "filled with all the fulness of God." (*k*) So also in another place, when he glories that believers are victorious in every conflict, he immediately adds, as the reason of it, "through him that loved us." (*l*)

XX. We see now, that the confidence which the saints have in their works is not such as either ascribes any thing to the merit of them, (since they view them only as the gifts of God, in which they acknowledge his goodness, and as marks of their calling, whence they infer their election,) or derogates the least from the gratuitous righteousness which we obtain in Christ; since it depends upon it, and cannot subsist without it

(*h*) Prov. xiv. 26.

(*i*) 2 K. xix. 3

(*k*) Ephes. iii. 18, 19.

(*l*) Rom. viii. 37.

This is concisely and beautifully represented by Augustine, when he says, "I do not say to the Lord, I despise not the works of my hands. I have sought the Lord with my hands, and I have not been deceived. But I commend not the works of my hands; for I fear that when thou hast examined them, thou wilt find more sin than merit. This only I say, this I ask, this I desire; Despise not the works of thy hands. Behold in me thy work, not mine. For if thou beholdest mine, thou condemnest me; if thou beholdest thine own, thou crownest me. Because whatever good works I have, they are from thee." He assigns two reasons why he ventured not to boast of his works to God; first, that if he has any good ones, he sees nothing of his own in them; secondly, that even these are buried under a multitude of sins. Hence the conscience experiences more fear and consternation than security. Therefore he desires God to behold his best performances, only that he may recognize in them the grace of his own calling, and perfect the work which he has begun.

XXI. The remaining objection is, that the Scripture represents the good works of believers as the causes for which the Lord blesses them. But this must be understood so as not to affect what we have before proved, that the efficient cause of our salvation is the love of God the Father; the material cause, the obedience of the Son; the instrumental cause, the illumination of the Spirit, that is, faith; and the final cause, the glory of the infinite goodness of God. No obstacle arises from these things to prevent good works being considered by the Lord as inferior causes. But how does this happen? Because those whom his mercy has destined to the inheritance of eternal life, he, in his ordinary dispensations, introduces to the possession of it by good works. That which, in the order of his dispensations, precedes, he denominates the cause of that which follows. For this reason he sometimes deduces eternal life from works; not that the acceptance of it is to be referred to them; but because he justifies the objects of his election, that he may finally glorify them; he makes the former favour, which is a step to the succeeding one, in some sense the cause of it. But whenever the true cause is to be assigned, he does not direct us to take refuge in works, but confines our thoughts entirely to his mercy. For what does he teach us by the apostle? "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Why does he not oppose righteousness to sin, as well as life to death? Why does he not make righteousness the cause of life, as well as sin the cause of death? For then the antithesis would have been complete, whereas by this variation it is partly destroyed. But the apostle intended by this comparison to express a certain

truth — that death is due to the demerits of men, and that life proceeds solely from the mercy of God. Lastly, these phrases denote rather the order of the Divine gifts, than the cause of them. In the accumulation of graces upon graces, God derives from the former a reason for adding the next, that he may not omit any thing necessary to the enrichment of his servants. And while he thus pursues his liberality, he would have us always to remember his gratuitous election, which is the source and original of all. For although he loves the gifts which he daily confers, as emanations from that fountain, yet it is our duty to adhere to that gratuitous acceptance, which alone can support our souls, and to connect the gifts of his Spirit, which he afterwards bestows on us, with the first cause, in such a manner as will not be derogatory to it.

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## CHAPTER XV.

### BOASTING OF THE MERIT OF WORKS, EQUALLY SUBVERSIVE OF GOD'S GLORY IN THE GIFT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND OF THE CERTAINTY OF SALVATION.

WE have now discussed the principal branch of this subject ; that because righteousness, if dependent on works, must inevitably be confounded in the sight of God, therefore it is contained exclusively in the mercy of God and the participation of Christ, and consequently in faith alone. Now, it must be carefully remarked that this is the principal hinge on which the argument turns, that we may not be implicated in the common delusion, which equally affects the learned and the vulgar. For as soon as justification by faith or works becomes the subject of inquiry, they have immediate recourse to those passages which seem to attribute to works some degree of merit in the sight of God ; as though justification by works would be fully evinced, if they could be proved to be of any value before God. We have already clearly demonstrated that the righteousness of works consists only in a perfect and complete observance of the law. Whence it follows, that no man is justified by works, but he who, being elevated to the summit of perfection, cannot be convicted even of the least transgression. This, therefore, is a different and separate question, whether, although works be utterly insufficient for the justification of men, they do not, nevertheless, merit the grace of God.

II. In the first place, with respect to the term *merit*, it is necessary for me to premise, that whoever first applied it to human works, as compared with the Divine judgment, showed very little concern for the purity of the faith. I gladly abstain from all controversies about mere words; but I could wish that this sobriety had always been observed by Christian writers, that they had avoided the unnecessary adoption of terms not used in the Scriptures, and calculated to produce great offence, but very little advantage. For what necessity was there for the introduction of the word *merit*, when the value of good works might be significantly expressed without offence by a different term? But the great offence contained in it, appears in the great injury the world has received from it. The consummate haughtiness of its import can only obscure the Divine grace, and taint the minds of men with presumptuous arrogance. I confess, the ancient writers of the Church have generally used it, and I wish that their misuse of one word had not been the occasion of error to posterity. Yet they also declare in some places that they did not intend any thing prejudicial to the truth. For this is the language of Augustine in one passage: "Let human merit, which was lost by Adam, here be silent, and let the grace of God reign through Jesus Christ." Again: "The saints ascribe nothing to their own merits; they will ascribe all, O God, only to thy mercy." In another place: "And when a man sees that whatever good he has, he has it not from himself, but from his God, he sees that all that is commended in him proceeds not from his own merits, but from the Divine mercy." We see how, by divesting man of the power of performing good actions, he likewise destroys the dignity of merit. Chrysostom says, "Our works, if there be any consequent on God's gratuitous vocation, are a retribution and a debt; but the gifts of God are grace, beneficence, and immense liberality." Leaving the name, however, let us rather attend to the thing. I have before cited a passage from Bernard: "As not to presume on our merits is sufficiently meritorious, so to be destitute of merits is sufficient for the judgment." But by the explanation immediately annexed, he properly softens the harshness of these expressions, when he says, "Therefore you should be concerned to have merits; and if you have them, you should know that they are given to you; you should hope for the fruit, the mercy of God; and you have escaped all danger of poverty, ingratitude, and presumption. Happy the Church which is not destitute, either of merits without presumption, or of presumption without merits." And just before he had fully shown how pious his meaning was. "For concerning merits," he says, "why should the Church be solicitous, which has a more firm and secure founda-

tion for glorying in the purpose of God? For God cannot deny himself; he will perform what he has promised. Thus you have no reason for inquiring, on account of what merits we may hope for blessings, especially when you read, 'Not for your sakes, but for my sake;' (*m*) it is sufficiently meritorious to know that merits are insufficient."

III. The Scripture shows what all our works are capable of meriting, when it represents them as unable to bear the Divine scrutiny, because they are full of impurity; and in the next place, what would be merited by the perfect observance of the law, if this could any where be found, when it directs us, "When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants;" (*n*) because we shall not have conferred any favour on God, but only have performed the duties incumbent on us, for which no thanks are due. Nevertheless, the good works which the Lord has conferred on us, he denominates our own, and declares that he will not only accept, but also reward them. It is our duty to be animated by so great a promise, and to stir up our minds that we "be not weary in well doing," (*o*) and to be truly grateful for so great an instance of Divine goodness. It is beyond a doubt, that whatever is laudable in our works proceeds from the grace of God; and that we cannot properly ascribe the least portion of it to ourselves. If we truly and seriously acknowledge this truth, not only all confidence, but likewise all idea of merit, immediately vanishes. We, I say, do not, like the sophists, divide the praise of good works between God and man, but we preserve it to the Lord complete, entire, and uncontaminated. All that we attribute to man, is, that those works which were otherwise good are tainted and polluted by his impurity. For nothing proceeds from the most perfect man, which is wholly immaculate. Therefore let the Lord sit in judgment on the best of human actions, and he will indeed recognize in them his own righteousness, but man's disgrace and shame. Good works, therefore, are pleasing to God, and not unprofitable to the authors of them; and they will moreover receive the most ample blessings from God as their reward; not because they merit them, but because the Divine goodness has freely appointed them this reward. But what wickedness is it, not to be content with that Divine liberality which remunerates works destitute of merit with unmerited rewards, but with sacrilegious ambition still to aim at more, that what entirely originates in the Divine munificence may appear to be a compensation of the merit of works! Here I appeal to the common sense of every man. If he who,

(*m*) Ezek. xxxvi. 32.(*n*) Luke xvii. 10.(*o*) Gal. vi. 9. 2 Thess. iii. 13

by the liberality of another, enjoys the use and profit of an estate, usurp to himself also the title of proprietor, does he not by such ingratitude deserve to lose the possession which he had? So also if a slave, manumitted by his master, conceals his mean condition as a freed-man, and boast that he was free by birth, does he not deserve to be reduced to his former servitude? For this is the legitimate way of enjoying a benefit, if we neither arrogate more than is given us, nor defraud our benefactor of his due praise; but, on the contrary, conduct ourselves in such a manner, that what he has conferred on us may appear, as it were, to continue with himself. If this moderation ought to be observed towards men, let every one examine and consider what is due to God.

IV. I know that the sophists abuse some texts in order to prove that the term *merit* is found in the Scriptures with reference to God. They cite a passage from Ecclesiasticus: "Mercy shall make place for every man according to the merit of his works." (p) And from the Epistle to the Hebrews: "To do good, and to communicate, forget not; for with such sacrifices men merit of God." (q) My right to reject the authority of Ecclesiasticus I at present relinquish; but I deny that they faithfully cite the words of the writer of Ecclesiasticus, whoever he might be; for in the Greek copy it is as follows: Πᾶσιν ἐλεημοσύνη ποιησεί τοπὸν· ἕκαστος γὰρ κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ εὐρήσεται. "He shall make place for every mercy; and every man shall find according to his works." And that this is the genuine reading, which is corrupted in the Latin version, appears both from the complexion of the words themselves and from the preceding context. In the passage quoted from the Epistle to the Hebrews, there is no reason why they should endeavour to insnare us by a single word, when the apostle's words in the Greek imply nothing more than that "with such sacrifices God is well pleased." This alone ought to be abundantly sufficient to repress and subdue the insolence of our pride, that we transgress not the scriptural rule by ascribing any dignity to human works. Moreover, the doctrine of the Scripture is, that our good works are perpetually defiled with many blemishes, which might justly offend God and incense him against us; so far are they from being able to conciliate his favour, or to excite his beneficence towards us; yet that, because in his great mercy he does not examine them according to the rigour of his justice, he accepts them as though they were immaculately pure, and therefore rewards them, though void of all merit, with infinite blessings both in this life and in that which is to come. For I cannot admit the distinction laid down by some, who are other-

(p) Ecclus. xvi. 14.

(q) Heb. xiii. 16.

wise men of learning and piety, that good works merit the graces which are conferred on us in this life, and that eternal salvation is the reward of faith alone; because the Lord almost always places the reward of labours and the crown of victory in heaven. Besides, to ascribe the accumulation of graces upon graces, given us by the Lord, to the merit of works, in such a manner as to detract it from grace, is contrary to the doctrine of the Scripture. For though Christ says, that "to every one that hath shall be given," and that "the good and faithful servant, who hath been faithful over a few things, shall be made ruler over many things," (*r*) yet he likewise shows in another place, that the improvements of believers are the gifts of his gratuitous kindness. "Ho, every one that thirsteth," says he, "come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." (*s*) Whatever, therefore, is now conferred on believers to promote their salvation as well as their future blessedness, flows exclusively from the beneficence of God; nevertheless he declares, that both in the latter and in the former, he has respect to our works, because, to demonstrate the magnitude of his love to us, he dignifies with such honour, not only ourselves, but even the gifts which he has bestowed on us.

