

FRIENDLY LETTERS

TO A

LADY;

IN WHICH

SEVERAL IMPORTANT

DOCTRINES OF THE GOSPEL

ARE

EXPLAINED AND VINDICATED.



By JOHN BUTLER,
Pastor of the Baptist Church in Winthrop, Me.



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DISTRICT OF MASSACHUSETTS....TO WIT:

District Clerk's Office.

BE IT REMEMBERED, That on the twenty-sixth day of March, A. D. 1830, in the fifty-fourth year of the Independence of the United States of America, JAMES LORING, of the said District, has deposited in this office the title of a Book, the right whereof he claims as Proprietor, in the words following, to wit:

Friendly Letters to a Lady; in which several Important Doctrines of the Gospel are explained and vindicated. By JOHN BUTLER, Pastor of the Baptist Church in Winthrop, Me.

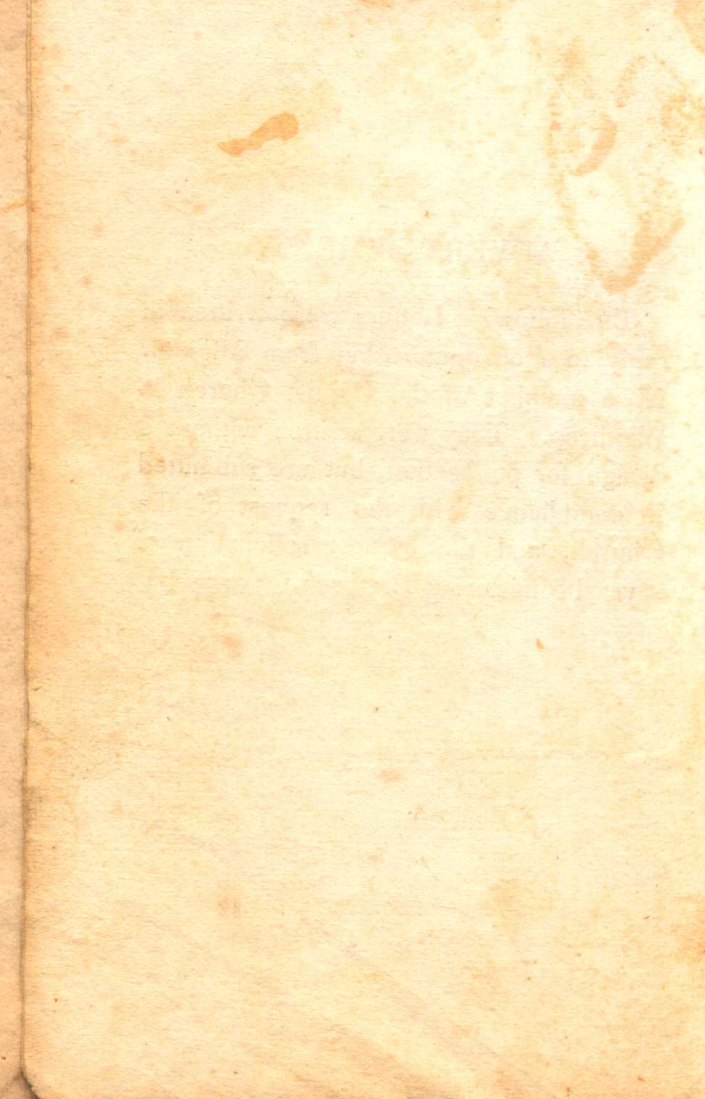
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JNO. W. DAVIS, } Clerk of the District
of Massachusetts.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following Letters were written in reply to a communication from Miss E. N., a member of the Baptist Church in Winthrop. They were written without a design for publication, but are submitted in compliance with the request of the Church, and the earnest solicitation of several Ministering Brethren.



RECOMMENDATIONS.

Boston, March 29, 1830.

Having read a part of the "Friendly Letters to a Lady," with some care, I am disposed to think very favourably of the little book, as judicious, and characterized with deep gospel piety, and well adapted to establish the Christian in sound sentiments and correct practice. I may express the hope that this book will be extensively read, and that it will prove one means of promoting the cause of genuine piety, and the good order of the church of our Lord Jesus Christ.

C. P. GROSVENOR.

Boston, April 1, 1830.

I have read the "Friendly Letters to a Lady," written by the Rev. Mr. Butler. It is, I think, generally undesirable that books be introduced by "letters of commendation," which are, I suspect, sometimes regarded as substitutes for intrinsic merit, rather than as evidences of unusual worth. This little book, certainly, does not need such an introduction. But if my opinion can aid its circulation, I may confidently say, that it is written in a neat style; the temper which pervades it is affectionate

and faithful ; and the statements of religious truth are discreet and scriptural. That it may be useful in confirming the faith of Christians, and reclaiming sinners from the error of their ways, is my sincere prayer.

JAMES D. KNOWLES.

