

Monergism

# BRIEF THOUGHTS

CONCERNING THE GOSPEL

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# **Brief Thoughts Concerning the Gospel**

**by Samuel Pike**

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## **PREFATORY NOTICE**

SAMUEL PIKE, the author of the following Tract, was born about the year 1717 at Ramsey, in Wiltshire. In his early life, in the obscurity of a country village, he acquired the elements of literary and theological knowledge, and discovered that enlightened piety and that love of truth, which characterised him through life. At a suitable age he entered the academy in London for preparatory study for the

ministry. The learned John Eames, F.R.S., was his scientific tutor; and Mr. John Hubbard directed his theological studies. After completing his academical course, he became pastor of a congregation at Henley on the Thames, where he remained for a few years. In 1747 he was called to London, to succeed Mr. John Hill, whose Sermons are still highly esteemed, as minister of the Independent church meeting in Three Cranes, Thames Street, and was soon after chosen (then a high honour) one of the preachers of the Merchants' Lecture, Pinner's Hall. He also, for some time, in conjunction with Mr. Samuel Hayward, conducted a course of Casuistical Lectures on the Lord's day evenings, which was afterwards published under the title of 'Cases of Conscience,' and has passed through a number of editions. Some time after his settlement in London he opened an academy, in which he instructed a number of young men in the languages, in natural philosophy, and in theology. In 1753 he published a work entitled 'Philosophia Sacra; or, The Principles of Natural Philosophy, extracted from Divine Revelation.' The work discovered learning and ingenuity, but being based on a false principle, has, like the other illustrations and defenses of Hutchinsonianism, fallen into not unmerited neglect. In the year 1755, he published, under the title, 'A Form of Sound Words,' an excellent analysis and explication of the Westminster Assembly's Shorter Catechism. The 'Letters on Theron and Aspasio,' by Sandeman, first published in 1757, attracted Mr. Pike's attention, and his study of these subjects led him to modify considerably his views respecting the nature of faith, and the manner in which it answers the purposes assigned to it in the plan of salvation. This change of opinion led, through a course of unpleasant controversy, to the termination of his ministerial relation with the church in Three Cranes' Court, in the year 1765. Soon after he joined the Sandemanian or Glassite church in Bull and Mouth street, who called him to the office of the eldership among them; he afterwards removed to a congregation in that connection in Trowbridge, in his native county, where he laboured with much acceptance, till the infirmities of a premature old age came on him; and after a short confinement he died in the spring of 1773, at the age of 56 years.

Calumnious reports were circulated as to his having contracted intemperate habits, and it was said he died under a cloud; but his biographer, Walter Wilson, Esq., no way prejudiced in his favour by attachment to his peculiar views, states that 'he can assure his readers that such reports were utterly without foundation; and that he with great satisfaction takes the opportunity of publicly contradicting a report so calamitous to the reputation of an injured individual, and so unfavourable to the interests of religion.' In the prospect of dissolution, the principles unfolded in the following tract supported his heart. He was calm, resigned, and happy in the faith of the truth, and the hope of eternal life, and instead of his sun setting under a cloud it shone brilliant to the last.

The Tract that follows is composed of extracts from Mr. Pike's writings. The first part of it is to be found in his 'Dispassionate Narrative of the Rise, Progress, and Issue of the Late Schism in the church under the pastoral care of Samuel Pike.' London. 1760. Pages 93-106. The tenth section does not appear in any former reprint. The second part is taken from his 'Free Grace indeed !' London. 1760. Pages 29-37. This part also does not appear in any former edition of the 'Brief Thoughts.' The third part is extracted from the same pamphlet, pages 62-78. In the year 1790, the late Charles Stuart, of Dunearn, Esq., M.D., the son-in-law of Dr. John Erskine, the friend of Andrew Fuller, a man who united in a remarkable degree, to use Dr. M'Crie's words in reference to him, 'the honourable feelings of the gentleman, the refined and liberal thinking of the scholar, and the unaffected and humble piety of the Christian,' published without the author's name, the Tract, with the exceptions noted, under the title of 'Brief Thoughts.' It was adopted by the Edinburgh Society for publishing Religious Tracts, founded in 1793, and forms the fourteenth of their series. It was also received into the series of the London Religious Tract Society, and published in two tracts, No. 294, 295, with the separate titles of, 'Hindrances to believe the Gospel,' and 'Rest in Christ.' To the very neat edition of the Tract published in 48vo, at Kelso, 1851, the editor, the Rev. Horace Bonar, has appended as a third part, an excellent letter of the late Henry

David Inglis, advocate, 'On holding fast the beginning of our Confidence.'

This Tract has been very highly estimated both by theologians and by Christians,—the former admiring its lucidity and comprehensiveness as a statement of doctrine; the latter delighting in it as 'the sincere milk of the word,' most wholesome spiritual food. There is an interesting incident in reference to it recorded in Dr. Hanna's Life of Dr. Chalmers. Soon after the publication of 'The Farewell Address to the Parishioners of Kilmany,' Dr. Stuart and the author met in the streets of Edinburgh, and got into a very animated conversation on religious subjects, particularly the nature of faith and its functions in the saving economy. Dr. Stuart was not quite satisfied with some of his friend's modes of expression on these subjects, and the long conversation did not seem to have removed the dissatisfaction. At last, just as they were about to part, Dr. Chalmers said, 'If you wish to see my views clearly and distinctly stated, you will find them in a tract entitled 'Brief Thoughts.' 'Why,' said Dr. Stuart, 'that tract was published by me.' Dr. Chalmers used to describe the whole scene very graphically, and adduce it as an instance of how men may think they differ, while really they agree.' It is very justly stated by the latest editor of the tract that 'its great value is that it states the Gospel with such point and plainness, that in the simple statement of it mistakes are either prevented or corrected.'

It is inserted in this Collection, not for its rareness but for its intrinsic excellence, and because appearing generally under the humble guise of a religious tract, it may fail to attract from students of divinity the attention it deserves, as a well-thought and clearly expressed illustration of some of the most important and difficult questions in Christian theology, both theoretical and practical. In conclusion, I repeat the declaration I have made elsewhere: 'I consider these Brief Thoughts' as among the most precious of mere human compositions, containing a singularly clear scriptural statement of those principles which lie at the foundation of those just

views of the Christian method of salvation which are, under divine influence, the great source both of holiness and comfort.'

## BRIEF THOUGHTS

# I. CONCERNING THE GOSPEL, AND THE HINDRANCES TO BELIEVE IT

1. The word gospel properly signifies good news, or glad tidings, and may be used to denote good news of any kind; but the gospel, eminently so called, is a message sent, or brought to us from heaven of good things. The substance of it is, to declare to the fallen, condemned sinners of the human race, that Jesus is the Christ, who came into the world to save the chief of sinners: that God hath given us eternal life, and that this life is in his Son; that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, &c. All these things taken together in their blessed and extensive import, as centring in one point, are the gospel. And these things are told us openly and freely, that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing, we might have life through his name, or in what is declared concerning him as the Saviour. This gospel was preached to Adam, in the first promise; to Abraham, in its being told him, that in his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed; to Israel typically, in the whole system of sacrifices; prophetically, in the psalms, and in all the prophets; and it is now exhibited to us, historically and doctrinally, in the New Testament, in the relation it gives us of the birth, life, death, resurrection, and glorification of our Lord Jesus, and the account it gives us of the true and glorious design of all these things. Were we to sum up the whole, we shall find it to be, as to its general subject, a declaration of free and full salvation in Jesus Christ, addressed to lost, helpless, and condemned sinners. The redemption obtained by Jesus Christ, is presented to our view as quite necessary for our salvation, as quite suitable to our condition, as quite free for our encouragement, and as quite full or complete for our supply.