V. If these points had been handled and digested in proper order in former ages, there would never have arisen so many debates and dissensions. Paul says, that in erecting the superstructure of Christian doctrine, it is necessary to retain that foundation which he had laid among the Corinthians, other than which no man can lay, which is Jesus Christ. (*t*) What kind of a foundation have we in Christ? Has he begun our salvation, that we may complete it ourselves? and has he merely opened a way for us to proceed in by our own powers? By no means; but, as the apostle before stated, when we acknowledge him, he is "made unto us righteousness." (*u*) No man, therefore, is properly founded on Christ, but he who has complete righteousness in him; since the apostle says, that he was sent, not to assist us in the attainment of righteousness, but to be himself our righteousness; that is to say, that we were chosen in him from eternity, before the formation of the world, not on account of any merit of ours, but according to the purpose of the Divine will; (*v*) that by the death of Christ we are redeemed from the sentence of death, and liberated from perdition; (*x*) that in him we are adopted as sons and heirs by the heavenly Father, (*y*) to whom we have been reconciled by

(*r*) Matt xxv. 21, 29. (*s*) Isaiah lv. 1. (*t*) 1 Cor. iii. 10, 11.  
 (*u*) 1 Cor. i. 30. (*v*) Ephes. i. 3—5. (*x*) Col. i. 14, 20, 21. (*y*) John i. 12

his blood ; that being committed to his protection, we are not in the least danger of perishing ; (*z*) that being thus ingrafted into him, we are already, as it were, partakers of eternal life, and entered by hope into the kingdom of God ; and moreover, that having obtained such a participation of him, however foolish we may be in ourselves, he is our wisdom before God ; that however impure we are, he is our purity ; that though we are weak and exposed to Satan, yet that power is ours which is given to him in heaven and in earth, (*a*) by which he defeats Satan for us, and breaks the gates of hell ; that though we still carry about with us a body of death, yet he is our life ; in short, that all that is his belongs to us, and that we have every thing in him, but nothing in ourselves. On this foundation, I say, it is necessary for us to build, if we wish to “grow unto a holy temple in the Lord.” (*b*)

VI. But the world has long been taught a different lesson ; for I know not what good works of morality have been invented to render men acceptable to God, before they are ingrafted into Christ. As though the Scripture were false in asserting, that “he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life.” (*c*) If they are destitute of life, how could they generate any cause of life ? As though there were no truth in the declaration, that “whatsoever is not of faith, is sin !” (*d*) as though an evil tree could produce good fruits ! But what room have these most pestilent sophists left to Christ for the exertion of his power ? They say that he has merited for us the first grace ; that is, the opportunity of meriting ; and that now it is our part not to miss the offered opportunity. What extreme impudence and impiety ! Who would have expected that any persons professing the name of Christ, would presume thus to rob him of his power, and almost to trample him under their feet ? It is every where testified of him, that all who believe in him are justified : (*e*) these men tell us, that the only benefit received from him is, that a way is opened for all men to justify themselves. But I wish that they had experienced what is contained in these passages : “He that hath the Son, hath life ;” (*f*) “he that believeth is passed from death unto life ;” (*g*) “justified by his grace,” that we might “be made heirs of eternal life ;” (*h*) that believers have Christ abiding in them, by whom they are united to God ; (*i*) that they are partakers of his life, and sit with him “in heavenly places ;” (*k*) that they are translated into the kingdom of God, and have obtained salvation ; (*l*) and innumerable places of similar import. For they

(*z*) John x. 28, 29.

(*a*) Matt. xxviii. 18.

(*b*) Ephes. ii. 21. Titus iii. 7.

(*c*) 1 John v. 12.

(*d*) Rom. xiv. 23.

(*e*) Acts xiii. 39.

(*f*) 1 John v. 12.

(*g*) John v. 24.

(*h*) Rom. iii. 24.

(*i*) 1 John iii. 24

(*k*) Ephes. ii. 6.

(*l*) Col. i. 13.

do not signify that by faith in Christ we merely gain the ability to attain righteousness or effect our salvation, but that both are bestowed on us. Therefore, as soon as we are ingrafted into Christ by faith, we are already become sons of God, heirs of heaven, partakers of righteousness, possessors of life, and (the better to refute their falsehoods) we have attained, not the opportunity of meriting, but all the merits of Christ; for they are all communicated to us.

VII. Thus the Sorbonic schools, those sources of all kinds of errors, have deprived us of justification by faith, which is the substance of all piety. They grant, indeed, in words, that a man is justified by faith formed; but this they afterwards explain to be, because faith renders good works effectual to justification; so that their mention of faith has almost the appearance of mockery, since it could not be passed over in silence, while the Scripture is so full of it, without exposing them to great censure. And not content with this, they rob God of part of the praise of good works, and transfer it to man. Perceiving that good works avail but little to the exaltation of man, and that they cannot properly be denominated merits if they be considered as the effects of Divine grace, they derive them from the power of free-will; which is like extracting oil from a stone. They contend, that though grace be the principal cause of them, yet that this is not to the exclusion of free-will, from which all merit originates. And this is maintained not only by the latter sophists, but likewise by their master, Lombard, whom, when compared with them, we may pronounce to be sound and sober. Truly wonderful was their blindness, with Augustine so frequently in their mouths, not to see how solicitously he endeavoured to prevent men from arrogating the least degree of glory on account of good works. Before, when we discussed the question of free-will, we cited from him some testimonies to this purpose; and similar ones frequently recur in his writings; as when he forbids us ever to boast of our merits, since even they are the gifts of God; and when he says, "that all our merit proceeds from grace alone; that it is not obtained by our sufficiency, but is produced entirely by grace," &c. That Lombard was blind to the light of Scripture, in which he appears not to have been so well versed, need not excite so much surprise. Yet nothing could be wished for more explicit, in opposition to him and his disciples, than this passage of the apostle; who, having interdicted Christians from all boasting, subjoins as a reason why boasting is unlawful, that "we are his (God's) workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." (m) Since

(m) Ephes. ii. 10

nothing good, then, can proceed from us but as we are regenerated, and our regeneration is, without exception, entirely of God. we have no right to arrogate to ourselves the smallest particle of our good works. Lastly, while they assiduously inculcate good works, they at the same time instruct the consciences of men in such a manner, that they can never dare to be confident that God is propitious and favourable to their works. But, on the contrary, our doctrine, without any mention of merit, animates the minds of believers with peculiar consolation, while we teach them that their works are pleasing to God, and that their persons are undoubtedly accepted by him. And we likewise require, that no man attempt or undertake any work without faith; that is, unless he can previously determine, with a certain confidence of mind, that it will be pleasing to God.

VIII. Wherefore let us not suffer ourselves to be seduced even a hair's breadth from the only foundation, on which, when it is laid, wise architects erect a firm and regular superstructure. For if there be a necessity for doctrine and exhortation, they apprize us, that "for this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil; whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin:" (*n*) "the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles;" (*o*) the elect of God are vessels of mercy selected to honour, and therefore ought to be cleansed from all impurity. (*p*) But every thing is said at once, when it is shown that Christ chooses such for his disciples as will deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow him. (*q*) He who has denied himself, has laid the axe to the root of all evils, that he may no longer seek those things which are his own; he who has taken up his cross, has prepared himself for all patience and gentleness. But the example of Christ comprehends not only these, but all other duties of piety and holiness. He was obedient to his Father, even to death; he was entirely occupied in performing the works of God; he aspired with his whole soul to promote the glory of his Father; he laid down his life for his brethren; he both acted and prayed for the benefit of his enemies. But if there be need of consolation, these passages will afford it in a wonderful degree: "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the aying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body." (*r*) "If we be dead with him,

(*n*) 1 John iii. 8, 9.

(*o*) 1 Peter iv. 3.

(*p*) 2 Tim. ii. 20. Rom. ix. 23.

(*q*) Luke ix. 23.

(*r*) 2 Cor. iv. 8-10.

we shall also live with him ; if we suffer, we shall also reign with him." (t) " Being made conformable unto his death ; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead." (u) The Father has predestinated all whom he has chosen in his Son "to be conformed to his image, that he might be the first-born among many brethren ;" and therefore "neither death, nor life, nor things present, nor things to come, shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus ;" (w) but "all things shall work together for good" (x) to us, and conduce to our salvation. We do not justify men by works before God ; but we say, that all who are of God are regenerated and made new creatures, that they may depart from the kingdom of sin into the kingdom of righteousness ; and that by this testimony they ascertain their vocation, (y) and, like trees, are judged by their fruits.

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## CHAPTER XVI.

### A REFUTATION OF THE INJURIOUS CALUMNIES OF THE PAPISTS AGAINST THIS DOCTRINE.

THE observation with which we closed the preceding chapter is, of itself, sufficient to refute the impudence of some impious persons, who accuse us, in the first place, of destroying good works, and seducing men from the pursuit of them, when we say that they are not justified by works, nor saved through their own merit ; and secondly, of making too easy a road to righteousness, when we teach that it consists in the gratuitous remission of sins ; and of enticing men, by this allurements, to the practice of sin, to which they have naturally too strong a propensity. These calumnies, I say, are sufficiently refuted by that one observation ; yet I will briefly reply to them both. They allege that justification by faith destroys good works. I forbear any remarks on the characters of these zealots for good works, who thus calumniate us. Let them rail with impunity as licentiously as they infest the whole world with the impurity of their lives. They affect to lament that while faith is so magnificently extolled, works are degraded from their proper rank. What if they be more encouraged and established ? For we never dream either of a faith destitute of good works.

(t) 2 Tim ii. 11, 12.

(u) Phil. iii. 10, 11.

(x) Rom. viii. 28.

(w) Rom. viii. 29, 30, 39

(y) 2 Peter i. 10.

or of a justification unattended by them : this is the sole difference, that while we acknowledge a necessary connection between faith and good works, we attribute justification, not to works, but to faith. Our reason for this we can readily explain, if we only turn to Christ, towards whom faith is directed, and from whom it receives all its virtue. Why, then, are we justified by faith? Because by faith we apprehend the righteousness of Christ, which is the only medium of our reconciliation to God. But this you cannot attain, without at the same time attaining to sanctification ; for he "is made unto us wisdom and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption." (z) Christ therefore justifies no one whom he does not also sanctify. For these benefits are perpetually and indissolubly connected, so that whom he illuminates with his wisdom, them he redeems ; whom he redeems, he justifies ; whom he justifies, he sanctifies. But as the present question relates only to righteousness and sanctification, let us insist upon them. We may distinguish between them, but Christ contains both inseparably in himself. Do you wish, then, to obtain righteousness in Christ? You must first possess Christ ; but you cannot possess him without becoming a partaker of his sanctification ; for he cannot be divided. Since, then, the Lord affords us the enjoyment of these blessings only in the bestowment of himself, he gives them both together, and never one without the other. Thus we see how true it is that we are justified, not without works, yet not by works ; since union with Christ, by which we are justified, contains sanctification as well as righteousness.

II. It is also exceedingly false, that the minds of men are seduced from an inclination to virtue, by our divesting them of all ideas of merit. Here the reader must just be informed, that they impertinently argue from reward to merit, as I shall afterwards more fully explain ; because, in fact, they are ignorant of this principle, that God is equally liberal in assigning a reward to good works, as in imparting an ability to perform them. But this I would rather defer to its proper place. It will suffice, at present, to show the weakness of their objection, which shall be done two ways. For, first, when they say that there will be no concern about the proper regulation of our life without a hope of reward being proposed, they altogether deceive themselves. If they only mean that men serve God in expectation of a reward, and hire or sell their services to him, they gain but little ; for he will be freely worshipped and freely loved, and he approves of that worshipper who, after being deprived of all hope of receiving any reward, still ceases

(z) 1 Cor. i. 30.

not to worship him. Besides, if men require to be stimulated, it is impossible to urge more forcible arguments than those which arise from the end of our redemption and calling; such as the word of God adduces, when it inculcates, that it is the greatest and most impious ingratitude not reciprocally to "love him who first loved us;" (a) that "by the blood of Christ our consciences are purged from dead works, to serve the living God;" (b) that it is a horrible sacrilege, after having been once purged, to defile ourselves with new pollutions; and to profane that sacred blood; (c) that we have been "delivered out of the hand of our enemies," that we "might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life;" (d) that we are made "free from sin," that with a free spirit we might "become the servants of righteousness;" (e) "that our old man is crucified," that "we should walk in newness of life." (f) Again: "If ye be risen with Christ," as his members indeed are, "seek those things which are above," and conduct yourselves as "pilgrims on the earth;" that you may aspire towards heaven, where your treasure is. (g) That "the grace of God hath appeared, teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour." (h) Wherefore "God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by Christ." (i) That we are the "temples of the Holy Ghost," which it is unlawful to profane; (k) that we are not *darkness*, 'but light in the Lord,' whom it becomes to "walk as children of the light;" (l) that "God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness; for this is the will of God, even our sanctification, that we should abstain from fornication;" (m) that our calling is a holy one, which should be followed by a correspondent purity of life; (n) that we are "made free from sin," that we might "become servants of righteousness." (o) Can we be incited to charity by any stronger argument than that of John, "If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another?" "in this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil;" (p) hereby the children of light, by their abiding in love, are distinguished from the children of darkness; or that of Paul, That if we be united to Christ, we are members of one body, and ought to afford each other mutual assistance? (q) Or can we be more power-

(a) 1 John iv. 10, 19.

(g) Col. iii. 1. Heb. xi. 13.

(l) Ephes. v. 8.

(b) Heb. ix. 14.

1 Peter ii. 11.

(m) 1 Thess. iv. 3, 7.

(c) Heb. x. 29.

(h) Titus ii. 11—13.

(n) 2 Tim. i. 9. 1 Peter i. 15

(d) Luke i. 74, 75.

(i) 1 Thess. v. 9.

(o) Rom. vi. 18.

(e) Rom. vi. 18.

(k) 1 Cor. iii. 16, 17; vi. 19.

(p) 1 John iv. 11; iii. 10.

(f) Rom. vi. 4, 6.

Ephes. ii. 21.