From the knowledge I have of the judicious and experienced author of these Letters, and an attentive perusal of the few pages which have been submitted to my inspection, I think the production will prove highly interesting and useful.

HOWARD MALCOM.

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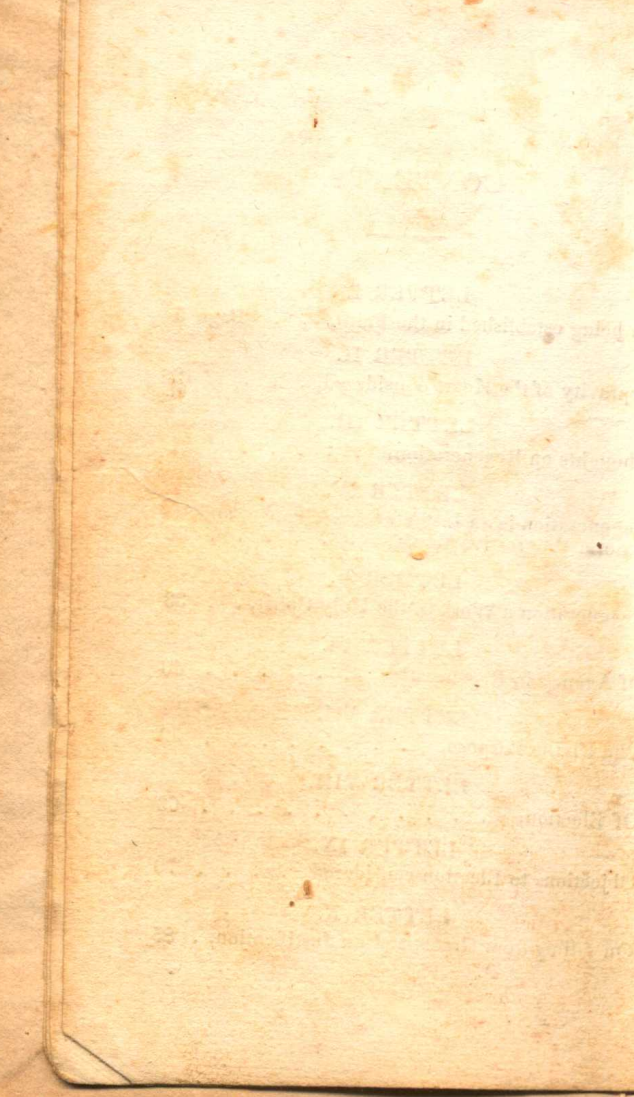
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FRIENDLY LETTERS

To a Lady.



LETTER I.

ON BEING ESTABLISHED IN THE FAITH.

Dear Sister,

You may, perhaps, feel grateful, that, concerning your faith or practice in religion, you are accountable to no human tribunal. This I grant, but it is important that you should feel your accountability to CHRIST, the Head of the Church.

As it respects your covenant obligations, you are bound by them, no further, than they are in accordance with divine truth. It is of great moment, however, to you, and to the cause of God, that you should not renounce the truth, nor make

light of any covenant engagements which are according to it. From your letter, addressed to the church, it appears, that on removing from this place to M. you have formed acquaintance with a people, whose religious sentiments are very different from those which you professed to believe, when you were with us. Speaking of them, you say, "Within a few months, God has been pouring out his Spirit among this people." And you seem to think that what they believe is truth, or the Lord would not bless them. But does he not bless those also, who believe the doctrines which you have lately renounced? This circumstance therefore proves nothing. The fact is, our gracious Lord "deals not with us after our sins, nor rewards us according to our iniquities." If God should withhold his favour from his people, till they were free from error, who then could expect his blessing? You speak of the abundant goodness of God to your soul, since you have been with that people, and on this account, seem to think, that you

have now found that “liberty wherewith Christ maketh his people free.” But why should this confirm you that their sentiments are truth? Did you not experience the “goodness of God to your soul,” in years past, when you were with those who believed what you now renounce—when you wept and sighed and prayed with them—when infinite mercy opened the prison door, struck off your fetters, and led you forth into the light of life—when your voice mingled with theirs in praise to Jesus for his unmerited pity and love? Did you not experience the goodness of God, when you were baptized in the name of the sacred Trinity, and joined yourself to them in church relation? And have you not experienced the presence of Jesus at his table, when with them you commemorated his dying love? Or were all these interesting scenes delusions? And if so, what better evidence have you, that your later joys are not delusions also?