2. This representation is so great and glorious, and contains such joyful particulars, that one would imagine, it could not fail of affording at once the most enlivening light, the most satisfying hope, the most solid joy, and spiritual strength and life to our souls. Such is certainly its nature, such is plainly its tendency, and such is its real influence and effect, wherever its meaning, its evidence, and its importance, are understood and received. This we are certain never will be, without the divine teaching or influence of the Spirit of truth and grace.

However, hereby the most interesting message, and the most gladdening tidings are brought us. This message some neglect, others misunderstand; some despise, and others dispute it; while many understand it so defectively, that it conveys no more pleasure or satisfaction to their minds than if they had never heard it, or did not at all understand it. So that many persons sit under the sound of it, who are very little, if at all, enlivened, encouraged, or attracted thereby. This proceeds from some remaining difficulties or objections, which still possess their minds, and obstruct the joy, satisfaction, hope, and love, that would otherwise arise in their minds upon the belief of it. For it is evident, that when this was preached of old, they who heard and understood it were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord. Acts xiii. 48.

3. Let us therefore search a little into this matter, and attend to the objections and difficulties which rise in the mind; whereby it comes to pass, that many receive no comfort and advantage to their souls by the declaration of it: so that it proves in reality no gospel to them. For we must necessarily take it for granted, that it is in itself a message of great joy; otherwise it would not have received the name it bears.

It is evident, then, that to many these glad tidings do not convey any pleasure, because they do not appear suited to their wants and desires. It is to them a thing quite foreign from their thoughts and wishes; and so they despise or neglect it. One says in his heart, 'If you



could bring me tidings of some worldly honours to be freely conferred, or of some large sums of money to be freely given, this would rejoice my heart. Or if you could tell me where and how I might enjoy such and such sensual pleasures, this would be very acceptable.'

The language spoken by the hearts of others is to this effect: 'If you could assure me any way, that I could live and indulge myself in sin, &c., with hopes of impunity, without fear of death or hell, this would be very good news to me.' But it is evident, in both these cases, the sentiments of the heart are directly contrary to the truth of God. For the former account the world their chief portion, and the latter esteem sin their greatest good. They do not perceive, they do not really believe, the suitableness and importance of the salvation in Jesus Christ to their souls; and therefore it does not wear the aspect of good news in their view.

To others, the proclamation of salvation only in Christ is not good news; because they do not see it to be quite necessary for them. They do not think their case to be really so bad, as a full and free salvation intimates. They do not apprehend themselves quite lost, undone, and helpless; but think they can, they must, and ought to do something towards their own recovery to the favour of God.

As the free gospel opposes all such self-sufficient desires and endeavours, it is therefore rather disgusting and offensive. – Such as these do not know either themselves, or the law, or the true God.

4. But after all, there is another great reason why the glad tidings of the blessed gospel do not convey any real satisfaction; and that is, because the proper freeness of divine grace revealed is not discerned nor credited. The language of many persons is this: 'I do not deny or question the perfection of Christ's work, and the freeness of his redemption: I have heard these things, and am persuaded of them, and yet still I feel myself lost, and miserable, and helpless, and do not find that all this conveys any pleasure or satisfaction to my mind; for

I have still many objections against myself, and many doubts and difficulties in my mind in relation to my salvation.'—What these are, or may be, we shall soon attend to.—But do you indeed believe the proper freedom of divine grace? How comes it to pass then, that you are not encouraged by, and delighted with it, when it is certain it must be so in any similar ease?

If a person in great want be told of a free supply; or a person in debt, ready to be arrested, be told of a free, able, and willing surety; could this fail of giving him pleasure, hope, and satisfaction, on his hearing and believing it? And if it did not, would not every by-stander judge, that there must be some mistake or doubt in his mind about it? — There must therefore be some defect or mistake in our apprehension, if we have not some satisfying hope produced in our minds, from the free gospel, of full salvation in Jesus Christ, for an helpless, undone sinner.

5. Let me then represent, as clearly as I can, what must be, or may be, the mistake or doubt in the minds of many. 'The gospel affords not relief to my mind (says one), because my sin and guilt have been greater than many, than most, or than any others. Mine iniquities have increased over my head, and my transgressions mount up to the very heavens. Look where I will, I can find no relief; whether I look backward, inward, forward, or upward, all is dark and dreadful. My case is so peculiar, my sins are so aggravated, &c. I cannot apprehend that divine grace should reach directly to such a one as me.' I answer, Are any guilty sinners excluded out of the proclamation of grace? If they were, the gospel would cease to be glad tidings, not only to you, but to everyone else: for we have all sinned, and conic short of the glory of God; and if God should mark iniquities, none could stand. You think that the gospel may be joyful tidings to others, but not to you. But why so? You say, Because they are not so bad as I am, and have been. This is the same as to say, That because others are in some respects better than you, therefore they have more reason and better ground, to hope in Christ than you have. But who-ever thinks thus, it is evident, does not apprehend the grace of God in Christ to

be properly and directly free; and he imagines, that he must be somewhat better than he is, before he may hope in Christ. But we are directly told, That Christ came into the world to save the chief of sinners; and that this faithful saying is worthy of all acceptance; and consequently, worthy of your acceptance, whoever you be, or whatsoever you have been. You are right if you think yourself the chief of sinners; but you wrong the grace and gospel of Christ, if you think or say, That you are not as welcome as any sinner upon the face of this earth to the redemption by Jesus Christ. In truth, such despondent and apparently humble confessions, if examined to the bottom, will be found, when they obstruct our hope, to be no more than the conviction and the regret that we want materials for erecting an altar to our pride; that we are destitute of a justifying righteousness, which we are anxiously labouring after; they are but the painful lamentation arising out of the disappointed desire of attaining life, as it were, by the works of the law; and they consist well, if we look into them seriously, with the notion, that there is a great deal of good in our hearts, in our motives, if not in our actions, though there be somewhat lacking, at the same time, to give us perfect confidence before God.

6. Another may be saying in his thoughts, 'But after all that the gospel reveals, it is no comforting or satisfying news to me; because I remember, that Christ did not purchase this redemption for all mankind; neither has God purposed it for all; and therefore, though I know that those who shall be saved, are saved by grace quite free and sovereign, yet I can be no way comforted by this, because I have no marks or evidences in my favour, to prove that I am of the number of the elected and redeemed. I can therefore only entertain a general possibility, that I may be saved as well as another; but this is far from being sufficient to afford peace to my soul and conscience.' I readily reply, It is a real and important truth, that election and redemption are thus particular and sovereign, not universal nor conditional. But remember, though the redemption by Christ is not universal in its intention, yet it is so in its proclamation to be believed for salvation. John iii. 14-19. Read over these verses, and you may see, that here is

good news, here are glad tidings indeed, presented to gain the confidence of poor helpless sinners. This free grace requires no previous marks or evidences of our own particular election or redemption, in order to afford immediate relief to the mind, in believing it to be thus open and free. It is true, God by his word requires us to believe the doctrines of particular election and redemption, in order to give us a view of the sovereignty of his grace, and to prevent us from thinking it to be any way conditional or suspended upon any actings of ours. But yet it does by no means require us to believe our own particular election or redemption, in order to our hope God-ward. It presents the redemption of Jesus Christ directly before us as full and free; and wheresoever this takes proper effect upon the mind, conscience, and conduct, this is the proper and sure evidence of our own election. For our election of God is known by the gospel coming with power, &c. 1 Thess. i. 4. 5. Say not then, Who shall ascend into heaven, to see whether our names are in the book of life? But look into the gospel, and see whether thy name, as a sinner, be not there; and whether the grace therein revealed, is not free for thee, and for any.

7. Another's thought may be working this way: 'But, alas ! after all you can say, or I can find in the word, about the freedom of divine grace, it gives me no satisfaction; for I know that the work of the Holy Spirit is necessary to bring the soul and Christ together; and because I do not find his influence upon my heart, I am therefore greatly perplexed, and at as great a loss almost as if there was no such gospel preached to me.'