(q) 1 Cor. xii. 12, &amp;c.

fully excited to holiness, than when we are informed by John, that "every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as God is pure?" (*r*) Or when Paul says, "Having therefore these promises, (relative to our adoption,) let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit?" (*s*) or than when we hear Christ proposing himself as our example, that we should follow his steps? (*t*)

III. These few instances, indeed, I have given as a specimen; for if I were disposed to quote every particular passage, I should produce a large volume. The apostles are quite full of admonitions, exhortations, and reproofs, to "furnish the man of God unto all good works," (*u*) and that without any mention of merit. But they rather deduce their principal exhortations from this consideration, That our salvation depends not on any merit of ours, but merely on the mercy of God. As Paul, after having very largely shown that we can have no hope of life, but from the righteousness of Christ, when he proceeds to exhortations, beseeches us "by the mercies of God" with which we have been favoured. (*v*) And indeed this one reason ought to be enough; that God may be glorified in us. (*w*) But if any persons be not so powerfully affected by the glory of God, yet the remembrance of his benefits should be amply sufficient to incite them to rectitude of conduct. But these men, who by the obtrusion of merit extort some servile and constrained acts of obedience to the law, are guilty of falsehood when they affirm that we have no arguments to enforce the practice of good works, because we do not proceed in the same way; as though, truly, such obedience were very pleasing to God, who declares that he "loveth a cheerful giver;" and forbids any thing to be given "grudgingly, or of necessity." (*x*) Nor do I say this, because I either reject or neglect that kind of exhortation, which the Scripture frequently uses, that no method of animating us to our duty may be omitted. It mentions the reward which "God will render to every man according to his works;" (*y*) but that this is the only argument, or the principal one, I deny. In the next place, I assert that we ought not to begin with it. Moreover, I contend that it has no tendency to establish the merit preached by these men, as we shall afterwards see; and, lastly, that it is entirely useless, unless preceded by this doctrine, That we are justified solely on account of the merit of Christ, apprehended by faith, and not on account of any merit in our own works; because none can be capable of the pursuit of holiness, but such as have previously imbibed this doctrine.

(*r*) 1 John iii. 3.

(*s*) 2 Cor. vii. 1.

(*t*) Matt. xi. 29. John xiii. 15.

(*u*) 2 Tim. iii. 17

(*v*) Rom. xii. 1.

(*w*) Matt. v. 16.

(*x*) 2 Cor. ix. 7.

(*y*) Matt. xvi. 27.

Rom. ii. 6.

This sentiment is beautifully suggested by the Psalmist when he thus addresses the Lord: "There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared;" (z) for he shows that there is no worship of God without an acknowledgment of his mercy, on which alone it is both founded and established. And this well deserves to be remarked, in order that we may know, not only that the true worship of God arises from a reliance on his mercy, but that the fear of God (which the Papists hold to be meritorious) cannot be dignified with the title of *merit*, because it is founded in the pardon and remission of sins.

IV. But the most futile of all their calumnies is, that men are encouraged to the practice of sin by our maintaining the gratuitous remission of sins, in which we make righteousness to consist. For we say, that so great a blessing could never be compensated by any virtue of ours, and that therefore it could never be obtained, unless it were gratuitously bestowed; moreover, that it is gratuitous to us indeed, but not so to Christ, whom it cost so much, even his own most sacred blood, beside which no price sufficiently valuable could be paid to Divine justice. When men are taught in this manner, they are apprized that it is not owing to them that this most sacred blood is not shed as often as they sin. Besides, we learn that such is our pollution, that it can never be washed away, except in the fountain of this immaculate blood. Must not persons who hear these things conceive a greater horror of sin, than if it were said to be cleansed by a sprinkling of good works? And if they have any fear of God, will they not dread, after being once purified, to plunge themselves again into the mire, and thereby to disturb and infect, as far as they can, the purity of this fountain? "I have washed my feet," (says the believing soul in Solomon,) "how shall I defile them?" (a) Now, it is plain which party better deserves the charge of degrading the value of remission of sins, and prostituting the dignity of righteousness. They pretend that God is appeased by their frivolous *satisfactions*, which are no better than dung; we assert, that the guilt of sin is too atrocious to be expiated by such insignificant trifles; that the displeasure of God is too great to be appeased by these worthless satisfactions; and therefore that this is the exclusive prerogative of the blood of Christ. They say, that righteousness, if it ever be defective, is restored and repaired by works of satisfaction. We think it so valuable that no compensation of works can be adequate to it; and therefore that for its restitution we must have recourse to the mercy of God alone. The remaining particulars that pertain to the remission of sins may be found in the next chapter.

(z) Psalm cxxx. 4.

(a) Cant. v. 3.

## CHAPTER XVII.

THE HARMONY BETWEEN THE PROMISES OF THE LAW AND  
THOSE OF THE GOSPEL.

LET us now pursue the other arguments with which Satan by his satellites attempts to destroy or to weaken justification by faith. I think we have already gained this point with these calumniators — that they can no longer accuse us of being enemies to good works. For we reject the notion of justification by works, not that no good works may be done, or that those which are performed may be denied to be good, but that we may neither confide in them, nor glory in them, nor ascribe salvation to them. For this is our trust, this is our glory, and the only anchor of our salvation, That Christ the Son of God is ours, and that we are likewise, in him, sons of God and heirs of the celestial kingdom : being called, not for our worthiness, but by the Divine goodness, to the hope of eternal felicity. But since they assail us besides, as we have observed, with other weapons, let us also proceed to the repulsion of them. In the first place, they return to the legal promises which the Lord gave to the observers of his law, and inquire whether we suppose them to be entirely vain, or of any validity. As it would be harsh and ridiculous to say they are vain, they take it for granted that they have some efficacy. Hence they argue, that we are not justified by faith alone. For thus saith the Lord, “Wherefore it shall come to pass, if ye hearken to these judgments, and keep and do them, that the Lord thy God shall keep unto thee the covenant and the mercy which he sware unto thy fathers ; and he will love thee, and bless thee, and multiply thee.” (b) Again : “If ye thoroughly amend your ways and your doings ; if ye thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbour ; if ye oppress not, neither walk after other gods ; then will I cause you to dwell in this place,” &c. (c) I am not willing to recite a thousand passages of the same kind, which, not being different in sense, will be elucidated by an explanation of these. The sum of all is declared by Moses, who says that in the law are proposed “a blessing and a curse, life and death.” (d) Now, they argue, either that this blessing becomes inefficacious and nugatory, or that justification is not by faith alone. We have already shown how, if we adhere to the law, being destitute of every

(b) Deut. vii. 12, 13.

(c) Jer. vii. 5—7.

(d) Deut. xi. 26 ; xxx. 15.

blessing, we are obnoxious to the curse which is denounced on all transgressors. For the Lord promises nothing, except to the perfect observers of his law, of which description not one can be found. The consequence then is, that all mankind are proved by the law to be obnoxious to the curse and wrath of God; in order to be saved from which, they need deliverance from the power of the law, and emancipation from its servitude; not a carnal liberty, which would seduce us from obedience to the law, invite to all kinds of licentiousness, break down the barriers of inordinate desire, and give the reins to every lawless passion; but a spiritual liberty, which will console and elevate a distressed and dejected conscience, showing it to be delivered from the curse and condemnation under which it was held by the law. This liberation from subjection to the law, and manumission, (if I may use the term,) we attain, when we apprehend by faith the mercy of God in Christ, by which we are assured of the remission of sins, by the sense of which the law penetrated us with compunction and remorse.

II. For this reason all the promises of the law would be ineffectual and vain, unless we were assisted by the goodness of God in the gospel. For the condition of a perfect obedience to the law, on which they depend, and in consequence of which alone they are to be fulfilled, will never be performed. Now, the Lord affords this assistance, not by leaving a part of righteousness in our works, and supplying part from his mercy, but by appointing Christ alone for the completion of righteousness. For the apostle, having said that he and other Jews, "knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, believed in Christ," adds as a reason, not that they might be assisted to obtain a complete righteousness by faith in Christ, but "that they might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law." (e) If the faithful pass from the law to faith, to find righteousness in the latter, which they perceive to be wanting in the former, they certainly renounce the righteousness of the law. Therefore let whosoever will now amplify the rewards which are said to await the observer of the law; only let him remark, that our depravity prevents us from receiving any benefit from them, till we have obtained by faith another righteousness. Thus David, after having mentioned the reward which the Lord has prepared for his servants, immediately proceeds to the acknowledgment of sins, by which it is annulled. In the nineteenth psalm, likewise, he magnificently celebrates the benefits of the law; but immediately exclaims "Who can understand his errors? cleanse

(e) Gal. ii. 16

thou me from secret faults.”(f) This passage perfectly accords with that before referred to, where, after having said, “All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies,” he adds, “For thy name’s sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great.”(g) So we ought also to acknowledge, that the Divine favour is offered to us in the law, if we could purchase it by our works; but that no merit of ours can ever obtain it.

III. What, then, it will be said, were those promises given, to vanish away without producing any effect? I have already declared that this is not my opinion. I assert, indeed, that they have no efficacy with respect to us as long as they are referred to the merit of works; wherefore, considered in themselves, they are in some sense abolished. Thus that grand promise, “Keep my statutes and judgments; which if a man do, he shall live in them;”(h) the apostle maintains to be of no value to us, if we rest upon it, and that it will be no more beneficial to us than if it had never been given; because it is inapplicable to the holiest of God’s servants, who are all far from fulfilling the law, and are encompassed with a multitude of transgressions.(i) But when these are superseded by the evangelical promises, which proclaim the gratuitous remission of sins, the consequence is, that not only our persons, but also our works, are accepted by God; and not accepted only, but followed by those blessings, which were due by the covenant to the observance of the law. I grant, therefore, that the works of believers are rewarded by those things which the Lord has promised in his law to the followers of righteousness and holiness; but in this retribution it is always necessary to consider the cause, which conciliates such favour to those works. Now, this we perceive to be threefold: The first is, That God, averting his eyes from the actions of his servants, which are invariably more deserving of censure than of praise, receives and embraces them in Christ, and by the intervention of faith alone reconciles them to himself without the assistance of works. The second is, That in his paternal benignity and indulgence, he overlooks the intrinsic worth of these works, and exalts them to such honour, that he esteems them of some degree of value. The third cause is, That he pardons these works as he receives them, not imputing the imperfection with which they are all so defiled, that they might otherwise be accounted rather sins than virtues. Hence it appears how great has been the delusion of the sophists, who thought that they had dexterously avoided all absurdities by saying that works are sufficient to merit salvation, not on account of their

(f) Psalm xix. 12.

(g) Psalm xxv. 10, 11.

(h) Lev. xviii. 5.

(i) Rou. x. 5, &c.

own intrinsic goodness, but by reason of the covenant, because the Lord in his mercy has estimated them so highly. But at the same time, they had not observed how far the works, which they styled *meritorious*, fell short of the condition of the promise; unless they were preceded by justification founded on faith alone, and by remission of sins, by which even good works require to be purified from blemishes. Therefore, of the three causes of the Divine goodness, in consequence of which the works of believers are accepted, they only noticed one, and suppressed two others, and those the principal.

IV. They allege the declaration of Peter, which Luke recites in the Acts: "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that worketh righteousness is accepted with him." (*k*) And hence they conclude, what they think admits of no doubt, that if a man by rectitude of conduct conciliate to himself the favour of God, the grace of God is not the sole cause of his salvation; moreover, that God of his own mercy assists a sinner in such a manner, as to be influenced to the exercise of mercy by his works. But we cannot by any means reconcile the Scriptures with themselves, unless we observe a twofold acceptance of man with God. For God finds nothing in man, in his native condition, to incline him to mercy, but mere misery. If, then, it is evident that man is entirely destitute of all good, and full of every kind of evil, when he is first received by God, by what good qualities shall we pronounce him entitled to the heavenly calling? Let us reject, therefore, all vain imagination of merits, where God so evidently displays his unmerited clemency. The declaration of the angel to Cornelius in the same passage, "Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God," they most wickedly pervert to prove that the practice of good works prepares a man to receive the grace of God. For Cornelius must have been already illuminated with the Spirit of wisdom, since he was endued with the fear of God, which is true wisdom; and he must have been sanctified by the same Spirit, since he was a follower of righteousness, which the apostle represents as one of the Spirit's most certain fruits. (*l*) It was from the grace of God, then, that he derived all these things in which he is said to have pleased him; so far was he from preparing himself to receive it by the exercise of his own powers. There cannot indeed be adduced a single syllable of the Scripture, which is not in harmony with this doctrine; That there is no other cause for God's reception of man into his love, than his knowledge that man, if abandoned by him, would be utterly lost; and because it is not his will to abandon him to perdition,

(*k*) Acts x. 34, 35.(*l*) Ga v. 5

he displays his mercy in his deliverance. Now, we see that this acceptance is irrespective of the righteousness of man, but is an unequivocal proof of the Divine goodness towards miserable sinners, who are infinitely unworthy of so great a favour.

V. After the Lord has recovered a man from the abyss of perdition, and separated him to himself by the grace of adoption, — because he has regenerated him, and raised him to a new life, he now receives and embraces him, as a new creature, with the gifts of his Spirit. This is the acceptance mentioned by Peter, in which even the works of believers after their vocation are approved by God; for the Lord cannot but love and accept those good effects which are produced in them by his Spirit. But it must always be remembered, that they are accepted by God in consequence of their works, only because, for their sakes and the favour which he bears to them, he deigns to accept whatever goodness he has liberally communicated to their works. For whence proceeds the goodness of their works, but from the Lord's determination to adorn with true purity those whom he has chosen as vessels of honour? And how is it that they are accounted good, as though they were free from all imperfection, except from the mercy of their Father, who pardons the blemishes which adhere to them? In a word, Peter intends nothing else in this passage, but that God accepts and loves his children, in whom he beholds the marks and lineaments of his own countenance; for we have elsewhere shown that regeneration is a reparation of the Divine image in us. Wherever the Lord contemplates his own likeness, he justly both loves and honours it. The life of his children, therefore, being devoted to holiness and righteousness, is truly represented as pleasing to him. But as the faithful, while they are surrounded with mortal flesh, are still sinners, and all their works are imperfect, and tainted with the vices of the flesh, he cannot be propitious either to their persons or to their works, without regarding them in Christ rather than in themselves. It is in this sense that those passages must be understood, which declare God to be merciful and compassionate to the followers of righteousness. Moses said to the Israelites, "The Lord thy God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations" (*m*) — a sentence which was afterwards in frequent use among that people. Thus Solomon, in his solemn prayer: "Lord God of Israel, who keepest covenant and mercy with thy servants that walk before thee with all their heart." (*n*) The same language is also repeated by Nehemiah. (*o*) For as, in all the covenants of his mercy, the Lord stipulates with his

(*m*) Deut. vii. 9.