In the course of a few years, Providence

may place you among a different denomination of Christians from that which you have lately embraced, and if there should be a revival among them, and you should “share in the gracious blessing,” and “feel a fellowship for them as Christians,” you might be as much induced to remove your relation to that denomination, as you have been to unite with the denomination you now fellowship. It is of great importance to have the heart established with grace. Flattery is a powerful snare, whether it be self-flattery, or that of professed friends, and our minds may be prepared for delusions, by emotions which we little suspect. In the height of a religious excitement, every thing becomes interesting, and there is much to animate the pious heart. Many are daily coming forward, and expressing either a concern for their souls, or a joyful hope of salvation. Such was the religious state of things in this place, a few years since. But such seasons are usually short, and followed by a time of trial. Many, who had been re-

strained by the powerful displays of divine grace, soon become bold and decided in expressing their opposition to religion. Numbers, whose minds, though not renewed, had been enlightened to see their danger, turn again to folly ; many who professed to have experienced the great salvation, turn away and walk no more with the saints ; and others are carried in different directions by the various “ winds of doctrine” which assail them. But it is then that the true disciples of Christ should give evidence of the sincerity of their profession. I am persuaded that, in a few years, the events which you have lately witnessed, and participated in, will be regarded by you, with very different emotions from what you have hitherto realized. Cherishing a hope that you are a redeemed child of God, I do trust that he will yet teach you the doctrine of his word, and show you wherein you have erred ; for “ the meek will he teach his way, the meek will he guide in judgment.”

I must request you to peruse the following letters a second time, and I do hope you will read them with care, and with a desire to be led into the truth as it is in Jesus. And I do earnestly request you, and in this I cannot be denied, that, before you enter on the second letter, you will retire, where none but the eternal God, the Author of all truth, the Searcher of all hearts, the Judge of quick and dead, can witness your devotions. There spread your case before Him, and O! do it with a contrite spirit. Entreat him to show you his truth, and your duty. Pray for a heart to believe and rejoice in the doctrine of the Bible, whatever you may find that doctrine to be. There is no interest, worthy of serving, which can be promoted by religious error. Let us consider that we must soon stand before the judgment seat of Christ, and that

“ Nothing but truth before his throne
With honour can appear.”

That you may be then found at the right hand of the Judge, clothed with the garment of salvation, crowned with unfading glory, and receive from the lips of the adorable Saviour, that transporting invitation, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world," is, my dear Sister, the prayer of your

Affectionate Pastor.

LETTER II.

DEPRAVITY OF THE HEART CONSIDERED.

Dear Sister,

I would first invite you to reflect on the disposition of the heart in man, prior to regeneration. The declaration of our Lord, John v. 42, will direct us. "I know you, that you have not the love of God in you." See also Rom. viii. 7. "The carnal mind is enmity against God, it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." We shall readily admit that these passages are descriptive of the unregenerated heart. In this state of mind, man perceives no beauty in holiness, he derives no pleasure from spiritual things, but is opposed to holiness, and to the means of promoting it. That temper of heart, and course of life which God abhors, is the element in which he delights.

Those affections of heart, and services which God, and all holy beings approve, he hates. This disposition in man is what we mean by *depravity*.

A little before the flood, the Most High declared that all flesh had corrupted their way before him, Gen. vi. 5. "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." David, nearly fifteen hundred years after this, in giving a description of the unrenewed heart, affirmed, "They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy, there is none that doeth good, no, not one." And further, that the language of the heart is, "No God." Psalm xiv. More than a thousand years after David recorded the above, St. Paul, directed by the same Spirit of inspiration, describes the disposition of unrenewed sinners, in the same language. Rom. iii. 9—18. Among other declarations contained in this portion of scripture are the following: "There is none right-

eous, no, not one. There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. There is no fear of God before their eyes." Hence it appears, that this description is not peculiar to any particular nation or generation of men, but is of universal application. The same apostle, in writing to his Ephesian brethren, reminded them, that before they were renewed, they "walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." This disposition of heart he termed, being "dead in trespasses and sins : " Eph. ii. 1, 2, and this is what we mean by *total depravity*.

It is true, that man, previous to regeneration, is the subject of many amiable affections, although the heart is, in the scriptures, represented as being "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked." Now, in order to reconcile these seeming contradictions, we should not deny the doctrine of *total depravity*, but observe

the different *relations* we sustain. We are members of civil society, and all civil and domestic virtues have respect to the obligations which this connexion confers. In this capacity, our motives are not called in question, and acts of justice and benevolence are rightly esteemed praiseworthy. But it should be also observed, we stand in an important relation to God ; we are the subjects of his moral government, which claims authority over the heart ; and a man may be a respected citizen, carefully observing the laws of a well regulated state of society, and sustain all the domestic relations with much affection and tenderness, though he is destitute of love to God, and an affectionate regard to his authority. Here the seeming contradiction is removed, and facts, observed in society, brought to harmonize with the scriptures.

You appear to have mistaken the decisions and remonstrances of natural conscience, for the grace of God. This is an error, which, I believe, has ensnared many of the dear people of God. Does not our

experience teach us, that the hearts, and consciences of unrenewed men are at variance. Previous to that change which has laid a foundation for our hope of salvation, did we not often feel our hearts inclined to gratifications, which we knew were displeasing to God, and forbidden in his word? Conscience seldom fails to reprove such iniquity. St. Paul marks a wide difference between knowledge, and the grace of God. He admits that a man may have all knowledge, and yet be as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.