I answer, It is very certain and undoubted, that the Spirit's work is necessary, sovereign, and effectual. But what then? Must we feel or be conscious of any work of the Spirit upon our hearts, before we believe the testimony of free grace to the satisfaction of our consciences. If so, this would utterly overturn the open freedom of the grace of God; and the work of the Spirit would be so explained and conceived, as to stand in opposition to the word of the gospel. In my view, there is scarcely a clearer proof of the necessity of the

Spirit's work to show us the true grace of God, than the continual propensity appearing in us, thus to pervert it or mistake it, and to aim at placing even the consciousness of the Spirit's work between a free Christ and our souls. The Spirit's work is to show us the things of Christ, and to make us know the grace of God in the truth. Read the account given of his work and office, in John xvi. 7-11, and 1 Cor. ii. 9.-19, where it is most fully explained; and there you will see, that his work does by no means stand in opposition to the freedom of gospel-grace: but, on the contrary, it is a confirmation of it; for he sets his seal to it, when he brings this free grace to our minds, and so gives us peace and satisfaction from it.

8. The mind of another person may be perplexed in this way: 'I can receive no satisfaction to my soul from the gospel-report, because the Scripture says, Unless a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.' Now I know not whether I am, regenerated or no; I cannot find to my satisfaction that I have any principle of grace in my heart; and therefore I can have no true pleasure or peace, unless I can some way or other be assured of this.' In this manner many souls bring in abundance of objections against themselves, and make the glad tidings of salvation in Christ of none effect to them; because they conceive, that a consciousness of their own regeneration is previously necessary to peace and hope God-ward.

But remember, such is the freeness of grace, that an assurance of our being regenerated, is no way previously necessary to our resting our souls upon free forgiveness proclaimed in the gospel. Suppose then you do not know your own regeneration, should this hinder you, should this discourage you, from believing free forgiveness, and so enjoying a conscious interest therein by faith? Remember likewise, that so far as the thought of these defects discourages you, so far they intimate, that you are seeking your encouragement some way in and from yourselves. But behold, all this which you imagine you must be conscious of, to beget and maintain hope towards God; all this, I say, is the effect of the faith of the gospel upon the mind; for we are regenerated by the word of truth. James i. 18. It is there-fore a sense

and sight of this free-grace-truth which lies at the bottom of all the true change made in our thoughts, affections, and conduct.

9. But some may farther say, 'Faith is necessary to salvation; now I cannot find any faith in me; I cannot exert the act of trusting aright. I am not able. I have not strength to believe.' I reply, If by this complaint you mean, that you cannot believe divine grace to be so free, that you may directly rest your soul upon it; that you are not persuaded of the free ability of Christ to save to the uttermost; then I am called upon to offer evidence for it from the divine word, and to prove it from thence to your conviction, on purpose that you may be persuaded of it, and satisfied by it.

But if you still say, 'I have no doubt about that; only I can receive no comfort from it, for want of having, and discerning faith, and its exercises and actings in my soul.' Then it is evident, you are now conceiving faith, and its actings, in such a light as to be a sort of objection to the open, direct freeness of divine grace; and so instead of believing it, you do in fact object to it. Whereas, if you did really believe it in its proper view, you would not make your want of anything in yourself (call it faith, or by any other name) an objection; but would directly have hope and relief from what you believe concerning the grace of God in Christ; and being thus encouraged and relieved, you would then know experimentally, what it is to hope, trust, love, &c., which you strive at otherwise in vain.

10. But to conclude. Some may still say, 'I cannot, I dare not rest satisfied in the general hope of the gospel: Because it does not, it cannot of itself (let me believe it ever so clearly and firmly) assure me of my own particular interest in Christ, or that I shall be saved by him. The gospel is only a general open proclamation; it does not say directly to any one, you are elected, redeemed, regenerated, or in a state of salvation.' This is indeed a very great entanglement to many minds; and it is often so impressed, as to render the gospel in all its glory and freedom, of but little use to relieve or support the soul. It appears very defective and insufficient under such apprehensions,

and hereby many are so distressed, that they are driven to esteem the gospel insufficient, and to aim to introduce or seek after something more than what is therein exhibited, to raise, support, encourage, and strengthen the soul. But I apprehend this arises from one or other of these causes.

Either (1.) a defective view of the proper freedom of divine grace; or else (2.) a desire after and an eagerness for such an assurance of salvation, as is neither necessary for us, nor would be useful to us.

As to the First, What though the gospel proclamation is open, general and unrestrained, why may it not exhibit a free welcome, and afford an immediate ground of hope and encouragement, to any sinner as such?

If many persons are bidden to a feast, and have all the same welcome, is there a necessity for any of those to have a more special right than the others, to make their way clear? If then in the present case we take God at his word without doubting or disputing; we shall see enough in the free welcome to remove our discouragements, to satisfy our minds, and to give us peace and hope; without wanting or searching for a better warrant or a clearer right than we have in common as sinners, through the free gospel. The openness and unlimitedness of it to sinners as such directly, is so far from being an objection, that it is the very reason why hope and peace is received immediately from it. Were it not so, any particular person may well doubt whether remission and salvation are proclaimed freely to him. But in a full clear view of this freedom, any helpless sinner may say in his heart, 'The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want;' just in the same sense, as a poor object that is clearly persuaded of a free welcome to a well-furnished table of a friend may say, That person is my friend, therefore I shall never be starved.

And as to the other difficulty, it is of this nature. Persons desire to have such an assurance of salvation, as is no way needful at first for our hope God-ward. Were we to be directly assured of our own

special interest, particular election and certain salvation, this would open a door for presumption, and an Antinomian abuse of the grace of God: which the gospel abhors.

There is enough in the mere free gospel, to prevent all tormenting discouragement and anxiety, and to lay a foundation, for the most cordial love and most cheerful and ready obedience towards God in Christ. And upon this principle all the exhortations to trust, love, and obedience proceed; and indeed without it, there could be nothing of any of these things truly in our hearts or lives. As to our own particular or special interest, there can be no true satisfaction about it, but in trusting, loving, and obeying upon the footing of the free gospel. Thus there is a security against any abuse, if it be rightly understood: for a person cannot gratify himself in anything contrary to the rules of the word, without saying in his heart, that something besides a free Christ is his hope and portion. Whereas, on the other hand, while we proceed upon gospel principles in our affections and practice, we shall not be destitute of the witness and seal of the Spirit to our adoption.

The intention of all that has been said, is only to show that the proper, immediate, unconditional freedom of divine grace, is that which stands foremost in the gospel declaration; and that it is this which constitutes it properly gospel, to poor, perishing, helpless, condemned sinners of mankind.

There is nothing previous to this freedom of grace, nothing seen, felt, heard, or understood, that can afford any degree of true belief to the distressed soul, or guilty conscience. While this mere grace is so rich, full, and free, that it is sufficient in the hands of the divine Spirit to give immediate and proper relief. Wheresoever this is properly understood and really credited, in its evidence and importance, it is such good news that it conveys peace and rest to the mind before God, and so it is verified, 'We which have believed do enter into rest,' Heb. iv. 3. And this comfortable satisfaction is such as becomes the spring of all gospel love, patience, repentance, and obedience, in a



continued belief and view of this free love proclaimed in the blessed gospel.

Neither are those true and important doctrines of distinguishing grace, any way opposite to, denied by, or inconsistent with this free gospel hope. For it is this free grace gospel believed, or which is the same, it is the grace of God in Christ known and believed which pacifies the conscience, comforts the heart, strengthens the soul, purifies the affections, and attracts to love and obedience.

Those who are thus pacified, comforted, &c., are true believers, who live by the faith of the Son of God, in a continued dependence upon and regard to Christ as their light, life, joy, strength, and portion. These shall certainly persevere, for God has by his Spirit, through the word, put his fear and shed abroad his love in their hearts, that they might not depart from him.