(*n*) 1 Kings viii. 23.

(*o*) Neh. i. 5.

servants for integrity and sanctity in their lives, that his goodness may not become an object of contempt, and that no man infected with a vain confidence in his mercy, (*p*) may bless himself in his mind while walking in the depravity of his heart, so he designs by these means to confine to their duty all that are admitted to the participation of his covenant; yet, nevertheless, the covenant is originally constituted and perpetually remains altogether gratuitous. For this reason, David, though he declares that he had been rewarded for the purity of his hands, does not overlook that original source which I have mentioned: "He delivered me, because he delighted in me;" (*q*) where he commends the goodness of his cause, so as not to derogate from the gratuitous mercy which precedes all the gifts that originate from it.

VI. And here it will be useful to remark, by the way, what difference there is between such forms of expression and the legal promises. By legal promises I intend, not all those which are contained in the books of Moses, — since in those books there likewise occur many evangelical ones, — but such as properly pertain to the ministry of the law. Such promises, by whatever appellation they may be distinguished, proclaim that a reward is ready to be bestowed, on condition that we perform what is commanded. But when it is said that "the Lord keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him," this rather designates the characters of his servants, who have faithfully received his covenant, than expresses the causes of his beneficence to them. Now, this is the way to prove it: As the Lord favours us with the hope of eternal life, in order that he may be loved, revered, and worshipped by us, therefore all the promises of mercy contained in the Scriptures are justly directed to this end, that we may revere and worship the Author of our blessings. Whenever, therefore, we hear of his beneficence to them who observe his laws, let us remember that the children of God are designated by the duty in which they ought always to be found; and that we are adopted as his children, in order that we may venerate him as our Father. Therefore, that we may not renounce the privilege of our adoption, we ought to aim at that which is the design of our vocation. On the other hand, however, we may be assured, that the accomplishment of God's mercy is independent of the works of believers; but that he fulfils the promise of salvation to them whose vocation is followed by a correspondent rectitude of life, because in them who are directed by his Spirit to good works, he recognizes the genuine characters of his children. To this must be referred what is said of the citizens of the

(*p*) Deut. xxix. 19, 20.(*q*) 2 Sam. xxii. 20, 21.

Church: "Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness," &c. (r) And in Isaiah: "Who shall dwell with the devouring fire? He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly," &c. (s) For these passages describe, not the foundation which supports the faithful before God, but the manner in which their most merciful Father introduces them into communion with him, and preserves and confirms them in it. For as he detests sin, and loves righteousness, those whom he unites to him he purifies by his Spirit, in order to conform them to himself and his kingdom. Therefore, if it be inquired what is the first cause which gives the saints an entrance into the kingdom of God, and which makes their continuance in it permanent, the answer is ready; Because the Lord in his mercy has once adopted and perpetually defends them. But if the question relate to the manner in which he does this, it will then be necessary to advert to regeneration and its fruits, which are enumerated in the psalm that we have just quoted.

VII. But there appears to be much greater difficulty in those places which dignify good works with the title of *righteousness*, and assert that a man is justified by them. Of the former kind there are many, where the observance of the commands is denominated *justification* or *righteousness*. An example of the other kind we find in Moses: "And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments." (t) If it be objected that this is a legal promise, which, having an impossible condition annexed to it, proves nothing, — there are other passages which will not admit of a similar reply; such as, "In case thou shalt deliver him the pledge, &c., it shall be righteousness unto thee before the Lord." (u) Similar to this is what the Psalmist says, that the zeal of Phinehas in avenging the disgrace of Israel, "was counted unto him for righteousness." (w) Therefore the Pharisees of our day suppose that these passages afford ample ground for their clamour against us. For when we say, that if the righteousness of faith be established, there is an end of justification by works, — they argue, in the same manner, that if righteousness be by works, then it is not true that we are justified by faith alone. Though I grant that the precepts of the law are termed *righteousness*, there is nothing surprising in this; for they are so in reality. The reader, however, ought to be apprized that the Hebrew word צִדִּיק (*commandments*) is not well translated by the Greek word δικαιοσύνη, (*righteousness*.) But I readily relin-

(r) Psalm xv. 1, 2.

(s) Isaiah xxxiii. 14, 15.

(t) Deut. vi. 25.

(u) Deut. xxiv. 13.

(w) Psalm cvi. 30, 31.

quish all controversy respecting the word. Nor do we deny that the Divine law contains perfect righteousness. For although, being under an obligation to fulfil all its precepts, we should, even after a perfect obedience to it, only be unprofitable servants,—yet, since the Lord has honoured the observance of it with the title of *righteousness*, we would not detract from what he has given. We freely acknowledge, therefore, that the perfect obedience of the law is righteousness; and that the observance of every particular command is a part of righteousness; since complete righteousness consists of all the parts. But we deny that such a kind of righteousness any where exists. And therefore we reject the righteousness of the law; not that it is of itself defective and mutilated, but because, on account of the debility of our flesh, (*x*) it is no where to be found. It may be said, that the Scripture not only calls the Divine precepts *righteousnesses*, but gives this appellation also to the works of the saints. As where it relates of Zacharias and his wife, that “they were both righteous before God, walking in all his commandments:” (*y*) certainly, when it speaks thus, it estimates their works rather according to the nature of the law, than according to the actual condition of the persons. Here it is necessary to repeat the observation which I have just made, that no rule is to be drawn from the incautiousness of the Greek translator. But as Luke has not thought proper to alter the common version, neither will I contend for it. Those things which are commanded in the law, God has enjoined upon man as necessary to righteousness; but that righteousness we do not fulfil without observing the whole law, which is broken by every act of transgression. Since the law, therefore, only prescribes a righteousness, if we contemplate the law itself, all its distinct commands are parts of righteousness: if we consider men, by whom they are performed, they cannot obtain the praise of righteousness from one act, while they are transgressors in many, and while that same act is partly vicious by reason of its imperfection.

VIII. But I proceed to the second class of texts, in which the principal difficulty lies. Paul urges nothing more forcible in proof of justification by faith, than what is stated respecting Abraham—that he “believed God; and it was counted unto him for righteousness.” (*z*) Since the action of Phinehas, therefore, is said to have been “counted unto him for righteousness,” (*a*) we may also use the same argument concerning works, which Paul insists on respecting faith. Therefore our adversaries, as though they had established the point, determine

(*z*) Rom. viii. 3.(*y*) Luke i. 6.(*z*) Rom. iv. 3. Gal. iii. 6.(*a*) Psalm cvi. 31.

that we are justified neither without faith, nor by faith alone ; and that our righteousness is completed by works. Therefore I conjure believers, if they know that the true rule of righteousness is to be sought in the Scripture alone, to accompany me in a serious and solemn examination how the Scripture may be properly reconciled with itself without any sophistry. Paul, knowing the righteousness of faith to be the refuge of those who are destitute of any righteousness of their own, boldly infers that all who are justified by faith, are excluded from the righteousness of works. It being likewise evident, on the other hand, that this is common to all believers, he with equal confidence concludes that no man is justified by works, but rather, on the contrary, that we are justified independently of all works. But it is one thing to dispute concerning the intrinsic value of works, and another, to argue respecting the place they ought to hold after the establishment of the righteousness of faith. If we are to determine the value of works by their own worthiness, we say that they are unworthy to appear in the sight of God ; that there is nothing in our works of which we can glory before God ; and consequently, that being divested of all assistance from works, we are justified by faith alone. Now, we describe this righteousness in the following manner : That a sinner, being admitted to communion with Christ, is by his grace reconciled to God ; while, being purified by his blood, he obtains remission of sins, and being clothed with his righteousness, as if it were his own, he stands secure before the heavenly tribunal. Where remission of sins has been previously received, the good works which succeed are estimated far beyond their intrinsic merit ; for all their imperfections are covered by the perfection of Christ, and all their blemishes are removed by his purity, that they may not be scrutinized by the Divine judgment. The guilt, therefore, of all transgressions, by which men are prevented from offering any thing acceptable to God being obliterated, and the imperfection, which universally deforms even the good works of believers, being buried in oblivion, their works are accounted righteous, or, which is the same thing, are imputed for righteousness.

IX. Now, if any one urge this to me as an objection, to oppose the righteousness of faith, I will first ask him, Whether a man is reputed righteous on account of one or two holy works, who is in the other actions of his life a transgressor of the law. This would be too absurd to be pretended. I shall next inquire, If he is reputed righteous on account of many good works, while he is found guilty of any instance of transgression. This, likewise, my adversary will not presume to maintain, in opposition to the sanction of the law, which denounces a curse on all those who do not fulfil every one of its

precepts. (b) I will further inquire, If there is any work which does not deserve the charge of impurity or imperfection. (c) But how could this be possible before those eyes, in which the stars are not sufficiently pure, nor the angels sufficiently righteous? Thus he will be compelled to concede, that there is not a good work to be found, which is not too much polluted, both by its own imperfection and by the transgressions with which it is attended, to have any claim to the honourable appellation of *righteousness*. Now, if it be evidently in consequence of justification by faith, that works, otherwise impure and imperfect, unworthy of the sight of God, and much more of his approbation, are imputed for righteousness, — why do they attempt, by boasting of the righteousness of works, to destroy the righteousness of faith, from which all righteousness of works proceeds? But do they wish to produce a viperous offspring to destroy the parent? For such is the true tendency of this impious doctrine. They cannot deny that justification by faith is the beginning, foundation, cause, motive, and substance of the righteousness of works; yet they conclude, that a man is not justified by faith because good works also are imputed for righteousness. Let us therefore leave these impertinences, and acknowledge the real state of the case; if all the righteousness which can be attributed to works depends on justification by faith, the latter is not only not diminished, but, on the contrary, is confirmed by it; since its influence appears the more extensive. But let us not suppose that works, subsequent to gratuitous justification, are so highly esteemed, that they succeed to the office of justifying men, or divide that office with faith. For unless justification by faith remain always unimpaired, the impurity of their works will be detected. Nor is there any absurdity in saying, that a man is so justified by faith, that he is not only righteous himself, but that even his works are accounted righteous beyond what they deserve.

X. In this way we will admit, not only a partial righteousness of works, which our opponents maintain, but such as is approved by God, as though it were perfect and complete. A remembrance of the foundation on which it stands will solve every difficulty. For no work is ever acceptable, till it be received with pardon. Now, whence proceeds pardon, but from God's beholding us and all our actions in Christ? When we are ingrafted into Christ, therefore, as our persons appear righteous before God, because our iniquities are covered by his righteousness, so our works are accounted righteous, because the sinfulness otherwise belonging to them is not imputed, being all buried in the purity of Christ. So we may justly

(b) Deut. xxvii. 26.

(c) Job iv 18; xv 15; xxv. 5

assert, that not only our persons, but even our works, are justified by faith alone. Now, if this righteousness of works, whatever be its nature, is consequent and dependent on faith and gratuitous justification, it ought to be included under it, and subordinated to it, as an effect to its cause; so far is it from deserving to be exalted, either to destroy or to obscure the righteousness of faith. Thus Paul, to evince that our blessedness depends on the mercy of God, and not on our works, chiefly urges this declaration of David: "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." (*d*) If, in opposition to this, the numerous passages be adduced where blessedness seems to be attributed to works; such as, "Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord;" (*e*) that hath mercy on the poor; (*f*) that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly; (*g*) that endureth temptation;" (*h*) "Blessed are they that keep judgment;" (*i*) the undefiled, (*k*) the poor in spirit, the meek, the merciful," &c.; (*l*) they will not at all weaken the truth of what is advanced by Paul. For since no man ever attains all these characters, so as thereby to gain the Divine approbation, it appears that men are always miserable till they are delivered from misery by the pardon of their sins. Since all the beatitudes celebrated in the Scriptures are of no avail, and no man can derive any benefit from them, till he has obtained blessedness by the remission of his sins, which then makes room for the other beatitudes, it follows that this is not merely the noblest and principal, but the only blessedness; unless, indeed, we suppose it to be diminished by those which are dependent on it. Now, we have much less reason to be disturbed by the appellation of *righteous*, which is generally given to believers. I acknowledge that they are denominated *righteous* from the sanctity of their lives; but as they rather devote themselves to the pursuit of righteousness than actually attain to righteousness itself, it is proper that this righteousness, such as it is, should be subordinate to justification by faith, from which it derives its origin.

XI. But our adversaries say that we have yet more difficulty with James, since he contradicts us in express terms. For he teaches, that "Abraham was justified by works," and that we are all "justified by works, and not by faith only." (*m*) What then? Will they draw Paul into a controversy with James? If they consider James as a minister of Christ, his declarations must be understood in some sense not at variance with Christ

(*d*) Rom. iv. 7, 8. Psalm xxxii. 1, 2.