It is evident also, that many of the truly pious, do not distinguish holy exercises from those which are merely the exercises of an awakened mind, which is yet unrenewed. A man may be much enlightened, and greatly alarmed, whose heart is not renewed. Many in this state have confessed that they were great sinners, manifested great anxiety, and earnestly entreated the prayers of the saints; and some of this character fall upon their knees, and cry for mercy. Now upon this sol-

em and critical point, you will, dear Sister, permit me to write freely. It is of infinite importance, that our views upon this subject should be correct. It is asked, ought we not to rejoice, when we witness the alarm and anxiety of awakened sinners? To which I answer, yes; not, however, because it proves to us that their hearts are renewed, or that they ever will be, but because such convictions usually precede a saving work of grace. As the scriptures teach us that the heart, before it is regenerated, is destitute of love to God, and consequently, of all holy exercises, and as we know that unregenerated men may, in that state, be enlightened and convinced of much important truth, so we ought not to say of such persons, that they are "seeking religion," that they are "seeking the Lord," that they are "seeking salvation." It is the fear of wrath to come, and not a sense of the evil of sin, which affects their minds. Unrenewed sinners do not hate sin; they lament that they have exposed themselves to condemnation, but

not that they have displeased and dishonoured infinite holiness and goodness. Let such persons be persuaded that they shall escape the miseries of hell, and their anxiety is all over, and they are filled with great joy. Unlimited damage is done to the souls of men, in times of revival of religion, by having no distinction made between the exercises of the renewed, and unrenewed heart.

It is a practice with many, which I have witnessed, that, when they observe symptoms of seriousness and anxiety of mind, to encourage such persons "to hope in Christ, to continue to seek the Lord and their salvation," and, without any regard to the nature of their exercises, to tell them, that for them to pray, or to kneel and ask the prayers of others, will be "taking one step towards heaven." Now it is an awful fact, that men never take one step towards heaven, till they *love a holy God, and his righteous law*. But unrenewed men do not love God, therefore they never take one "step towards

God and heaven," till their hearts are regenerated. What awful deception, then, is effected by many, who do not understand the way of salvation. My soul trembles for those who thus teach, and for those who are instructed in this way of delusion. Persons, thus flattered, will no doubt soon obtain a hope, and there is reason to expect that they will soon turn away from religion, and their last state be worse than the first. Now, as it was by *mistake* they were thought to have received the grace of God, so it is a mistake to believe that they have fallen from grace. It is sometimes asked, if men, while unregenerated, may be enlightened, and their judgments convinced of much important truth, why can they not, while in that state, be persuaded to repent of sin, and forsake it? The answer is plain: It is not because they cannot repent of sin, and forsake it, if they would, for they have all the *natural* ability which is necessary to perform every divine requirement. But it is because their hearts are alienated from God. Sin

is the moral element in which they delight, and the disposition of the heart prevails against the dictates of an enlightened judgment. Why can they not be induced to seek the Lord Jesus and his salvation? Because their "carnal mind is enmity against God." They may draw near to him with their mouths, and honour him with their lips, but their hearts are far from him, and must be changed, before they will turn and seek him. The inability, then, of unrenewed sinners, consists in an unholy disposition, or, which is the same, in the enmity of the heart against God; and this, surely, cannot extenuate their guilt.

With fervent prayer that you may be guided into all truth, I remain,

Yours affectionately.

LETTER III.

THOUGHTS ON REGENERATION.

Dear Sister,

In my last, I communicated to you my views of the unrenewed heart in man, and also adduced Scripture testimony, proving that these views were according to truth. In this, I propose to invite your attention to the important subject of *Regeneration*.

The human mind is capable of a great variety of changes, and our views and desires, our pleasures and pursuits, are rendered various, and are often changed by different systems of education. But education is limited to an improvement of the intellectual faculties. A restraint may be laid upon the passions, and an external reformation produced, by Divine Providence, but such reformations are partial and temporary. Great effects may be

produced upon the mind by free and solemn conversation, exhortation, and prayer; and particularly by public preaching. As the speaker leads his congregation to the foot of Sinai, while the thunders of divine justice are rolling from its trembling summit, it is natural to expect that some will fear, in view of their awful danger. And many have been much affected by the power of sympathy, while the scene of infinite pity and love has opened on their view from Calvary. It is to be seriously feared that many, after passing through these changes, which touch nothing but the passions, imagine that they have "got religion."

When the attention of people is excited to religious subjects, it is of the greatest importance that the nature of sin should be clearly defined, which can be done, only, by clearly explaining the nature, and claims of the divine law. The adorable perfections of God, as revealed in the Scriptures, should be carefully exhibited to their view, that they may be able to

judge, whether they love or hate him. True repentance should be carefully distinguished from that sorrow, which arises merely from the fear of punishment. It should also be shown, wherein humble faith in Christ differs from that vain, bold confidence, which is the fruit of ignorance and flattery.