Blessed are they that know the joyful sound; they shall walk in the light of God's countenance; for the more they know of it, and enjoy the holy satisfaction flowing from it; the more they appear to be under the real influence of the blessed Spirit of truth and grace; the more evident both to themselves and others, is their election, their particular redemption, their real regeneration and effectual calling. For God hath chosen his people to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth, whereunto they are called, by the gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 Thess. ii. 13, 14.

And O, may the Lord the Spirit make every one of us know more and more the excellency and glory of this free grace, and remove those clouds that frequently interpose between the Sun of Righteousness and our souls; that we may be filled with all joy and peace in believing, and so may abound in hope and in true holiness, through the power of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

**BRIEF THOUGHTS**

## **II. CONCERNING THE WAY IN WHICH THE GOSPEL BELIEVED GIVES PEACE AND HOPE.**

There is a certain central truth, which runs through the Bible from the beginning to the end, and which we may be tempted to overlook or not to discern in its proper importance and beauty, amidst a firm belief of all the distinguishing doctrines of Calvinism, as they are usually stated; and I think of no better form of expressing it at present, than this, Jesus Christ in all his grace and fulness, is declared in the gospel for this very purpose, to appear as the only, the immediate and the sure foundation of a lost sinner's hope. as such.' Without multiplying words at present to expatiate upon, to explain and prove, this principle, I would rather illustrate it by setting forth some of the proper effects thereof upon the mind and heart. This truth, I say, when clearly understood and believed upon divine evidence, does immediately silence the objections and remove the discouragement of the convinced sinner. Nay, the very belief of this truth, evidently contains in it a conviction of the sinner's helpless and hopeless condition in himself; for otherwise, Christ would not appear as his only foundation of hope. And when the soul beholds Christ as his immediate and sure foundation, he cannot but have some peace of conscience, and some encouraging sense of the divine free favour; such as draws off the heart (in proportion to the efficacy of the truth upon the mind) from self, sense, and sin, and produces a love to God in Christ, and so becomes a principle of all gospel obedience. So necessary is this truth, that unless it be properly understood and cordially believed, all the other doctrines of the word can have very little efficacy upon the mind; yea, no evangelical effect at all. But if this truth be received, or introduced into the conscience, all the other doctrines of the word will be found not only consistent with it, but connected with it, illustrated by it and subservient to it. This central doctrine is what is more emphatically called the Truth or the Gospel; and stands distinguished from the other truths of the

word in several passages of sacred writ. For instance, is the doctrine of particular election a gospel truth? We are said to be 'chosen to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.' Is the doctrine of regeneration a divine truth? We are said to be begotten, through the gospel, or with the word of truth. As to adoption, it is said, 'we are all the children of God, by faith in Christ Jesus.' As to sanctification, it is said, we are 'sanctified through the truth:' and as to perseverance, it is plain, we are 'kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation;' and so as to spiritual consolation, it is evident, we are 'filled with all joy and peace in believing.' This central truth is the principal and proper matter of faith, and Christ or God in Christ appearing in it, is the proper and only object of faith. In beholding and believing the absolute necessity, entire perfection and the immediate unconditional freeness of God's grace in Christ, we have our self-righteous confidence opposed and suppressed, and have the discouragements of our souls in measure removed. In this truth we have Christ and all his salvation brought near, exceedingly, immediately near to our souls and to our case; so that nothing appears to stand between him and us, however unworthy, guilty, polluted and miserable we have been; and therefore as soon as ever it is rightly perceived, and actually believed, we 'being justified by faith, have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.'

It is evident I am not here pleading for what is commonly called a bare historical faith, wherein a person looks upon himself as a sort of a bystander with respect to the matter of his faith; for whosoever does not see that the gospel report points directly at him and at his own case, cannot be said to apprehend the truth in its proper light. It is indeed certain, that almost every other doctrine may be perceived in a kind of speculative or historical manner; a person may believe and contemplate the doctrines of particular election and redemption as a bystander, because he does not see his own immediate personal concern in it. The same may be said of the doctrines of efficacious grace and of the saints' perseverance. If a person does not see that what the gospel says of Christ and salvation by him is entirely

necessary for him, exactly suited to his case, and free for his use, he is still kept at some distance; apprehending the doctrines of grace to be little more than a general declaration of what God intends to do or has done upon or for some sinners, without seeing any personal concern of his own in the matter.

I am very sensible that the doctrines of the Bible are often conceived in such a light as to become a sort of objection against the open freeness of the hope held forth in the gospel: for we are very ready to say in our mind, that since God does not tell us who in particular were elected and redeemed, or who shall be wrought upon effectually, &c., therefore a person must be sensible of some visible or real change passed upon him for the better, before he may or can venture to receive any degree of satisfying hope in Christ Jesus revealed in the gospel. But if we can recollect that particular election and redemption, and that the operations of the Spirit are intended to bring sinners to know and embrace this hope of the gospel; it will then appear that all these doctrines are rather a confirmation of, than an objection against, this blessed hope. For the conscientious belief of this gospel truth, is above and contrary to our natures; as it draws us off' from all that which' we are naturally attached to and fond of. We are always inclined to oppose, mistake, despise or suspect this hope; and are very ready to understand the gospel, in such a light as leaves some room for self-dependence, self-indulgence, or for entertaining some delusive hopes. For these reasons, together with others, there is an entire necessity for the divine agency of the Holy Spirit, to introduce it into our consciences and maintain it in our hearts. I might here further observe, that this truth makes the gospel-hope appear so free and humbling, that we naturally scorn it, as it sets us all upon a level before God: that it appears to us to be very defective, narrow, weak and foolish, because it does not give us directly such a full satisfaction concerning our own special interest, as should leave us in a kind of state of safety somewhat independent upon God in Christ believed on: that it is offensive to our corrupted nature, because it obliges us to live so near to and so constantly dependent upon an infinitely holy and sovereign

God. In a word, our natural wish and desire is, to have something in ourselves to be a ground and reason of peace and hope towards God; and therefore we are fond of leaning upon and desirous to prop up some such kind of hope; while we are averse to and suspicious of that sure foundation which God has laid in Zion, because it is something distinct from the consideration of anything in ourselves. All these things, with many more, concur to render it necessary for a divine almighty agency to be employed in writing this truth upon our hearts. But when this supernatural truth is made by the Spirit to take possession of our souls, it draws us off from our natural wish and desire, from self-dependence and self-indulgence, and leads us to look to and live upon God in Christ as our only and entire hope and portion, as our free refuge and sanctuary. Hereupon there begin to appear some evidences of our particular election and redemption. The immortal seed of the word is sown in the heart, a new principle introduced, a new spring of affections and actions is given; whereby the soul is rendered' capable of holding communion with God, and aims from this hope and love after conformity to Christ. And as such things as these appear and advance in the affections and conduct, the evidences of a special interest in Christ are discovered. Not that this person's hope, pleasure and satisfaction arises only or chiefly from these evidences of interest; but from the glory, perfection and freeness of divine grace appearing in a revealed Christ. For it is this which he has all along in his eye, for his hope and dependence, while he advances forward in bringing forth such fruits of faith as show him to be a disciple of Christ. In proportion then as the believer is favoured with this satisfaction from the freeness of divine grace revealed, the fruits of it appear; and in that proportion his evidences are brightened: but as these things decline, his evidences of interest disappear.

I am very sensible after all that has been said, that the turning, pinching point lies in this question: 'Is it possible for that truth, which has a uniform aspect towards all sinners as such, and which is as true concerning those that perish as those that are saved, to give any solid satisfaction, or to afford solid hope to any individual?'