(*e*) Psalm cxii. 1.

(*f*) Prov. xiv. 21.

(*g*) Psalm i. 1.

(*h*) James i. 12.

(*i*) Psalm cvi. 3.

(*k*) Psalm cxix. 1.

(*l*) Matt. v. 3, 5, 7.

(*m*) James ii. 21, 24

when speaking by the mouth of Paul. The Spirit asserts, by the mouth of Paul, that Abraham obtained righteousness by faith, not by works; we likewise teach, that we are all justified by faith without the works of the law. The same Spirit affirms by James, that both Abraham's righteousness and ours consists in works, and not in faith only. That the Spirit is not inconsistent with himself is a certain truth. But what harmony can there be between these two apparently opposite assertions? Our adversaries would be satisfied, if they could totally subvert the righteousness of faith, which we wish to be firmly established; but to afford tranquillity to the disturbed conscience, they feel very little concern. Hence we perceive, that they oppose the doctrine of justification by faith, but at the same time fix no certain rule of righteousness, by which the conscience may be satisfied. Let them triumph then as they please, if they can boast no other victory but that of having removed all certainty of righteousness. And this miserable victory, indeed, they will obtain, where, after having extinguished the light of truth, they are permitted by the Lord to spread the shades of error. But, wherever the truth of God remains, they will not prevail. I deny, therefore, that the assertion of James, which they hold up against us as an impenetrable shield, affords them the least support. To evince this, we shall first examine the scope of the apostle, and then remark wherein they are deceived. Because there were many persons at that time, and the Church is perpetually infested with similar characters, who, by neglecting and omitting the proper duties of believers, manifestly betrayed their real infidelity, while they continued to glory in the false pretence of faith, James here exposes the foolish confidence of such persons. It is not his design, then, to diminish, in any respect, the virtue of true faith, but to show the folly of these triflers, who were content with arrogating to themselves the vain image of it, and securely abandoned themselves to every vice. This statement being premised, it will be easy to discover where lies the error of our adversaries. For they fall into two fallacies; one respecting the word "faith," the other respecting the word "justification." When the apostle gives the appellation of *faith* to a vain notion, widely different from true faith, it is a concession which derogates nothing from the argument; this he shows from the beginning in these words: "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works?" (n) He does not say, If any one have faith without works; but, If any one boast of having it. He speaks still more plainly just after, where he ridicules it by representing it as worse than the knowledge of devils; and lastly,

(n) James ii. 14.

when he calls it *dead*. But his meaning may be sufficiently understood from the definition he gives: "Thou believest," says he, "that there is one God." Indeed, if nothing be contained in this creed but a belief of the Divine existence, it is not at all surprising that it is inadequate to justification. And we must not suppose this denial to be derogatory to Christian faith, the nature of which is widely different. For how does true faith justify, but by uniting us to Christ, that, being made one with him, we may participate his righteousness? It does not, therefore, justify us, by attaining a knowledge of God's existence, but by a reliance on the certainty of his mercy.

XII. But we shall not have ascertained the whole scope of the apostle, till we have exposed the other fallacy; for he attributes justification partly to works. If we wish to make James consistent with the rest of the Scriptures, and even with himself, we must understand the word "justify" in a different signification from that in which it is used by Paul. For we are said by Paul to be justified, when the memory of our unrighteousness is obliterated, and we are accounted righteous. If James had alluded to this, it would have been preposterous for him to make that quotation from Moses: "Abraham believed God," &c. (o) For he introduces it in the following manner: Abraham obtained righteousness by works, because he hesitated not to sacrifice his son at the command of God. And thus was the Scripture fulfilled, which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness. If an effect antecedent to its cause be an absurdity, either Moses falsely asserts in that place, that Abraham's faith was imputed to him for righteousness, or Abraham did not obtain righteousness by his obedience, displayed in the oblation of his son. Abraham was justified by faith, while Ishmael, who arrived at adolescence before the birth of Isaac, was not yet conceived. How, then, can we ascribe his justification to an act of obedience performed so long after? Wherefore, either James improperly inverted the order of events, (which it is unlawful to imagine,) or, by saying that Abraham was justified, he did not mean that the patriarch deserved to be accounted righteous. What, then, was his meaning? He evidently appears to speak of a declaration of righteousness before men, and not of an imputation of it in the sight of God; as though he had said, They who are justified by true faith, prove their justification, not by a barren and imaginary resemblance of faith, but by obedience and good works. In a word, he is not disputing concerning the method of justification, but requiring of believers a righteousness manifested in good works. And as Paul contends for justi-

(o) James ii. 21—23. Gen. xv. 6.

fication independent of works, so James will not allow those to be accounted righteous, who are destitute of good works. The consideration of this object will extricate us from every difficulty. For the principal mistake of our adversaries consists in supposing, that James describes the method of justification, while he only endeavours to destroy the corrupt security of those who make vain pretences to faith, in order to excuse their contempt of good works. Into whatever forms, therefore, they pervert the words of James, they will extort nothing but these two truths — that a vain notion of faith cannot justify; and that the faithful, not content with such an imagination, manifest their righteousness by their good works.

XIII. Nor can they derive the least support from a similar passage which they cite from Paul, that "Not the hearers of the law, but the doers of the law, shall be justified." (*p*) I have no wish to evade it by the explanation of Ambrose, that this is spoken, because faith in Christ is the fulfilling of the law. For this I conceive to be a mere subterfuge, which is totally unnecessary. The apostle in that place is demolishing the foolish confidence of the Jews, who boasted of possessing the exclusive knowledge of the law, whilst at the same time they were the greatest despisers of it. To prevent such great self-complacence on account of a mere acquaintance with the law, he admonishes them, that if righteousness be sought by the law, it is requisite not only to know but to observe it. We certainly do not question that the righteousness of the law consists in works, nor that this righteousness consists in the worthiness and merit of works. But still it cannot be proved that we are justified by works, unless some person be produced who has fulfilled the law. That Paul had no other meaning, is sufficiently evident from the context. After having condemned the Gentiles and Jews indiscriminately for unrighteousness, he proceeds particularly to inform us, that "as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law;" which refers to the Gentiles; and that "as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law;" which belongs to the Jews. Moreover, because they shut their eyes against their transgressions, and gloried in their mere possession of the law, he adds, what is exceedingly applicable, that the law was not given that men might be justified merely by hearing its voice, but by obeying it; as though he had said, Do you seek righteousness by the law? Plead not your having heard it, which of itself is a very small advantage, but produce works as an evidence that the law has not been given to you in vain. Since in this respect they were all deficient, they were consequently deprived of their glorying in the law. The meaning of Paul.

therefore, rather furnishes an opposite argument : Legal righteousness consists in perfect works ; no man can boast of having satisfied the law by his works ; therefore there is no righteousness by the law.

XIV. Our adversaries proceed to adduce those passages in which the faithful boldly offer their righteousness to the examination of Divine justice, and desire to be judged according to it. Such are the following : " Judge me, O Lord, according to my righteousness, and according to mine integrity that is in me." (q) Again : " Hear the right, O Lord. Thou hast proved mine heart ; thou hast visited me in the night ; thou hast tried me, and shalt find nothing." (r) Again : " I have kept the ways of the Lord, and have not wickedly departed from my God. I was also upright before him, and I kept myself from mine iniquity. Therefore hath the Lord recompensed me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands." (s) Again : " Judge me, O Lord, for I have walked in mine integrity. I have not sat with vain persons ; neither will I go in with dissemblers. Gather not my soul with sinners, nor my life with bloody men ; in whose hands is mischief, and their right hand is full of bribes. But as for me, I will walk in mine integrity." (t) I have already spoken of the confidence which the saints appear to derive from their works. The passages now adduced will form no objection to our doctrine, when they are explained according to the occasion of them. Now, this is twofold. For believers who have expressed themselves in this manner, have no wish to submit to a general examination, to be condemned or absolved according to the whole tenor of their lives, but they bring forward a particular cause to be judged ; and they attribute righteousness to themselves, not with reference to the Divine perfection, but in comparison with men of impious and abandoned characters. In the first place, in order to a man's being justified, it is requisite that he should have, not only a good cause in some particular instance, but a perpetual consistency of righteousness through life. But the saints, when they implore the judgment of God in approbation of their innocence, do not present themselves as free from every charge, and absolutely guiltless ; but having fixed their dependence on his goodness alone, and confiding in his readiness to avenge the poor who are unlawfully and unjustly afflicted, they supplicate his regard to the cause in which the innocent are oppressed. But when they place themselves and their adversaries before the Divine tribunal, they boast not an innocence, which, on a severe examination, would

(q) Psalm vii. 8.

(r) Psalm xvii. 1, 3.

(s) Psalm xviii. 21, 23, 24.

(t) Psalm xxvi. 1, 4, 9—11.

he found correspondent to the purity of God; but knowing that their sincerity, justice, simplicity, and purity, are pleasing and acceptable to God, in comparison with the malice, wickedness, fraud, and iniquity of their enemies, they are not afraid to invoke Him to judge between them. Thus, when David said to Saul, "The Lord render to every man his righteousness and his faithfulness" (*v*) he did not mean that the Lord should examine every individual by himself, and reward him according to his merits; but he called the Lord to witness the greatness of his innocence in comparison with the iniquity of Saul. Nor did Paul, when he gloried in having "the testimony of" his "conscience" that he had conducted himself in the Church "with simplicity and godly sincerity," (*w*) intend to rely on this before God; but the calumnies of the impious constrained him to oppose all their slanderous aspersions by asserting his fidelity and probity, which he knew to be acceptable to the Divine goodness. For we know what he says in another place: "I am conscious to myself of nothing; yet am I not hereby justified." (*x*) Because, indeed, he was certain, that the judgment of God far transcended the narrow comprehension of man. However, therefore, the pious may vindicate their innocence against the hypocrisy of the impious, by invoking God to be their witness and judge, yet in their concerns with God alone, they all with one voice exclaim, "If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" (*y*) Again: "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified." (*z*) And, diffident of their own works, they gladly sing, "Thy loving-kindness is better than life." (*a*)

XV. There are likewise other passages, similar to the preceding, on which some person may yet insist. Solomon says, "The just man walketh in his integrity." (*b*) Again: "In the way of righteousness there is life; and in the pathway thereof there is no death." (*c*) Thus also Ezekiel declares, that he who "doth that which is lawful and right, shall surely live." (*d*) We neither deny nor obscure any of these. But let one of the sons of Adam produce such an integrity. If no one can, they must either perish from the presence of God, or flee to the asylum of mercy. Nor do we deny, that to believers their integrity, however imperfect, is a step toward immortality. But what is the cause of this, unless it be that when the Lord has admitted any persons into the covenant of his grace, he does not scrutinize their works according to their intrinsic merit, but embraces them with paternal benignity? By this

(*v*) 1 Sam. xxvi. 23.(*w*) 2 Cor. i. 12.(*x*) 1 Cor. iv. 4.(*y*) Psalm cxxx. 3.(*z*) Psalm cxliii. 2.(*a*) Psalm lxiii. 3.(*b*) Prov. xx. 7.(*c*) Prov. xii. 28.(*d*) Ez. xxxiii. 14, 15.

we mean, not merely what is taught by the schoolmen, "that works receive their value from the grace which accepts them;" for they suppose, that works, otherwise inadequate to the attainment of salvation by the legal covenant, are rendered sufficient for this by the Divine acceptance of them. But I assert, that they are so defiled, both by other transgressions and by their own blemishes, that they are of no value at all, except as the Lord pardons both; and this is no other than bestowing on a man gratuitous righteousness. It is irrelevant to this subject, to allege those prayers of the apostle, in which he desires such perfection for believers, that they may be unblamable and irreprovable in the day of Christ. (e) These passages, indeed, the Celestines formerly perverted, in order to prove a perfection of righteousness in the present life. We think it sufficient briefly to reply, with Augustine, "that all the pious ought, indeed, to aspire to this object, to appear one day immaculate and guiltless before the presence of God; but since the highest excellency in this life is nothing more than a progress towards perfection, we shall never attain it, till, being divested at once of mortality and sin, we shall fully adhere to the Lord." Nevertheless, I shall not pertinaciously contend with any person who chooses to attribute to the saints the character of perfection, provided he also defines it in the words of Augustine himself; who says, "When we denominate the virtue of the saints perfect, to this perfection itself belongs the acknowledgment of imperfection, both in truth and in humility."

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

### JUSTIFICATION BY WORKS NOT TO BE INFERRED FROM THE PROMISE OF A REWARD.

LET us now proceed to those passages which affirm that "God will render to every man according to his deeds;" (f) that "every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." (g) "Tribulation and anguish upon every soul that doeth evil; but glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good." (h) And, "All shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." (i) "Come, ye

(e) 1 Thess. iii. 13, et alibi.  
(g) 2 Cor. v. 10.

(f) Rom. ii. 6. Matt. xvi. 27.  
(h) Rom. ii. 9, 10.