Regeneration is a *moral* change, or a change of the disposition of the heart towards God, his righteous law, and towards holiness in general. The subject of this change is a new creature, and with him, "old things are past away, and, behold, all things are become new." And those who have not become the subjects of it are dead in trespasses and sins, enemies to God, both in their minds, and by wicked works. What then must be the nature of their sorrows, and prayers, and their "seeking religion," as it is called by many? Before regeneration, the will is free in all its acts of disobedience, impenitence and unbelief; but it never acts freely in loving God, hating sin, and believing in Jesus Christ.

Regeneration, or, which is the same, a change of the moral principle in man, lays a foundation for holy exercises ; such as love to God, godly sorrow for sin, humble submission to God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Having spiritual discernment, the renewed man can perceive the odious nature of sin, and particularly of his own pollution and guilt, on account of which, he abhors himself. He can now discover a beauty in holiness, and say of Jesus, "He is the chiefest among ten thousand, and the One altogether lovely." But why could he not see these things before ? That he *did not*, will be acknowledged by all. But the question is, *why* did he not ? The only answer is, his disposition was unholy.

If, dear Sister, the sentiment of this letter differs from the doctrine with which you say, "I have full fellowship," I appeal to your conscience, whether it differs from the views you had when you were first "translated from darkness into light."

The nature of regeneration is a deep, mysterious, and important subject. May its holy and happy fruits enrich our hearts, that we may be established, and “be not carried about by every wind of doctrine.”

Yours, &c.

LETTER IV.

REGENERATION IS AN INSTANTANEOUS
CHANGE, AND NOT A PROGRES-
SIVE WORK.

Dear Sister,

It was the object of my last letter to lay before you the nature, and some of the effects of regeneration. In this, I purpose to consider this change as *instantaneous*.

Some suppose that regeneration is a progressive work ; that the subject of it first turns his attention to the concerns of his soul, and a future world. That he reads the word of God, attends on public worship, meditates seriously and often upon his state as a sinner, and, by degrees, becomes acquainted with his guilt and danger. That he now forsakes his vices, his carnal pleasures and irreligious associates, and resolves to pray, and “ seek religion.”

That after advancing in this course for a time, the duties of religion become agreeable, easy and natural. The individual, under consideration, will now practise a very different course of conduct, and is supposed to be a new creature, and to have experienced all the change necessary to entitle him to a hope of future happiness.

But as regeneration is a change of the disposition of the heart, or the commencement of holiness there, it is morally certain that it takes place instantaneously. The figures used in the Scriptures to denote this change, plainly show that this is the fact. It is termed, being "born again, created in Christ Jesus, having a new heart and a right spirit" given us. Now, a person must be born again, or not born again; created in Christ, or not created in him; he either has a new heart and a right spirit, or he has not; and there must be a definite point of time when this change takes place. But there is one passage of scripture, in particular, to which I

would call your attention. "You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." Eph. ii. 1. This figure is plain, and decisive. Common sense teaches us that the resurrection of Lazarus was instantaneous, or in other words, that he was dead till he was alive. And as regeneration is here called a resurrection, it is represented to us as being instantaneous. There necessarily is a definite moment when divine life is imparted to the soul. Till the moment Lazarus was quickened, he was considered, by all the usages of society, and by both human and divine laws, as being dead; and from the moment in which he was quickened, he was considered by all these as a living man. So also, until the heart of man is regenerated, he is dead in trespasses and sins, walking, that is, choosing and acting according to the course of this world. Whatever may be his morality, or profession; whatever light or conviction he may have, still he is an unregenerated sinner. Here, my dear Sister, you are desired seriously

to consider, that until the moment the individual is regenerated, all his thoughts and feelings, all his prayers, concern and labours, are the thoughts, prayers, concern, and labours, of an unregenerated sinner ; that is, of one whose heart is enmity to God, not subject to his law, neither will it ever be, until it is changed. How absurd and delusive, then, it is, to tell unrenewed men, that there are certain conditions, which, if they will perform, their hearts will be regenerated.

It is to be greatly lamented, that many public teachers in religion make no distinction between the living, and the dead ; and no less to be deplored, that mankind are so opposed to those distinguishing rays of divine truth, which discover the polluted, guilty, perishing state of the soul. We ought to pity and pray for those, whose blindness and obstinacy induce them to misrepresent, and ridicule, those solemn truths, which lay the axe at the root of human pride. Divine truth has always had to contend with the united efforts of the

enemies of God, and this we are to expect; but it is affecting that professed Christians should lend their aid, in this fearful work.