An answer to this question in the affirmative, may readily be accounted very enthusiastical; and the laying any stress upon such a truth for satisfying peace and hope, may be thought both unaccountable and dangerous; as if there could not be sufficient in it, to bear the weight that is laid upon it. But let not our reason at once boldly judge it to be impossible ! Who knows what the wisdom of God can contrive and declare? And I hope to make it appear both from fact, from doctrine and from experience, that this is the very ease with respect to the important doctrine before us. Unless there be a truth in this, the gospel cannot be accounted glad tidings of great joy to all people: the joy of the primitive Christians upon their first apprehending and believing the gospel, will appear to be without a proper foundation. And unless there be some solid joy and peace to be had from the pure gospel believed, we could never be able to perform any duties, or exercise any graces in an evangelical way, until we could arrive at some assurance of our own personal interest; but how any such assurance can be had, before evangelical duties are performed, or gospel experiences felt, is not conceivable.

But after all, it will still be inquired, Is it possible for a person to receive any solid satisfaction from a doctrine that is as true concerning those that perish, as those that are saved? I answer, we need not look far for proper similitudes to illustrate this matter by. If two persons are under the same disease, and both of them are told of the same free remedy; he that upon the relation believes the remedy to be effectual and free, is immediately comforted in his mind with hopes of a cure, and accordingly applies; while he that suspects either the efficacy or freeness of it, receives no relief to his mind about it, and perhaps perishes under the disease; though the remedy was as effectual in its nature, and as free in itself, with respect to his case as to the other's.

I might add a variety of similar comparisons, borrowed both from nature and scripture, to exemplify or familiarize this subject: such as a testimony concerning a free gift to be received; a free prop to lean upon, &c. Now in such cases as these, it is certain, that if a person's

mind be not in some measure relieved, pacified and encouraged by such a report, he does not really believe it, however he may profess it; but entertains some objections or scruples in his mind about it, unless he be supposed to be absolutely stupid and unconcerned about his own disease, want, or danger; in which case it is plain, he is not apprised of the necessity of such a relief for himself. Now when a person receives his hope and peace from such a free open testimony, he is not relieved by the thought of any difference between him and another, to whom it is as free and suitable as to himself; neither does he apprehend himself to have a better right or a clearer interest than another: but his satisfaction arises from the truth reported, which he apprehends and believes, though another does not. Now to bring this over to spiritual concerns. The free grace truth of the gospel affords hope and encouragement, and becomes the foundation of all those actings of the believing soul, commonly called acts of faith, but may be more properly called actings of love (for faith always operates by love) such as trusting, coming, embracing, and the like: for no person will come to Christ or trust in God, or embrace the promises, unless he has first a love in his soul to God in Christ, arising from a view and belief of his free grace. Neither are these actings of the mind to be considered as any arduous or difficult attempt in order to obtain peace and hope towards God; for they naturally arise and flow from the encouraging and soul-pacifying truth believed. They are merely motions or thoughts of the mind, generated and excited by the gracious truth believed. For in such spiritual cases we must cast aside all the external acts of the body, by which they are represented and expressed, and built upon. While this truth is clear in a person's mind, he can and does rest upon it, or rather upon God in Christ revealed therein; and so it becomes his continual support and refreshment, yea, and his continual motive to love and obedience. This is living by the faith of the Son of God. And in proportion as a person is quickened, enlivened, animated and supported hereby; in that proportion he is conscious of his connection with Christ, and vital union to him: because he now knows and feels in his own heart, that he has his strength and comfort directly and immediately from Christ revealed. Thus God gives his people a sense of his love, an

enjoyment of his favour, and a proof, seal, or evidence of their own interest in him. If a person loses sight of the truth, or is turned from it in any degree; he so far can have no true rest, and is in danger of seeking rest from some other quarter, or settling his hopes upon some false foundation. Thus he loses the true enjoyment of God's favour, and can never be recovered to it, but by being driven off from every other attempt, and having this truth afresh revived upon his mind, by some means or other. And among the various methods which the Spirit may use to recover a backslider, an eminent one is: to bring to remembrance past experiences of the efficacy of the gospel; not that his comfort may arise from those experiences, but from that free and perfect grace that lay at the foundation of them. The belief of this truth, together with its genuine influence upon the heart and conduct, is that which distinguishes believers from unbelievers. And whatever physical influences of the Spirit may be supposed in the matter of, regeneration and sanctification, separate from the truth believed; these can have no apparent share in pacifying the conscience and comforting the heart, as they are in their own nature utterly invisible, and so cannot become a matter of Christian experience. Neither must anything previous to or distinct from the thought of a free and perfect Saviour be here admitted, in giving case to the conscience; if it be, the peace resulting from thence is delusive, and derogatory to the all-sufficiency of Christ's work.

I would farther observe, that upon this plan, true holiness and true consolation keep pace with each other; until we come to such a situation, as to be beyond all hazard of losing this holy enjoyment in any degree, which cannot be till we come to glory. This likewise the believer is kept in a state of constant immediate dependence upon God; so that while he is guarded against any abuses on the one hand, lest a promise being left of entering into God's rest, he should seem to come short of it; he has on the other hand sufficient encouragement and pleasure in the way of gospel holiness; being attracted and enlivened by the continual hope of the free gospel. The believer has at no time ground to say, 'My mountain stands strong, and I shall never be moved;' but he has at all times reason to say,



'The Lord is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble;' and he actually does say it in his heart, as long as he is favoured with the sight of the necessity, sufficiency and freeness of divine grace in Christ for himself.

The believer's peace and joy then, rises and sinks just in proportion as he perceives the evidence of this gospel truth, as pointing to himself as well as to any other; accordingly, he cannot tread in any forbidden path for peace and comfort with this truth in his eye, without being struck with the solemn reflection, that he is now departing from the true God, undervaluing the hope of the gospel, and despising that love which is as jealous as it is attractive. The room that is left for this solemn reflection, is that which keeps us in a state and sense of absolute, constant, immediate dependence upon God in Christ. This is indeed what we very much want, and aim to be set free from in some degree and in some way or another. But the gospel in its purity will not permit it. Let it not here be thought, that this manner of stating things produces a slavish fear of divine wrath; for 'he is not afraid of evil tidings whose heart is fixed trusting in the Lord.' So that his fear only serves to keep or drive him from every false way and dangerous refuge, and to fix his heart and hope upon God in Christ, as his only hope and portion.

#### BRIEF THOUGHTS

### **III. CONCERNING THE WAY IN WHICH A BELIEVER COMES AT TRUE SATISFACTION ABOUT HIS STATE TOWARDS GOD.**

1. No question has ever been stated of greater consequence to our peace and comfort than this—We know that we must all appear

before the judgment-seat of Christ. As soon as the king of terrors has given the mortal stroke, our souls must launch into an unknown eternity, and enter on a state of everlasting happiness or misery. Our own consciences sometimes place us beforehand in the presence of God, the Judge of all. And a time will speedily come, when we shall approach to the very borders of eternity. If conscience be now awake, the question presses upon the mind with the greatest importunity, 'How can I be satisfied as to the concerns of my immortal soul?'—If Christians in general were but thus brought solemnly to realize these important matters, they would presently apprehend in their very hearts, that nothing less than a foundation entirely safe, and a hope absolutely sure, would serve their purpose.

2. But where is that to be found which is sufficient to support the soul and conscience in the agonies of death, and the prospect of an unchangeable condition? Where is that which will give satisfying relief to the conscience and a clear confidence before God? All will immediately say, In Jesus Christ alone. But cloth this answer still leave room for such questions as these? 'How shall I come at Christ? or how shall I be assured of my interest in him? What shall, or what must I do to obtain it? or what must I experience or practice in order to gain this satisfaction?' Here come in abundance of perplexing queries, and a scene of important difficulties not easy to be solved. So that professors are almost as much at a loss about their everlasting state, as if they had heard nothing of Christ, and his work for sinners.