(i) John v. 29.

blessed of my Father; for I was a hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink," &c. (*k*) And with these let us also connect those which represent eternal life as the reward of works, such as the following: "The recompense of a man's hands shall be rendered unto him." (*l*) "He that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded." (*m*) "Rejoice and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in heaven." (*n*) "Every one shall receive his own reward, according to his own labour." (*o*) The declaration, that God will render to every one according to his works, is easily explained. For that phrase indicates the order of events, rather than the cause of them. But it is beyond all doubt, that the Lord proceeds to the consummation of our salvation by these several gradations of mercy: "Whom he hath predestinated, them he calls; whom he hath called, he justifies; and whom he hath justified, he finally glorifies." (*p*) Though he receives his children into eternal life, therefore, of his mere mercy, yet since he conducts them to the possession of it through a course of good works, that he may fulfil his work in them in the order he has appointed, we need not wonder if they are said to be rewarded according to their works, by which they are undoubtedly prepared to receive the crown of immortality. And for this reason, they are properly said to "work out their own salvation," (*q*) while, devoting themselves to good works, they aspire to eternal life; just as in another place they are commanded to "labor for the meat which perisheth not," when they obtain eternal life by believing in Christ; and yet it is immediately added, "which the Son of man shall give unto you." (*r*) Whence it appears that the word *work* is not opposed to grace, but refers to human endeavours; and therefore it does not follow, either that believers are the authors of their own salvation, or that salvation proceeds from their works. But as soon as they are introduced, by the knowledge of the gospel and the illumination of the Holy Spirit, into communion with Christ, eternal life is begun in them. Now, "the good work which" God "hath begun in" them, "he will perform until the day of Jesus Christ." (*s*) And it is performed, when they prove themselves to be the genuine children of God by their resemblance to their heavenly Father in righteousness and holiness.

II. We have no reason to infer from the term *reward*, that good works are the cause of salvation. First, let this truth be established in our minds, that the kingdom of heaven is not

*k*) Matt. xxv. 34—36.

*l*) Prov. xii. 14.

*m*) Prov. xiii. 13.

*n*) Matt. v. 12. Luke vi. 23

*o*) 1 Cor. iii. 8.

*p*) Rom. viii. 30.

*q*) Phil. ii. 12.

*r*) Joha. vi. 27.

*s*) Phil. i. 6.

the stipend of servants, but the inheritance of children, which will be enjoyed only by those whom the Lord adopts as his children, and for no other cause than on account of this adoption. "For the son of the bond-woman shall not be heir with the son of the free-woman." (*t*) And, therefore, in the same passages in which the Holy Spirit promises eternal life as the reward of works, by expressly denominating it "an inheritance," he proves it to proceed from another cause. Thus Christ enumerates the works which he compensates by the reward of heaven, when he calls the elect to the possession of it; but at the same time adds, that it is to be enjoyed by right of inheritance. (*v*) So Paul encourages servants, who faithfully discharge their duty, to hope for a reward from the Lord; but at the same time calls it "the reward of the inheritance." (*w*) We see how they, almost in express terms, caution us against attributing eternal life to works, instead of ascribing it to Divine adoption. Why, then, it may be asked, do they at the same time make mention of works? This question shall be elucidated by one example from the Scripture. Before the nativity of Isaac, there had been promised to Abraham a seed in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed, a multiplication of his posterity, which would equal the stars of heaven and the sands of the sea, and other similar blessings. (*x*) Many years after, in consequence of a Divine command, Abraham prepares to sacrifice his son. After this act of obedience, he receives this promise: "By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son; that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea-shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice." (*y*) What? did Abraham by his obedience merit that blessing which had been promised him before the command was delivered? Here, then, it appears, beyond all doubt, that the Lord rewards the works of believers with those blessings which he had already given them before their works were thought of, and while he had no reason for his beneficence, but his own mercy.

III. Nor does the Lord deceive or trifle with us, when he says that he will requite works with what he had freely given previously to the performance of them. For since it is his pleasure that we be employed in good works, while aspiring after the manifestation or enjoyment of those things

(*t*) Gal. iv. 30.

(*v*) Matt. xxv. 34.

(*w*) Col. iii. 24.

(*x*) Gen. xii. 2, 3; xiii. 16; xv. 5.

(*y*) Gen. xxii. 16—18.

which he has promised, and that they constitute the road in which we should travel to endeavour to attain the blessed hope proposed to us in heaven, therefore the fruit of the promises, to the perfection of which fruit those works conduct us, is justly assigned to them. The apostle beautifully expressed both those ideas, when he said that the Colossians applied themselves to the duties of charity, "for the hope which was laid up for them in heaven, whereof they heard before in the word, of the truth of the gospel." (z) For his assertion, that they knew from the gospel, that there was hope laid up for them in heaven, is equivalent to a declaration that it depended not on any works, but on Christ alone; which perfectly accords with the observation of Peter, that believers "are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time." (a) When it is said that they must labour for it, it implies, that in order to attain to it, believers have a race to run, which terminates only with their lives. But that we might not suppose the reward promised us by the Lord to be regulated according to the proportion of merit, he proposes a parable, in which he has represented himself under the character of a householder, who employs all the persons he meets in the cultivation of his vineyard; some he hires at the first hour of the day, others at the second, others at the third, and some even at the eleventh hour; in the evening he pays them all the same wages. (b) A brief and just explanation of this parable is given by the ancient writer, whoever he was, of the treatise "On the Calling of the Gentiles," which bears the name of Ambrose. I shall adopt his words in preference to my own. "By the example of this comparison, (says he,) the Lord has shown a variety of manifold vocation pertaining to the same grace. They who, having been admitted into the vineyard at the eleventh hour, are placed on an equality with them who had laboured the whole day, represent the state of those whom, to magnify the excellence of grace, God, in his mercy, has rewarded in the decline of the day, and at the conclusion of life; not paying them the wages due to their labour, but sending down the riches of his goodness, in copious effusions, on them whom he has chosen without works; that even they who have laboured the most, and have received no more than the last, may understand theirs to be a reward of grace, not of works." Lastly, it is also worthy of being observed, that in those places where eternal life is called a reward of works, it is not to be understood simply of that communion which we have with God, as the prelude to a happy immortality, when he embraces us in Christ with paternal benevo-

(z) Col. i. 4, 5.

(a) 1 Peter i. 5.

(b) Matt. xx. 1, &amp;c.

ence, but of the possession or fruition of ultimate blessedness, as the very words of Christ import — “in the world to come, eternal life.” (c) And in another place, “Come, inherit the kingdom,” &c. (d) For the same reason, Paul applies the term *adoption* to the revelation of adoption, which shall be made in the resurrection; and afterwards explains it to be “the redemption of our body.” (e) Otherwise, as alienation from God is eternal death, so when a man is received into the favour of God so as to enjoy communion with him and become united to him, he is translated from death to life; which is solely the fruit of adoption. And if they insist, with their accustomed pertinacity, on the reward of works, we may retort against them that passage of Peter, where eternal life is called “the end (or reward) of faith.” (f)

IV. Let us not, therefore, imagine, that the Holy Spirit by these promises commends the worthiness of our works, as though they merited such a reward. For the Scripture leaves us nothing that can exalt us in the Divine presence. Its whole tendency is rather to repress our arrogance, and to inspire us with humility, dejection, and contrition. But such promises assist our weakness, which otherwise would immediately slide and fall, if it did not sustain itself by this expectation, and alleviate its sorrows by this consolation. First, let every one reflect, how difficult it is for a man to relinquish and renounce, not only all that belongs to him, but even himself. And yet this is the first lesson which Christ teaches his disciples, that is to say, all the pious. Afterwards he gives them such tuition during the remainder of their lives, under the discipline of the cross, that their hearts may not fix either their desires or their dependence on present advantages. In short, he generally manages them in such a manner, that whithersoever they turn, their views throughout the world, nothing but despair presents itself to them on every side; so that Paul says, “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.” (g) To preserve them from sinking under these afflictions, they have the presence of the Lord, who encourages them to raise their heads higher, and to extend their views further, by assurances that they will find in him that blessedness which they cannot see in the world. This blessedness he calls *a reward*, *a recompense*; not attributing any merit to their works, but signifying that it is a compensation for their oppressions, sufferings, and disgrace. Wherefore there is no objection against our following the example of the Scripture in calling eternal life *a reward*; since in that state the

(c) Mark x. 30.

(d) Matt. xxv. 34.

(e) Rom. viii. 23.

(f) 1 Peter i. 9.

(g) 1 Cor. xv. 19.

Lord receives his people from labor into rest ; from affliction into prosperity and happiness ; from sorrow into joy ; from poverty into affluence ; from ignominy into glory ; and commutes all the evils which they have endured for blessings of superior magnitude. So, likewise, it will occasion no inconvenience, if we consider holiness of life as the way, not which procures our admission into the glory of the heavenly kingdom, but through which the elect are conducted by their God to the manifestation of it ; since it is his good pleasure to glorify them whom he has sanctified. Only let us not imagine a reciprocal relation of merit and reward, which is the error into which the sophists fell, for want of considering the end which we have stated. But how preposterous is it, when the Lord calls our attention to one end, for us to direct our views to another ! Nothing is clearer, than that the promise of a reward to good works is designed to afford some consolation to the weakness of our flesh, but not to inflate our minds with vain-glory. Whoever, therefore, infers from this, that there is any merit in works, or balances the work against the reward, errs very widely from the true design of God.

V. Therefore, when the Scripture says, that “ the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give ” to his people “ a crown of righteousness,” (*h*) I not only reply with Augustine — “ To whom could the righteous Judge have given a crown, if the Father of mercies had never given grace ? and how would it have been an act of righteousness, if not preceded by that grace which justifies the ungodly ? how could these due rewards be rendered, unless those unmerited blessings were previously bestowed ? ” but I further inquire — How could he impute righteousness to our works, unless his indulgent mercy had concealed their unrighteousness ? How could he esteem them worthy of a reward, unless his infinite goodness had abolished all their demerit of punishment ? Augustine is in the habit of designating eternal life by the word *grace*, because, when it is given as the reward of works, it is conferred on the gratuitous gifts of God. But the Scripture humbles us more, and at the same time exalts us. For beside prohibiting us to glory in works, because they are the gratuitous gifts of God, it likewise teaches us that they are always defiled by some pollutions ; so that they cannot satisfy God, if examined according to the rule of his judgment ; but it is also added, to prevent our despondency, that they please him merely through his mercy. Now, though Augustine expresses himself somewhat differently from us, yet that there is no real difference of sentiment will appear from his language to Boniface. After a comparison between

(*h*) <sup>a</sup> Tim. iv. 8.

two men, the one of a life holy and perfect even to a miracle, the other a man of probity and integrity, yet not so perfect but that many defects might be discovered, he at length makes this inference: "The latter, whose character appears inferior to the former, on account of the true faith in God by which he lives, and according to which he accuses himself in all his delinquencies, and in all his good works praises God, ascribing the glory to him, the ignominy to himself, and deriving from him both the pardon of his sins and the love of virtue; this man, I say, when delivered from this life, removes into the presence of Christ. Wherefore, but on account of faith? which, though no man be saved by it without works, (for it is not a reprobate faith, but such as works by love,) yet produces remission of sins, for the just lives by faith; (i) but without it, works apparently good are perverted into sins." Here he avows, without any obscurity, that for which we so strenuously contend — that the righteousness of good works depends on their acceptance by the Divine mercy.

VI. Very similar to the foregoing passages is the import of the following: "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations." (k) "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God; that they do good, that they be rich in good works; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life." (l) Here good works are compared to riches, which we may enjoy in the happiness of eternal life. I reply, that we shall never arrive at the true meaning of these passages, unless we advert to the design of the Spirit in such language. If Christ's declaration be true, that "where our treasure is, there will our heart be also," (m) — as the children of this world are generally intent on the acquisition of those things which conduce to the comfort of the present life, so it ought to be the concern of believers, after they have been taught that this life will ere long vanish like a dream, to transmit those things which they really wish to enjoy, to that place where they shall possess a perfect and permanent life. It behoves us, therefore, to imitate the conduct of those who determine to migrate to any new situation, where they have chosen to reside during the remainder of their lives; they send their property before them, without regarding the inconvenience of a temporary absence from it; esteeming their happiness the greater in proportion to the wealth which they possess in the place which they intend for their permanent residence. If

(i) Heb. x. 38

(k) Luke xvi. 9.

(l) 1 Tim. vi. 17-19.

(m) Matt. vi. 21

we believe heaven to be our country, it is better for us to transmit our wealth thither, than to retain it here; where we may lose it by a sudden removal. But how shall we transmit it? Why, if we communicate to the necessities of the poor; whatever is bestowed on them, the Lord considers as given to himself. (n) Whence that celebrated promise, "He that hath pity upon the poor, lendeth unto the Lord." (o) Again: "He which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully." (p) For all things that are bestowed on our brethren in a way of charity, are so many deposits in the hand of the Lord; which he, as a faithful depositary, will one day restore with ample interest. Are our acts of duty, then, it will be asked, so valuable in the sight of God, that they are like riches reserved in his hand for us? And who can be afraid to assert this, when the Scripture so frequently and plainly declares it? But if any one, from the mere goodness of God, would infer the merit of works; these testimonies will afford no countenance to such an error. For we can infer nothing from them except the indulgence which God in his mercy is disposed to show us, since, in order to animate us to rectitude of conduct, though the duties we perform are unworthy of the least notice from him, yet he suffers not one of them to go unrewarded.