Though, my respected friend, you have expressed your disbelief of some of my views of the Scriptures, yet I think we shall agree in this: "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." I have too much reason to hope that you have experienced this change, to think that you will ever deny its necessity. But from your letter it appears, that you are "in full fellowship" with a sentiment which has widely spread in the world, and with which impenitent sinners are much pleased, viz. that "a measure of the Spirit is given to every man." To me it is evident, that the apostle, in that passage, is speaking of the gift of the Spirit to the saints; but without contending for this, I would ask, Will this save them, unless they are born again? and what does all which is given them avail, without this change, or what conditions will they per-

form acceptably to God, so long as their minds are enmity against him? Will any thing, which the sinner possesses, or performs, terminate in his salvation, unless he is regenerated? Why then are some contending that all men have a light within, which, if followed, will lead them to heaven? and others, that all men have a measure of grace given them, which, if improved, will terminate in their salvation? Now, my Sister, I solemnly assure you, that I consider such doctrine contrary to the word of God, and infinitely dangerous to the souls of men. I must therefore raise my warning voice against it. We may talk of light and grace being in the heart of man, and after all, it may be asked, what can be expected, so long as we know, that "every imagination of the thoughts of the heart is only evil continually?"

May we never become guilty of flattering unregenerated sinners, by telling them that they have taken the first or second step towards heaven, but may we be gra-

ciously assisted in labouring to convince them, that unless their hearts are renewed, and they become reconciled to God, they cannot be saved.

Yours, &c.

LETTER V.

REGENERATION, A WORK OF THE
HOLY SPIRIT.*Dear Sister,*

In my two last letters, I think it was made evident, that regeneration is an instantaneous renewal of the heart. We may now inquire, By what agency is this change effected? The least possible effect must have a cause. Now regeneration is a great work, and is in Scripture called a resurrection, a creation, and is an effect, of which, there must be an adequate cause, and this cause is either human or divine. Some believe that those who are the subjects of this change are themselves also the cause; that though they receive some divine assistance, yet the matter is decided by themselves whether they will "have religion or not." And some preachers tell their hearers, that

they can effect this change, without any more divine assistance than every man receives ; and further, that if ever the work is done, they must begin it. Now, upon this very important subject, we ought seriously and carefully to consider what we believe and what we say. You will permit me here to ask (and O, that the question might be duly examined by all God's dear children who have been misguided) what condition of salvation did you perform, acceptably to God, while your carnal mind, though awakened, was enmity against him ? Did you renew your own heart, or even begin the work ? If the doctrine be false, which we as a church believe, you ought to answer in the affirmative ; and, as you now believe it is false, this will be your answer. But let me entreat you to examine the subject again. We have seen that God in his word has declared, that all the exercises of unrenowned sinners are unholy. What unholy exercise, then, do they put forth, with which he is pleased, and receives as a condition

of their regeneration? Or can you believe that men regenerate their own hearts; that they deliver themselves from the power of darkness; create themselves in Christ? that they, while dead in trespasses and sins, and walking according to the course of this world, quicken themselves, or originate in their own hearts, a principle of holy life? It appears to me, scarcely possible, that you can believe this.

It is frequently remarked, “Sinners can do something, or they would not be criminal and under condemnation.” Do you ask, What is it which they can do? In reply, I would tenderly but seriously ask, how much, or what did *you* do, in changing your own heart; or what condition of regeneration did you perform, while your mind was alienated from God? If I might be permitted to anticipate your answer, it would be the following:—Surely I performed nothing. Not unto me, not unto me, be this great work attributed. Still I was not insensible nor inactive, and, before I had any hope in Jesus, I saw my-

self vile, and guilty, and under condemnation. I was sensible that I deserved no favour from the hand of my offended, dishonoured Maker. Sin against a being so holy, righteous and good, appeared “exceedingly sinful,” and I felt to abhor myself. After trying various expedients, I found all my efforts to obtain relief were insufficient. I believed that Jesus came into the world to save sinners, that he was able and willing to save, but I knew not where to find him ; and besides, my guilt appeared so great, that I expected nothing but condemnation. Then I cried to the Lord, and with tears and anguish, I poured out my soul at the throne of his grace. And O ! that memorable hour ! Then did I resign myself into the hand of God ; and a sweet sense of affection and delight, in view of his character, and in view of the Lord Jesus, seemed to fill my whole heart. Then was given to me, the first intimation of pardon and life. Then did the dark, threatening cloud of despair separate, and disclose to my view, a precious Saviour,

who, with open arms, received my perishing soul. It appeared to me then, and it has often since, that if the whole world should come to him, he would cast none of them out.