To obtain satisfaction in this, we set about examining our own hearts and ways, our past conduct, or past experiences, in hopes of finding something there, which may be the means of allaying our fears, and easing our consciences. We look with eagerness and solicitude into every corner of our hearts, to see whether in the midst of all the bad we find there, we cannot find something good wrought in us, or something truly gracious in our experiences, that may be a proper satisfying proof of our special interest. Perhaps we discern some probable evidences in our favour: we think we have felt some distinguishing experiences; and thus obtain ease and relief. But what

if it should appear after all, that these evidences are attended with uncertainty? What if there be some reason to suspect that they may be delusive? How then can the mind be eased, or the conscience pacified upon this plan?—While we are thus anxiously employed, seeking rest to our souls, we are under a strong bias to think the best, and make the best, of what we find and feel. How then can we know, but that under the influence of such a propensity, we may actually put a cheat upon ourselves, through a fond desire to apprehend that our state is at bottom safe and good? And what if our deceitful hearts should succeed, in this case, in bringing us into a delusion? Where are we then?—Perhaps these thoughts, at first view, seem to take away all use for marks and signs. But they do not, as we shall soon see. However that be, no one, I think, can deny or evade the force of them, how searching or discouraging soever they may seem. But there are some further thoughts equally alarming, which must not be omitted. Have not many made a shining profession, and, in their own and others' apprehension, been favoured with the most distinguishing experiences who yet have turned out hypocrites and apostates? Have not many talked high things about the witness, seal, and earnest of the Spirit, as enjoyed by themselves, who yet have been in the event found liars?

Again, are there not counterfeit graces, comforts, and experiences? Can these things be denied? Upon this plan for obtaining peace, we must therefore distinguish very nicely, before we can be supposed to arrive at any degree of certainty, by discriminating what is genuine from what is counterfeit; and after all, most probably the matter must remain in doubtful, sad suspense. How then can we have any solid peace? Again, perhaps we are in such circumstances as to the distress of our souls, or as to approaching death, that a speedy answer must be given, or the soul sinks under its load, and runs almost into desperation. Many inexpressible struggles are produced in the soul, perhaps when there is neither time nor capacity to examine the matter sufficiently. And yet in the midst of these unhappy circumstances, if a person discerns the infinite importance

of his soul, he sees that nothing short of that certainty upon which lie may immediately rest, will afford him satisfaction.

3. But does the divine word leave us in such a perplexity as this? If it does, where is our hope, our rest, our confidence?

Must not Christianity be, upon this plan, a very uncomfortable religion; a very uncertain scheme for hope and peace toward God? And does it not, in this way, actually leave us, yea, and oblige us, to take the chief of our hope and comfort directly from what we may be supposed to have felt or done? Behold, in the midst of all these inextricable perplexities, the gospel proclaims the Lord Jesus Christ, and all his salvation, open and free for the sure relief and hope of the distressed and guilty soul. If this be discerned in its beauty and importance, how necessary, how valuable, encouraging, and attracting, must the hope of the gospel appear ! Now while everything else proves uncertain, this is certain; when every other refuge and support fails, this appears sufficiently firm and free: it is found a safe retreat, a sure foundation, a sufficient stay; detached from every other thought and consideration.

But perhaps your anxious minds will here object, 'How can I be satisfied without an assurance of my own special interest in Christ; the general declaration of the gospel cannot afford me this, because it bears an equal aspect to all sinners as such?' But I would ask again, What kind of assurance do you want? Do you want to be so certified of your everlasting welfare, as to be set at rest from all sort of fear? Do you want to be able to say, 'My mountain stands strong, and I shall never be moved?' Do you want such assurance as shall allow you to think yourself safe, in any other way than that of constant, immediate, absolute dependence upon God in Christ for all you desire and expect, and so trusting, loving, and obeying him accordingly? This the word of God gives no one, because it does not assert directly concerning any individual now living, that he shall certainly be saved: neither can you obtain it by any positive certainty arising from duties or experiences, since the heart is always deceitful.

But see here in the gospel such a certainty afforded, as brings the soul into a state of immediate dependence upon God, and cleaving to him alone; assuring us, that in resting on him we are safe, and nowhere else: that while we in our hearts esteem God in Christ as our only hope and portion, our everlasting interests are secure: not merely in the purpose of God, and according to the everlasting covenant, but likewise according to the open promise of the gospel. Yea, we are assured, that in knowing and obeying the gospel, the Spirit witnesses with our spirit, that we may enjoy everlasting consolation, and good hope through grace.

The Scriptures most comfortably declare the gospel to be of such a nature, that 'whosoever believes it shall be saved;' while they aver, with equal solemnity, that 'he who believeth not shall be damned.' So that our greatest concern lies here; lest our faith should not be the faith of God's elect; lest our hope should not be the hope of the gospel; and lest our obedience should not be the obedience of faith. Whether our faith, hope, and obedience, be of the right kind, can only be known by its being produced, supported, or influenced by the gospel. Let us then look a little closely into this matter. Every person, except one that is in despair, has some hope; and that hope of his is supported by some thoughts or sentiments in his mind and heart. Now, I say, that if the sentiment which gives a person his peace of conscience, be anything opposite to, or separate from the gospel, as proclaiming a free and perfect Saviour, he does not believe it, but he has, or desires to have, a satisfaction which the gospel does not administer. Perhaps it is an enthusiastic satisfaction, formed upon a persuasion or appropriation wrought by some spirit, which speaks to him more than, or aside from what the gospel, properly understood, will warrant. Or perhaps his satisfaction is Antinomian; such as affords him reason to fear sin less than otherwise he might see a necessity for, if he had not this hope. Whereas we must always take it for granted, if we can dare to sin, or can dare to neglect our duty, under an apprehension of the safety of our state, however obtained, or however proved, that we do not now understand the true grace of God; for that makes all who understand it to know and feel, that it

teaches them to 'deny all ungodliness, and worldly lusts,' &c. The satisfaction which the gospel affords is such, that a person cannot indulge sin, without losing that satisfaction; because, in so doing, his heart says, that not Christ, but self and sense are his hope and portion. Or perhaps a person's peace may be Pharisaical or self-righteous in some shape or other, supported by some species of self-confidence; saying in his heart, 'I cannot be contented with a Saviour freely and openly proclaimed: I do not like to be set upon a level with the vilest of sinners, and to receive my hope and comfort upon the same plan with such; I will not stand upon the same footing with them.' Or else he will say, 'I have, or I must have something distinguishing in me, some mark, or sign, or I will not, I dare not believe and rest upon Christ.'

But after all, you may say, 'How can I be satisfied, unless I am conscious that I believe truly and savingly; since the scriptures say, He that believeth shall not be damned?' Must I not then, by examination and proof, have it appear to my conscience, that I am a true believer, before I can have any well-grounded satisfaction?'

This I find to be the grand objection, frequently made and urged against the present view of the gospel: and since it may be considered as a case of conscience, by which many are perplexed in their souls, as well as a sentimental objection, whereby many may be stumbled, I shall therefore take the more particular notice of it in the following observations.

5. If we attend then to common sense, and constant experience, as to the nature, manner, and proof of believing, or seeing, we shall find, that these things are of such a nature, that they entirely resolve themselves into their objects, so far as experience is concerned therein. A person is no farther conscious that he sees an object, than as the object seen does some way affect him: neither is a person properly conscious that he believes a proposition of importance, any farther than what he believes impresses him. When we behold an object, in common cases, our minds are not employed in thinking

about the manner of our seeing, but are only led to attend to the object seen; and so in believing, we are not thinking about any exercises of our own minds therein, but only about the thing believed. So that a person comes to know that he sees or believes, not by reflection upon, or examination into anything in himself; but by finding or experiencing, that what he sees or believes affects his mind. Thus there is produced a sort of experimental union between him that sees and believes, and what is seen or believed by him; so that he is affected with pleasure or pain, according to the light in which the thing appears, that is seen, heard, or believed. Now let us apply this plain thought to the report of the gospel.