VII. But they insist more on the words of the apostle, who, to console the Thessalonians under their tribulations, tells them that the design of their infliction is, "that they may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which they also suffer. Seeing," says he, "it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled, rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven." (q) And the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews says, "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have showed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints." (r) To the first passage I reply, That it indicates no worthiness of merit; but since it is the will of God the Father, that those whom he has chosen as his children be conformed to Christ his first begotten Son; (s) as it was necessary for him first to suffer and then to enter into the glory destined for him; (t) so "we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." (u) The tribulations, therefore, which we suffer for the name of Christ, are, as it were, certain marks impressed on us by which God usually distinguishes the sheep of his flock. For this reason; then, we are accounted worthy of the kingdom of God, because

(n) Matt. xxv. 40.  
(o) Prov. xix. 17.

(p) 2 Cor. ix. 6.  
(q) 2 Thess. i. 5—7.

(r) Heb. vi. 10.  
(s) Rom. viii. 29

(t) Luke xxiv. 26  
(u) Acts xiv. 22.

we bear in our body the marks of our Lord and Master, (*w*) which are the badges of the children of God. The same sentiment is conveyed in the following passages: "Bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body." (*x*) "Being made conformable unto his death, if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead." (*y*) The reason which the apostle subjoins tends not to establish any merit, but to confirm the hope of the kingdom of God; as though he had said, As it is consistent with the judgment of God to avenge on your enemies those vexations with which they have harassed you, so it is also to grant you respite and repose from those vexations. Of the other passage, which represents it as becoming the righteousness of God not to forget our services, so as almost to imply that he would be unrighteous if he did forget them, the meaning is, that in order to arouse our indolence, God has assured us that the labour which we undergo for the glory of his name shall not be in vain. And we should always remember that this promise, as well as all others, would be fraught with no benefit to us, unless it were preceded by the gratuitous covenant of mercy, on which the whole certainty of our salvation must depend. But relying on that covenant, we may securely confide, that our services, however unworthy, will not go without a reward from the goodness of God. To confirm us in that expectation, the apostle asserts that God is not unrighteous, but will perform the promise he has once made. This righteousness, therefore, refers rather to the truth of the Divine promise, than to the equity of rendering to us any thing that is our due. To this purpose there is a remarkable observation of Augustine; and as that holy man has not hesitated frequently to repeat it as deserving of remembrance, so I deem it not unworthy of a constant place in our minds. "The Lord," says he, "is faithful, who has made himself our debtor, not by receiving any thing from us, but by promising all things to us."

VIII. Our Pharisees adduce the following passages of Paul: "Though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing." Again: "Now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity." (*z*) Again: "Above all these things, put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness." (*a*) From the first two passages they contend that we are justified rather by charity than by faith; that is, by the superior virtue, as they express it. But this argument is easily overturned. For we have already shown, that what is mentioned in the first passage, has no

(*w*) Gal. vi. 17.

(*x*) 2 Cor. iv. 10.

(*y*) Phil. iii. 10, 11.

(*z*) 1 Cor. xiii. 2, 13.

(*a*) Col. iii. 14.

reference to true faith. The second we explain to signify true faith, than which he calls charity greater, not as being more meritorious, but because it is more fruitful, more extensive, more generally serviceable, and perpetual in its duration; whereas the use of faith is only temporary. In respect of excellence, the preëminence must be given to the love of God, which is not in this place the subject of Paul's discourse. For the only point which he urges is, that with reciprocal charity we mutually edify one another in the Lord. But let us suppose that charity excels faith in all respects, yet what person possessed of sound judgment, or even of the common exercise of reason, would argue from this that it has a greater concern in justification? The power of justifying, attached to faith, consists not in the worthiness of the act. Our justification depends solely on the mercy of God and the merit of Christ, which when faith apprehends, it is said to justify us. Now, if we ask our adversaries in what sense they attribute justification to charity, they will reply, that because it is a duty pleasing to God, the merit of it, being accepted by the Divine goodness, is imputed to us for righteousness. Here we see how curiously their argument proceeds. We assert that faith justifies, not by procuring us a righteousness through its own merit, but as the instrument by which we freely obtain the righteousness of Christ. These men, passing over in silence the mercy of God, and making no mention of Christ, in whom is the substance of righteousness, contend that we are justified by the virtue of charity, because it is more excellent than faith; just as though any one should insist that a king, in consequence of his superior rank, is more expert at making a shoe than a shoemaker. This one argument affords an ample proof that all the Sorbonic schools are destitute of the least experience of justification by faith. But if any wrangler should yet inquire, why we understand Paul to use the word *faith* in different acceptations in the same discourse, I am prepared with a substantial reason for such an interpretation. For since those gifts which Paul enumerates, are in some respect connected with faith and hope, because they relate to the knowledge of God, he summarily comprises them all under those two words; as though he had said, The end of prophecy, and of tongues, of knowledge, and of the gift of interpretation, is to conduct us to the knowledge of God. But we know God in this life only by hope and faith. Therefore, when I mention faith and hope, I comprehend all these things under them. "And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three;" that is, all gifts, whatever may be their variety, are referred to these. "But the greatest of these is charity." From the third passage they infer, that if "charity is the bond of perfectness," it is therefore the bond of right-

eousness, which is no other than perfection. Now, to refrain from observing that what Paul calls *perfectness*, is the mutual connection which subsists between the members of a well-constituted church, and to admit that charity constitutes our perfection before God ; yet what new advantage will they gain ? On the contrary, I shall always object, that we never arrive at that perfection, unless we fulfil all the branches of charity ; and hence I shall infer, that since all men are at an immense distance from complete charity, they are destitute of all hope of perfection.

IX. I have no inclination to notice all the passages of Scripture, which the folly of the modern Sorbonists seizes as they occur, and without any reason employs against us. For some of them are so truly ridiculous, that I could not even mention them, unless I wished to be accounted a fool. I shall therefore conclude this subject after having explained a sentence uttered by Christ, with which they are wonderfully pleased. To a lawyer, who asked him what was necessary to salvation, he replied, " If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments." (b) What can we wish more, say they, when the Author of grace himself commands to obtain the kingdom of heaven by an observance of the commandments ? As though it were not evident, that Christ adapted his replies to those with whom he conversed. Here a doctor of the law inquires the method of obtaining happiness, and that not simply, but what men must *do* in order to attain it. Both the character of the speaker and the inquiry itself induced the Lord to make this reply. The inquirer, persuaded of the righteousness of the law, possessed a blind confidence in his works. Besides, he only inquired what were those works of righteousness by which salvation might be procured. He is therefore justly referred to the law, which contains a perfect mirror of righteousness. We also explicitly declare, that if life be sought by works, it is indispensably requisite to keep the commandments. And this doctrine is necessary to be known by Christians ; for how should they flee for refuge to Christ, if they did not acknowledge themselves to have fallen from the way of life upon the precipice of death ? And how could they know how far they have wandered from the way of life, without a previous knowledge of what that way of life is ? It is then, therefore, that Christ is presented to them as the asylum of salvation, when they perceive the vast difference between their own lives and the Divine righteousness, which consists in the observance of the law. The sum of the whole is, that if we seek salvation by works, we must keep the commandments, by which we are taught perfect righteousness.

(b) Matt. xix. 17.

But to stop here, would be failing in the midst of our course, for to keep the commandments is a task to which none of us are equal. Being excluded, then, from the righteousness of the law, we are under the necessity of resorting to some other refuge, namely, to faith in Christ. Wherefore, as the Lord, knowing this doctor of the law to be inflated with a vain confidence in his works, recalls his attention to the law, that it may teach him his own character as a sinner, obnoxious to the tremendous sentence of eternal death, so, in another place, addressing those who have already been humbled under this knowledge, he omits all mention of the law, and consoles them with a promise of grace—"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest; and ye shall find rest unto your souls." (c)

X. At length, after our adversaries have wearied themselves with perversions of Scripture, they betake themselves to subtleties and sophisms. They cavil, that faith is in some places called a work, (d) and hence they infer that we improperly oppose faith to works. As though faith procured righteousness for us by its intrinsic merit, as an act of obedience to the Divine will, and not rather because, by embracing the Divine mercy, it seals to our hearts the righteousness of Christ, which that mercy offers to us in the preaching of the gospel. The reader will pardon me for not dwelling on the confutation of such follies; for they require nothing to refute them but their own weakness. But I wish briefly to answer one objection, which has some appearance of reason, to prevent its being the source of any difficulty to persons who have had but little experience. Since common sense dictates that opposites are subject to similar rules, and as all sins are imputed to us for unrighteousness, they maintain it to be reasonable, on the other hand, that all good works should be imputed to us for righteousness. Those who reply, that the condemnation of men proceeds from unbelief alone, and not from particular sins, do not satisfy me. I agree with them, that incredulity is the fountain and root of all evils. For it is the original defection from God, which is afterwards followed by particular transgressions of the law. But as they appear to fix one and the same rule for good and evil works in forming a judgment of righteousness or unrighteousness, here I am obliged to dissent from them. For the righteousness of works is the perfect obedience of the law. We cannot therefore be righteous by works, unless we follow this straight line throughout the whole of our lives. The first deviation from it is a lapse into unrighteousness. Hence it appears that righteousness arises not from one or a few works,

(c) Matt. xi. 28, 29

(d) John vi. 29.

but from an inflexible and indefatigable observance of the Divine will. But the rule of judging of unrighteousness is very different. For he who has committed fornication or theft, is for one transgression liable to the sentence of death, because he has offended against the divine Majesty. These disputants of ours, therefore, fall into an error for want of adverting to the decision of James, that "whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." For he that said, "Do not commit adultery," said also, "Do not kill," &c (e) It ought not, therefore, to be deemed absurd, when we say, that death is the reward justly due to every sin, because they are all and every one deserving of the indignation and vengeance of God. But it will be a weak argument to infer, on the contrary, that one good work will reconcile a man to God, whose wrath he has incurred by a multitude of sins.

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## CHAPTER XIX.

### ON CHRISTIAN LIBERTY.

WE have now to treat of Christian liberty, an explication of which ought not to be omitted in a treatise which is designed to comprehend a compendious summary of evangelical doctrine. For it is a subject of the first importance, and unless it be well understood, our consciences scarcely venture to undertake any thing without doubting, experience in many things hesitation and reluctance, and are always subject to fluctuations and fears. But especially it is an appendix to justification, and affords no small assistance towards the knowledge of its influence. Hence they who sincerely fear God will experience the incomparable advantage of that doctrine, which impious scoffers pursue with their raileries; because in the spiritual intoxication with which they are seized, they allow themselves the most unbounded impudence. Wherefore this is the proper time to introduce the subject; and though we have slightly touched upon it on some former occasions, yet it was useful to defer the full discussion of it to this place; because, as soon as any mention is made of Christian liberty, then either inordinate passions rage, or violent emotions arise, unless timely opposition be made to those wanton spirits, who most nefariously corrupt things which are otherwise the best. For some, under the pretext of this liberty,

(e) James ii. 10, 11.

cast off all obedience to God, and precipitate themselves into the most unbridled licentiousness; and some despise it, supposing it to be subversive of all moderation, order, and moral distinctions. What can we do in this case, surrounded by such difficulties? Shall we entirely discard Christian liberty, and so preclude the occasion of such dangers? But, as we have observed, unless this be understood, there can be no right knowledge of Christ, or of evangelical truth, or of internal peace of mind. We should rather exert ourselves to prevent the suppression of such a necessary branch of doctrine, and at the same time to obviate those absurd objections which are frequently deduced from it.

II. Christian liberty, according to my judgment, consists of three parts. The first part is, that the consciences of believers, when seeking an assurance of their justification before God, should raise themselves above the law, and forget all the righteousness of the law. For since the law, as we have elsewhere demonstrated, leaves no man righteous, either we must be excluded from all hope of justification, or it is necessary for us to be delivered from it, and that so completely as not to have any dependence on works. For he who imagines, that in order to obtain righteousness he must produce any works, however small, can fix no limit or boundary, but renders himself a debtor to the whole law. Avoiding, therefore, all mention of the law, and dismissing all thought of our own works, in reference to justification, we must embrace the Divine mercy alone, and turning our eyes from ourselves, fix them solely on Christ. For the question is, not how we can be righteous, but how, though unrighteous and unworthy, we can be considered as righteous. And the conscience that desires to attain any certainty respecting this, must give no admission to the law. Nor will this authorize any one to conclude, that the law is of no use to believers, whom it still continues to instruct and exhort, and stimulate to duty, although it has no place in their consciences before the tribunal of God. For these two things, being very different, require to be properly and carefully distinguished by us. The whole life of Christians ought to be an exercise of piety, since they are called to sanctification. (f) It is the office of the law to remind them of their duty, and thereby to excite them to the pursuit of holiness and integrity. But when their consciences are solicitous how God may be propitiated, what answer they shall make, and on what they shall rest their confidence, if called to his tribunal, there must then be no consideration of the requisitions of the law, but Christ alone must be proposed for righteousness, who exceeds all the perfection of the law.

(f) Ephes. i. 4. 1 Thess. iv. 3, 7.