Here, my Sister, let us pause and inquire, Can we believe that this repentance, and confession, and fervent prayer, and holy affection, and humble faith were the conditions of regeneration, or were they the fruits and effects of it? Undoubtedly the latter. Some suppose that the heart is renewed at the time an evidence of God's love, and a hope of pardon, are obtained. But we have seen that the unrenewed mind is enmity against God, and in love with sin; and, that every imagination of the thoughts is only evil continually. Surely you was not in this state, when you felt godly sorrow for sin; when with a melting, broken heart, you cried to the Lord for mercy; when you felt sin to be a burden to your soul, and greatly desired to be cleansed from it, that you might not offend and dishonour, a holy and good

God. Surely you was not an unregenerated sinner, an enemy to God, when, though you had no evidence of forgiveness, you saw the divine law to be holy, just, and good ; when you felt sensible of love to the saints, and of a desire to be in their society, and found a pleasure in attending to their devotions. Surely these do not answer to the Bible description of the unrenewed heart. By a mistake upon this point, some have been led to believe that unregenerated persons do exercise godly sorrow for sin, and “ seek religion,” which cannot possibly be the case. Though an individual has no evidence of his salvation, yet if he loves God, approves of his law, and is penitent and humble for his sins; if sin appears odious, and holiness desirable, he is a new creature. But those who are destitute of these exercises, though they may tell us of visions which they have seen of heaven and of hell, and have all knowledge, and much zeal, and confidence, they are, notwithstanding, dead in trespasses and sins. What an awful re-

sponsibility rests upon the ministers of religion, many of whom are leading their hearers into destructive errors ! It should be our prayer, that the Lord may pity, forgive, and enlighten them.

It is the height of absurdity to believe, that the subject of regeneration is also the agent, by which the change is effected. A man cannot loathe and abhor that which he loves ; nor can he desire that which he hates ; hence the necessity that his disposition should be changed. He will then desire what he before hated, and abhor that which he before loved. Nor will he make an effort to bring himself to love that which appears hateful to him. Divine Providence may awaken and alarm, and the word of God (as I remarked to you in my first letter) may enlighten and convince, but this is a work very different from regeneration. It is to be seriously feared, however, that it is all the change which many experience, who are zealous and bold professors ; and that the reason they spend so much time and strength, in

opposing and misrepresenting the humbling doctrine of the Bible, is, they were never born again. Nicodemus was a religious man, but he knew not "how these things could be," even when preached by our Saviour. "For the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

But it is time for me to observe, that regeneration is effected by the agency of the Holy Spirit. Whatever attainments the sinner may make, or changes he may pass through, he is destitute of love to God, till it is "shed abroad in the heart, by the Holy Spirit." Rom. v. 5.

I shall now attempt to prove this proposition, by the declarations of Scripture. Titus iii. 5. "According to his mercy *He* saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost." See also John i. 12, 13. "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them

that believe on his name. Which were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." This gracious work, He performs agreeably to his promise, Ezekiel xxxvi. 26, 27. "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you, and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes." Eph. ii. 8. "By grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." This work, St. Paul again ascribes to God in the 10th verse. "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works." I feel safe in saying, there is not a single passage in all the word of God, which informs us of even an individual, who changed his own heart, or performed the condition of regeneration, in consequence of which he was renewed by the Holy Spirit; or of one, who "got religion by taking one step after another, towards heaven." We hear

none of the inspired writers declaring to the people, that they can "get religion, as easy as they can get up or sit down;" and I must conclude, that the religion which is "got" in this way, is different from the religion of those who, in the Scriptures, are acknowledged to be saints.

By those passages of Scripture which I have quoted, it is made evident that God either renews the hearts of all men, or, that he does more for some than for others. With respect to the first, I suppose we agree in believing, that God will not renew the hearts of all men. If our belief in this is founded upon truth, the latter must be true. But from your letter it appears that this also you deny. In my next communication, this proposition shall be taken under consideration. In the mean time,

I remain yours, &c.

LETTER VI.

OF AGENCY IN REGENERATION.

Dear Sister,

We may now consider the question, Does God do more towards the salvation of one sinner, than of another? A large number of zealous, active Christian professors affirm in the most positive manner, that he does not. This affirmation attributes the difference found in the saint, from the sinner, to creature agency. This sentiment, I have shown to be contrary to reason, and to the Scriptures, and I would here add, it is contrary to the sentiment which St. Paul laboured to impress on the minds of his Corinthian brethren. To them he said, “Who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?”

Here the apostle evidently admits, that if those who are saints have made themselves to differ from others, then it is but reasonable that they should glory in themselves. But, said he, "it is written, let him that glorieth, glory in the Lord."

Do we find it any where written in the Scriptures, even of an individual, that he regenerated his own heart, or that he effected any part of this change, or that he performed certain conditions, in consequence of which, the Lord renewed his heart? If so, in what generation did he live, and what was his name? We read of many who repented, and turned to the Lord. This, however, is not regeneration, nor is it in Scripture called the condition of it; but when it is sorrow exercised "after a godly sort," it is the fruit of regeneration, and subsequent to it. Here I would seriously ask, Do you deliberately believe, that you have made the difference which you humbly hope now exists in the state of your heart, from that of those who are slaves to sin, in this world, and

those who are under its dominion in the world of spirits? This you do not, you cannot believe. No doubt the same divine influence, which we hope renewed our hearts, would have been sufficient to renew theirs. But, some say, "I have been enabled, by divine grace, to do all that I have done." This may be true, but the question is, *What* have you done? We nowhere read in the Scriptures, that men are enabled by divine grace to renew their hearts, or even to perform a condition of regeneration. If we have repented and believed in Christ, this we have been enabled to do by the Divine Spirit; but faith and repentance are not conditions of regeneration; they are the fruits or effects of it, which are, therefore, subsequent to it. We ought to pity the blindness of those, who, with the boldest confidence, declare to the uninstructed, that God does no more for one man than for another. If we receive the truth which they deny, still we have nothing to glory in. It is God who has delivered us from the power of dark-

ness, and translated us into his marvellous light ; let us then be humble and thankful.