6. The doctrine of free grace in Jesus Christ to sinners as such, proclaimed in the word, is in itself most joyful, comfortable, encouraging, and soul-pacifying news: therefore we cannot know that we believe it, but by feeling, or becoming conscious, that we are comforted, encouraged, or pacified thereby. Accordingly, the first effect of this belief must be peace of conscience before God through the blood of Christ, and some sense of the divine favour through the righteousness of Christ, proclaimed as free in the gospel. This must be, more or less, the necessary consequence, unless there remain in the mind some ignorance, doubt, or mistake, about the gospel itself; or unless the mind be drawn off to something else distinct from it or opposite to it, whereby the efficacy of the truth proclaimed may be enervated or undermined. When this appears to be the case, nothing can be more suited to remove any impediment in the way of its efficacy, than the declaring, explaining, proving, or vindicating the truth, with its importance. If this method be rendered effectual by the Spirit of God, who alone can do it, then the mistake is rectified, the mind enlightened, and the doubt solved; whereupon the person is encouraged and comforted by the blessed word, on which he is caused to hope.

7. Though what the person now sees and believes be in itself a general truth, openly proclaimed, yet the effect produced in believing it, is a peculiar experience of spiritual peace, rest, and refreshment.

So that while others may be supposed to remain strangers to it, or to disbelieve it, or to be under some mistake about it, he that believes it according as it is declared in the word, becomes possessed of a distinguishing experience, whereby he differs from what he was before, and from what many others are.

8. This distinguishing experience is of such a nature, that it contains or produces, more or less, an experimental consciousness of an interest in, and enjoyment of, the blessings comprehended in the declaration of free grace. For when a person sees the Son, and believeth on him, as freely exhibited, he becomes conscious, that what he sees in Christ becomes his light; that Christ, in whom he believes, becomes his hope; that his soul is supported by that on which he trusts and leans; and that he is quickened and attracted by that glorious gospel which he believes and loves. This is the way in which all spiritual blessings come to be experienced and enjoyed by us. In this way we may arrive at satisfaction and support. And it is in vain, and unsafe for us, to desire or to seek after any other knowledge of special interest, than what arises out of, and is accompanied with, this sense and experience of a vital union and connection between our souls and Christ in a way of believing. Christ is brought so exceedingly near to us in the gospel of his grace, that he is no sooner seen and known, as there exhibited, but this peace and hope must arise in the soul more or less; otherwise, neither Christ, nor the gospel, nor the divine grace, as revealed, can be said to be quite free.

9. If a person does not become conscious, in some degree, of peace, satisfaction and support, purely from what he perceives and believes standing forth in the free declaration of grace, he does not understand, nor does he credit the gospel; for therein is exhibited to us freely all our salvation.

Our faith can be proved only by this, That the truth itself, or which is the same, the blood and righteousness of Christ freely revealed, first pacifies the conscience before God, and then working by love, has a purifying effect upon our souls. If this kind of peace does not enter



the mind, through the revelation of grace, a person will still be seeking after spiritual comfort and support separate from it, or opposite to it: so that his heart despises, or his thoughts evade the true gospel; and lie is accordingly in real danger, and under some awful delusion. Where the gospel is not discerned by any person in its proper freeness, and its primitive glory, the objection now under consideration will return and continue upon his mind; and his defective and mistaken view of the gospel will still leave him under the influence of the spirit of self-dependence, as he will see no other way of obtaining or enjoying peace, but by a reflection upon something found in him, or experienced by him. Thus it appears, that the whole force of this objection proceeds at bottom from a disbelief of the proper immediate freeness of divine grace revealed in the gospel. For either a person does believe it, or he does not; if he does, he is in some measure pacified, comforted, and attracted thereby: if he does not, then he cannot see how he can have any proper peace to his mind, but by reflection upon himself; and accordingly seeks after, or rests upon some false and dangerous prop. This he is to be warned against by being reminded, that he who believes not shall be damned.

While Jesus Christ is proclaimed as a foundation so sure, that whosoever believeth shall not make haste as one in confusion; it is likewise to be added that the hail shall sweep away the refuges of lies; and such a refuge everything is, besides the Redeemer himself. Isa. xxviii. 16, 17.

10. All the scripture exhortations and promises to believing conspire to support this view of our subject, if they are rightly understood. These gracious exhortations and promises of the word may be briefly expressed thus: Believe, and live; look, and be saved; trust, and be safe; come, and find rest. Now all these declarations have evidently a most

encouraging and conscience-pacifying meaning in them; for they plainly contain, to an enlightened understanding, such a refreshing

import, as carries the mind at once beyond its own exercises, to the glorious, gracious object presented in them. A person apprehending the true meaning of such expressions, is not stopped in, or perplexed about the acts mentioned; but seeing that, by these calls and promises, salvation in Jesus Christ is freely presented, this sense of the divine freeness plainly suggested, becomes the life, the strength, and the hope of the soul, in all its actings towards God in Christ.

I could dwell upon this subject with abundance of pleasure, and illustrate it by various similitudes. But to be brief, let us take only one of these phrases into present consideration: 'Come to me,' says Christ, 'and I will give you rest.' Now one that is entangled with some legal thought, will immediately fix upon the act of coming; desiring to know how to perform this act aright, or to see whether he performed it or no; thinking that he can have no peace nor rest, but from the consideration of the right performance thereof. Whereas one that is taught the proper freeness of divine grace, as thus exhibited, will fix his eye directly upon the word me. 'Does Jesus Christ say, Come to me, and I will give you rest? Surely this is enough to encourage and attract my soul: I need nothing more for my hope, than to be assured of such a free welcome.' With this thought his soul is pacified; and its motion towards Christ being, as I may say, excited by, and filled with a sense of this divine free love, he comes, and finds rest. We may suppose one deep in debt, and ready to be arrested, to be addressed thus, 'Go to such an one, he is able and ready to pay your whole debt.' Would not this testimony itself set his mind at rest directly? Yes, surely; and his act of going would not be at all considered as previously necessary to the ease of his mind, but would be found to flow from it.

## **CONCLUSION.**

By these plain thoughts I would hope, through the blessing of the Spirit of grace, some may be led to see how much unbelief and self-righteousness must lie at the bottom of such a frame of spirit, as makes a person endeavour to perform a certain act, in order to obtain peace to his mind; or makes him examine whether he has performed it aright, in order to have peace from that consideration. For this is certainly a denial of the freeness of grace as revealed, and turns the gospel as it were into a new law, for peace and hope towards God; yea it seems evidently to proceed from a spirit of self-dependence, which will not permit a person to believe the immediate freeness of divine grace, or to be satisfied by it, or to rest in it, for want of discerning some previous change in himself for the better.

But some may here reply, with an anxious concern, 'Are there not some who are true believers, who yet are not fully assured of the safety of their state in Christ.' I readily answer, Yes, there are; for the least degree of true faith is connected with salvation. Yet as none can come to a clear satisfaction about themselves but in this way of believing, therefore I cannot consistently and safely take any other method of promoting the comfort of such, but by presenting before them a free and complete Saviour, to be rested upon, and rejoiced in; and if a person cannot receive comfort through such a gospel-declaration, it is both unsafe, and in vain for him to seek it any other way, in such circumstances. But if, through the operation of the blessed Spirit, by means of this gospel, his hope and comfort is promoted, the more he advances in hope and love this way, the more clearly he will be able to say with the apostle, 2 Tim. i. 12, 'I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.' While he perceives the all-sufficiency of Christ's free grace, the satisfaction of his soul is maintained by it, and he is more or less persuaded of the safety of what he has committed into Christ's hands. Here then lies the centre, the spring, the strength, of all that hope which is necessary to support and comfort our hearts.