III. On this point turns almost the whole argument of the Epistle to the Galatians. For that they are erroneous expositors, who maintain, that Paul there contends only for liberty from ceremonies, may be proved from the topics of his reasoning. Such as these: "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." (*g*) Again: "Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. Every man that is circumcised is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace." (*h*) These passages certainly comprehend something more exalted than a freedom from ceremonies. I confess, indeed, that Paul is there treating of ceremonies, because he is contending with the false apostles, who attempted to introduce again into the Christian Church the ancient shadows of the law, which had been abolished by the advent of Christ. But for the decision of this question it was necessary to discuss some higher topics, in which the whole controversy lay. First, because the brightness of the gospel was obscured by those Jewish shadows, he shows that in Christ we have a complete exhibition of all those things which were adumbrated by the ceremonies of Moses. Secondly, because these impostors instilled into the people the very pernicious opinion, that this ceremonial obedience was sufficient to merit the Divine favour, he principally contends, that believers ought not to suppose that they can obtain righteousness before God by any works of the law, much less by those inferior elements. And he at the same time teaches, that from the condemnation of the law, which otherwise impends over all men, they are delivered by the cross of Christ, that they may rely with perfect security on him alone — a topic which properly belongs to our present subject. Lastly, he asserts the liberty of the consciences of believers, which ought to be laid under no obligation in things that are not necessary.

IV. The second part of Christian liberty, which is dependent on the first, is, that their consciences do not observe the law, as being under any legal obligation; but that, being liberated from the yoke of the law, they yield a voluntary obedience to the will of God. For being possessed with perpetual terrors, as long as they remain under the dominion of the law, they will never engage with alacrity and promptitude in the service of God, unless they have previously received this liberty. We shall more easily and clearly discover the design of these things from an example. The precept of the law is, "Thou shalt

(*g*) Gal. iii. 13.(*h*) Gal. v. 1—4.

love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might." (i) That this command may be fulfilled, our soul must be previously divested of every other perception and thought, our heart must be freed from all desires, and our might must be collected and contracted to this one point. Those who, compared with others, have made a very considerable progress in the way of the Lord, are yet at an immense distance from this perfection. For though they love God with their soul, and with sincere affection of heart, yet they have still much of their heart and soul occupied by carnal desires, which retard their progress towards God. They do indeed press forward with strong exertions, but the flesh partly debilitates their strength, and partly attracts it to itself. What can they do in this case, when they perceive that they are so far from observing the law? They wish, they aspire; they endeavour, but they do nothing with the perfection that is required. If they advert to the law, they see that every work they attempt or meditate is accursed. Nor is there the least reason for any person to deceive himself, by concluding that an action is not necessarily altogether evil, because it is imperfect; and that therefore the good part of it is accepted by God. For the law, requiring perfect love, condemns all imperfection, unless its rigour be mitigated. Let him consider his work, therefore, which he wished to be thought partly good, and he will find that very work to be a transgression of the law, because it is imperfect.

V. See how all our works, if estimated according to the rigour of the law, are subject to its curse. How, then, could unhappy souls apply themselves with alacrity to any work for which they could expect to receive nothing but a curse? On the contrary, if they are liberated from the severe exaction of the law, or rather from the whole of its rigour, and hear God calling them with paternal gentleness, then with cheerfulness and prompt alacrity they will answer to his call and follow his guidance. In short, they who are bound by the yoke of the law, are like slaves who have certain daily tasks appointed by their masters. They think they have done nothing, and presume not to enter into the presence of their masters without having finished the work prescribed to them. But children, who are treated by their parents in a more liberal manner, hesitate not to present to them their imperfect, and in some respects faulty works, in confidence that their obedience and promptitude of mind will be accepted by them, though they have not performed all that they wished. Such children ought we to be, feeling a certain confidence that our services, however

(i) Deut. vi. 5.

small, rude, and imperfect, will be approved by our most indulgent Father. This he also confirms to us by the prophet: "I will spare them," saith he, "as a man spareth his own son that serveth him;" (*k*) where it is evident, from the mention of *service*, that the word *spare* is used to denote indulgence, or an overlooking of faults. And we have great need of this confidence, without which all our endeavours will be vain; for God considers us as serving him in none of our works, but such as are truly done by us to his honour. But how can this be done amidst those terrors, where it is a matter of doubt whether our works offend God or honour him?

VI. This is the reason why the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews refers to faith, and estimates only by faith, all the good works which are recorded of the holy patriarchs. (*l*) On this liberty there is a remarkable passage in the Epistle to the Romans, where Paul reasons that sin ought not to have dominion over us, because we are not under the law, but under grace. (*m*) For after he had exhorted believers, "Let not sin, therefore, reign in your mortal body; neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness; but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God," (*n*) — they might, on the contrary, object that they yet carried about with them the flesh full of inordinate desires, and that sin dwelt in them; but he adds the consolation furnished by their liberty from the law; as though he had said, Although you do not yet experience sin to be destroyed, and righteousness living in you in perfection, yet you have no cause for terror and dejection of mind, as if God were perpetually offended on account of your remaining sin; because by grace you are emancipated from the law, that your works may not be judged according to that rule. But those, who infer that we may commit sin because we are not under the law, may be assured that they have no concern with this liberty, the end of which is to animate us to virtue.

VII. The third part of Christian liberty teaches us, that we are bound by no obligation before God respecting external things, which in themselves are indifferent; but that we may indifferently sometimes use, and at other times omit them. And the knowledge of this liberty also is very necessary for us; for without it we shall have no tranquillity of conscience, nor will there be any end of superstitions. Many in the present age think it a folly to raise any dispute concerning the free use of meats, of days, and of habits, and similar subjects, considering these things as frivolous and nugatory; but they

(*k*) Mal. iii. 17.(*l*) Heb. xi. 2.(*m*) Rom. vi. 14.(*n*) Rom. vi. 12, 13.

are of greater importance than is generally believed. For when the conscience has once fallen into the snare, it enters a long and inextricable labyrinth, from which it is afterwards difficult to escape; if a man begin to doubt the lawfulness of using flax in sheets, shirts, handkerchiefs, napkins, and table cloths, neither will he be certain respecting hemp, and at last he will doubt of the lawfulness of using tow; for he will consider with himself whether he cannot eat without table cloths or napkins, whether he cannot do without handkerchiefs. If any one imagine delicate food to be unlawful, he will ere long have no tranquillity before God in eating brown bread and common viands, while he remembers that he might support his body with meat of a quality still inferior. If he hesitate respecting good wine, he will afterwards be unable with any peace of conscience to drink the most vapid; and at last he will not presume even to touch purer and sweeter water than others. In short, he will come to think it criminal to step over a twig that lies across his path. For this is the commencement of no trivial controversy; but the dispute is whether the use of certain things be agreeable to God, whose will ought to guide all our resolutions and all our actions. The necessary consequence is, that some are hurried by despair into a vortex of confusion, from which they see no way of escape; and some, despising God, and casting off all fear of him, make a way of ruin for themselves. For all, who are involved in such doubts, which way soever they turn their views, behold something offensive to their consciences presenting itself on every side.

VIII. "I know," says Paul, "that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean." (*o*) In these words he makes all external things subject to our liberty, provided that our minds have regard to this liberty before God. But if any superstitious notion cause us to scruple, those things which were naturally pure become contaminated to us. Wherefore he subjoins, "Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that which he alloweth. And he that doubteth is condemned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith; for whatsoever is not of faith is sin." (*p*) Are not they, who in these perplexities show their superior boldness by the security of their presumption, guilty of departing from God? whilst they who are deeply affected with the true fear of God, when they are even constrained to admit many things to which their own consciences are averse, are filled with terror and consternation. No persons of this description receive any of the gifts of God with thanksgiving, by which alone Paul, nevertheless, declares them to be all sanctified to our use. (*q*) I mean a thanksgiving proceeding

(*o*) Rom. xiv. 14.(*p*) Rom. xiv. 22, 23.(*q*) 1 Tim. iv. 5.

from a mind which acknowledges the beneficence and goodness of God in the blessings he bestows. For many of them, indeed, apprehend the good things which they use to be from God, whom they praise in his works; but not being persuaded that they are *given* to them, how could they give thanks to God as the giver of them? We see, in short, the tendency of this liberty, which is, that without any scruple of conscience or perturbation of mind, we should devote the gifts of God to that use for which he has given them; by which confidence our souls may have peace with him, and acknowledge his liberality towards us. For this comprehends all ceremonies, the observation of which is left free, that the conscience may not be bound by any obligation to observe them, but may remember that by the goodness of God it may use them, or abstain from them, as shall be most conducive to edification.

IX. Now, it must be carefully observed, that Christian liberty is in all its branches a spiritual thing; all the virtue of which consists in appeasing terrified consciences before God, whether they are disquieted and solicitous concerning the remission of their sins, or are anxious to know if their works, which are imperfect and contaminated by the defilements of the flesh, be acceptable to God; or are tormented concerning the use of things that are indifferent. Wherefore they are guilty of perverting its meaning, who either make it the pretext of their irregular appetites, that they may abuse the Divine blessings to the purposes of sensuality, or who suppose that there is no liberty but what is used before men, and therefore in the exercise of it totally disregard their weak brethren. The former of these sins is the more common in the present age. There is scarcely any one, whom his wealth permits to be sumptuous, who is not delighted with luxurious splendour in his entertainments, in his dress, and in his buildings; who does not desire a preëminence in every species of luxury; who does not strangely flatter himself on his elegance. And all these things are defended under the pretext of Christian liberty. They allege that they are things indifferent; this I admit, provided they be indifferently used. But where they are too ardently coveted, proudly boasted, or luxuriously lavished, these things, of themselves otherwise indifferent, are completely polluted by such vices. This passage of Paul makes an excellent distinction respecting things which are indifferent: "Unto the pure all things are pure; but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled." (r) For why are curses denounced on rich men, who "receive their consolation," who are "satiated," who "now

(r) Titus i. 15.

laugh," who "lie on beds of ivory," who "join field to field," who "have the harp, and the lyre, and the tabret, and wine in their feasts?" (s) Ivory and gold, and riches of all kinds, are certainly blessings of Divine Providence, not only permitted, but expressly designed for the use of men; nor are we any where prohibited to laugh, or to be satiated with food, or to annex new possessions to those already enjoyed by ourselves or by our ancestors, or to be delighted with musical harmony, or to drink wine. This indeed is true; but amidst an abundance of all things, to be immersed in sensual delights, to inebriate the heart and mind with present pleasures, and perpetually to grasp at new ones, — these things are very remote from a legitimate use of the Divine blessings. Let them banish, therefore, immoderate cupidity, excessive profusion, vanity, and arrogance; that with a pure conscience they may make a proper use of the gifts of God. When their hearts shall be formed to this sobriety, they will have a rule for the legitimate enjoyment of them. On the contrary, without this moderation, even common and ordinary pleasures are chargeable with excess. For it is truly observed, that a proud heart frequently dwells under coarse and ragged garments, and that simplicity and humility are sometimes concealed under purple and fine linen. Let all men, in their respective stations, whether of poverty, of competence, or of splendour, live in the remembrance of this truth, that God confers his blessings on them for the support of life, not for luxury; and let them consider this as the law of Christian liberty, that they learn the lesson which Paul had learned, when he said, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed, both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need." (t)

X. Many persons err likewise in this respect, that, as if their liberty would not be perfectly secure unless witnessed by men, they make an indiscriminate and imprudent use of it — a disorderly practice, which occasions frequent offence to their weak brethren. There are some to be found, in the present day, who imagine their liberty would be abridged, if they were not to enter on the enjoyment of it by eating animal food on Friday. Their eating is not the subject of my reprehension; but their minds require to be divested of this false notion; for they ought to consider, that they obtain no advantage from their liberty before men, but with God; and that it consists in abstinence as well as in use. If they apprehend it to be immaterial in God's view, whether they eat animal food or eggs, whether their garments be scarlet or black, it is quite sufficient. The

(s) Luke vi. 24, 25. Amos vi. 1, &c. Isaiah v. 8, &c.

(t) Phil. iv. 11, 12.

conscience, to which the benefit of this liberty was due, is now emancipated. Therefore, though they abstain from flesh, and wear but one color, during all the rest of their lives, this is no diminution of their freedom. Nay, because they are free, they therefore abstain with a free conscience. But they fall into a very pernicious error in disregarding the infirmity of their brethren, which it becomes us to bear, so as not rashly to do any thing which would give them the least offence. But it will be said, that it is sometimes right to assert our liberty before men. This I confess; yet the greatest caution and moderation must be observed, lest we cast off all concern for the weak, whom God has so strongly recommended to our regards.

XI. I shall now, therefore, make some observations concerning offences; how they are to be discriminated, what are to be avoided, and what are to be disregarded; whence we may afterwards determine what room there is for our liberty in our intercourse with mankind. I approve of the common distinction between an offence given and an offence taken, since it is plainly countenanced by Scripture, and is likewise sufficiently significant of the thing intended to be expressed. If you do any thing at a wrong time or place, or with an unseasonable levity, or wantonness, or temerity, by which the weak and inexperienced are offended, it must be termed an offence given by you; because it arises from your fault. And an offence is always said to be given in any action, the fault of which proceeds from the performer of that action. An offence taken is, when any transaction, not otherwise unseasonable or culpable, is, through malevolence, or some perverse disposition, construed into an occasion of offence. For in this instance the offence is not given, but taken without reason by such perverseness of construction. The first species of offence affects none but the weak; the second is created by moroseness of temper, and Pharisaical superciliousness. Wherefore we shall denominate the former, the offence of the weak, the latter, that of Pharisees; and we shall so temper the use of our liberty, that it ought to submit to the ignorance of weak brethren, but not at all to the austerity of Pharisees. For our duty to the weak, Paul fully shows in many places. "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye." Again: "Let us not therefore judge one another any more; but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling-block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way;" (u) and much more to the same import, which were better examined in its proper connection than recited here. The sum of all is, that "we, then, that are strong, ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of

(u) Rom. xiv. 1, 13.