Should any ask again, 'But is there no hope to be obtained farther than that which is exhibited in the gospel to all? Can there be no room for thankfulness for distinguishing grace?' I answer, that unless we have this first hope, this beginning of confidence, for our support and strength continually, it is quite impossible that any distinguishing experience should ever be produced and maintained, or that any true evidences should appear in us. For if this be not the life and strength of the soul, namely, a free revealed Christ, the person has reason to suspect all his duties, evidences, and experiences. But if a person be comforted and quickened; if he be encouraged to trust, and constrained to love Christ hereby; he may well find reason to be abundantly thankful for distinguishing grace, crying out with holy admiration and gratitude, 'How is it that thou wilt manifest thyself to us, and not unto the world !' John xiv. 22. Yea, while he is under this blessed influence of the gospel by the Spirit, he is taught to say with the apostle, 'The life I live in the flesh, is by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.' Gal. ii. 20. In this manner a believer makes use of his experiences to judge of his state; and such experiences as these, with their genuine fruits, are indeed the surest marks of our election. 1 Thess. i. 4, 5.

But instead of all this, we are too generally taught, that our consciences cannot be pacified by the blood of Christ immediately, as flowing freely to sinners; nor be truly comforted thereby. But on the contrary, almost the whole stress must be laid upon our discerning some previous gracious work; which must be made out to be saving, by the exercise of self-examination. Accordingly this duty is most commonly explained, enforced, and performed, with this view. As to that exhortation, 2 Cor. xiii. 5, 'Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves: What, know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?' Nothing can be more evident to one who reads it with attention, and views it in its connection, than that the design of it is to intimate this much; viz. That if anything appears in the temper or conduct of a professor, which is disagreeable to the gospel, he ought to take occasion from

thence to suspect whether he be in the faith. But this very text plainly suggests, by the surprise couched under these words, 'What, know ye not your own selves?' that if our experiences are of the right stamp, they will evidence themselves. —It is by faith that Christ dwells in the heart; and faith or believing is of such a nature, that it does more or less evidence itself to our consciences: and to confirm this witness of our own spirits, we may be sure, that the divine Spirit will not fail in joining his testimony, as we proceed loving and obeying the gospel we believe. So that there is no occasion for a laborious search, followed by a train of reasoning, to obtain peace and comfort. We need not be so suspicious of the hope of the gospel, or of the faithfulness of the Spirit as a Comforter. We may well leave this part to God, since he has proclaimed enough in the free gospel to afford us sufficient relief; and has promised that those who know, love, and obey him, shall not be forsaken by him. I remember the Psalmist once, in a disconsolate frame, was for calling to remembrance his song in the night, to obtain comfort. Psalm lxxvii. But he was unsuccessful in pursuing this method; and at length obtained comfort, by remembering the years of the right hand of the Most High: by which he meant, not his own past experiences, but the wonders God had formerly wrought for his people by Moses and Aaron. If then we would follow his example, we are to call to mind the accepted time, and the day of salvation, when Christ arose from the dead, having obtained complete salvation for them that believe.

I know you will here be ready to say, 'Are all our past experiences then to be forgotten, or not improved as evidences and encouragements?' I answer, Far be it; for though they are not to be used for pacifying our consciences, &c., yet they are to be remembered as confirmations of the faith to our minds, since, if they are genuine, they are so many proofs of the truth and power of the gospel; and likewise to make it more fully appear that we are in the faith; as also to encourage a further dependence upon the same free grace and love, which was the root of all those former gracious experiences. According to what the Psalmist says, Psalm lxiii. 7,

'Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice.'

Notwithstanding this, I will venture to say, that professors cannot be too suspicious of themselves, as to any experiences they have felt, or any duties they have performed. The scriptures are full of exhortations to watchfulness, jealousy, caution, and self-examination; always taking it for granted, that joy and peace come into the mind in believing and loving the testimony of God's grace in Christ. Such suspicion cannot do us any real damage; for if, in the midst of all our jealousies, the free-grace-truth in its glory and beauty appears to our view, that will prove an anchor to our hope, and an incentive to our love, even when we can find nothing about us but what would tend to discourage and sink us. And it will be found, that the comfort flowing thus into our souls from the gospel by the Spirit, as a contrast to the effects of our own self-jealousy, will be much more safe, solid, satisfying, and truly sanctifying, than what we think to obtain any other way.

Though these thoughts look as if they were intended to make believers always question their state, yet it will be found far otherwise; because they serve only to lead and keep them close to that foundation, which alone is secure, and where they will find rest. But however, in a case of so great importance, there is no room for flattery or compliment. Either you do, or do not question your state: if you do, there is no other way, that I know of, to obtain satisfaction, but by believing on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ directly as standing forth to view in the gospel; for it is in this way, and through this medium, that God conveys to his people a sense of his favour. If you do not question your state, but are well assured concerning it, then this assurance, if solid, will bear the trial: neither need you be afraid to look into the worst of it. But if a suspicion, arising in the mind upon this, should shake your confidence, it then becomes evident, that so far it was not placed upon Christ, but upon some good opinion you had formed concerning yourselves.

I shall therefore conclude the whole with one indubitable maxim, which it becomes all Christians constantly to retain; it is this: An uncertain foundation is an unsafe foundation.

However then Christians are of the number of the elect, redeemed and adopted; however they may, or ought to be esteemed such, by themselves or others, agreeable to their profession, practice, or experience; and however it be their duty to be thankful for any experiences or comforts which they have felt; all which is readily allowed: yet there is no absolute certainty to be gathered upon this plan, by reason of the deceitfulness of the heart. From whence it is plain, that God never intended his people should take their rest herein; but that they should, in the midst of all their hopes and fears about their personal interest, be led, confined, and kept to that hope and refuge that is in itself safe and sure. Nothing is more necessary than this, nor is there anything that we are naturally more averse to. Some make the world their portion, others make criminal indulgences their delight; and many make their own righteousness, in some shape or other, their confidence: and shall I add, that some are for placing it upon their experiences, and upon what they call the work of the Spirit in their hearts; and upon anything, rather than on the freeness of gospel-grace, which the work of the Spirit is designed to lead us to.

But if we are led and taught by the Holy Spirit to rest directly upon Christ alone, then we have the anchor of our souls both sure and steadfast: then the superstructure of gospel experience and obedience, built upon this foundation, will be good and solid; receiving all its solidity and firmness from its immediate connection with the foundation whereon it is built. Neither can we attain to any steady hope concerning our own interest, but in working upon this plan, and resting upon this prop. If a person looks upon the hope held forth in the gospel to be only an uncertain conditional hope, apprehending he may not securely rest upon it, unless through the consciousness of something previously wrought in him, or done by him, he is of course induced to seek after, or look to something in

himself, for the reason, or immediate ground of his confidence before God; and while this sentiment prevails in his heart, every duty he performs is legalized, and every experience he may have felt is perverted, by being placed exactly in the room of a revealed Christ. But if, on the contrary, the person sees that God's love in Christ, as revealed in the free gospel, points directly towards him for his only foundation, then the more he is apprehensive of his own guilt and danger, the more he is obliged to trust in Christ, and constrained to love him: and so the gospel-hope becomes a spur to all cheerful obedience. The believer then does not take his comfort from his obedience; but taking it immediately from Christ, he enjoys comfort in the exercise of love and obedience. For every exercise of evangelical love, and every act of gospel-obedience, has some comfort attending it; while every departure from Christ produces darkness and distress, unless the soul be deluded and deceived by some false comfort. Thus, upon the whole, it appears, that if the Lord the Spirit gives us right views of the full free grace held forth in the gospel, we shall be thereby kept at a distance from the self-righteous hope of the Pharisee, the licentious hope of the Antinomian, the self-sufficient hope of the free-willier, the conditional hope of the Neonomian, the presumptuous hope of him who is confident of his own interest without sufficient evidence for it; and we shall be prevented from taking up with the uncertain hope of him who does, more or less, place his evidences or experiences in the room of Christ, for his immediate and chief reason of encouragement and confidence. Then we shall have joy and peace in believing; and abound in hope, and in holiness, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

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