Some, who appear to see that the affirmation cannot be maintained, namely, that God does no more for one than for another, have chosen to vary the proposition a little. They say, that though God does more towards the salvation of some than others, yet he does enough for all to save them, if they will do their part. But do we read in the Scriptures that men are saved in consequence of doing their part ? If it is admitted that God renews the hearts of some, but not of others, how can it be true that he does enough to save the unrenewed, even "if they do their part." In order to maintain this, it must be made to appear, that those whom God leaves unrenewed can either regenerate their own hearts, or be saved without being born again.

I acknowledge that God does much for those whom he leaves unrenewed. He enlightens, convinces and reproves them ; he sets life and death before them, the

blessing and the curse, and, by the dearest interests of their souls, urges them to repent and believe the gospel. But if he leaves them to follow their unholy disposition, they will resist all his counsel; if he does not give them a new heart, and put a new spirit within them, they surely will do nothing which will save them. But are they not under obligation to repent? Most surely they are, and to come to Christ, that they may have life. This, however, they will not do, and hence the necessity of their being born again, in order to salvation. It is affirmed by many, that if God does more for some than for others, if he effects a work of grace in the hearts of some, which is essential to salvation, and does not effect it in others, then he is partial. Now as it is a fact, that he bestows his grace in a sovereign, distinguishing manner, so he will not make his creatures accountable for the consequences. But I cannot admit that this represents God to be partial. If two or more persons have just and equal claims

upon an individual, and he has power to withhold from them their rights, if in the exercise of this power he satisfies the claims of a part, but withholds from the rest, he is then partial. But there is nothing like this in the case before us. We have no claims upon the favour of our offended Maker. We have forfeited the least of his blessings ; and if he should leave all mankind under the power of sin, and withhold forever the smiles of his pardoning love, every mouth would be stopped, and all the world be found guilty, and justly condemned before him. His righteousness would be manifest in the dreadful sentence, "Depart from me, ye cursed." How then does it appear that he is partial or unjust, in saving one or more, as all deserve to perish. You, doubtless, recollect the declaration of St. Paul, "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy ;" and it rather becomes us humbly to adore and bless him for his infinite pity and love, than to murmur against him because he does not save all. But upon the

supposition that God did as much for one as for another, and so saved all men, we might still, with as much propriety, bring against him the charge of partiality or injustice, unless he saved fallen angels also. But we never hear those, who, with the greatest violence, oppose the distinguishing communications of divine grace among men, declaiming against the sovereignty of God, in providing a Saviour for fallen man, and not for fallen angels. And I seriously ask, why? But if God does no more for one, than for another, or if they make themselves to differ from others, then, the renewed, pardoned soul is not under greater obligation to love, praise, and serve God, than impenitent sinners are, or than he himself was, while in his sins. But does this accord with the Scripture representation of this subject? or does it accord with our experience? Now it is safe to affirm, that that doctrine is false, which cannot be reconciled with the Scriptures, and is contrary to the gracious experience of renewed souls.

We have already remarked, that it is confidently affirmed by a large class of Christian professors, that God does enough for all men to secure their salvation, provided they do their part, which they must do, or never be saved. Now if this be a fact, or these Christian brethren really believe what they affirm, why do they pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and why do they sometimes pray, that "God would pour down his Spirit upon the congregation then before them." If it be not necessary to their salvation, that God should do any thing more for them, why ask him to do more? What means the monthly concert for prayer, and other prayer-meetings? Is it not the height of ingratitude, and presumption, to ask God, who has already done so much for man, to do that which there is no necessity for him to do. Why not say, as a public speaker once said, in my hearing, that "God does not pour out his Spirit any more at one time than at another." This man was opposing the sovereign displays

of divine grace, and labouring to show, that what are called Reformations, result entirely from the resolutions, determinations, and other efforts of the people. He then told his hearers, that whatever remained to be done towards their salvation, they must do, for God had done his part, having done all that was necessary, and would do no more. This gentleman was of no less distinction than a Bishop in the denomination which he represented. He was undoubtedly consistent in these declarations, with other parts of his religious system ; but how far is this from the doctrine of the apostles and prophets ! If this strange doctrine be true, St. Paul should have said, “ by the grace of God,” *and my own efforts*, “ I am what I am.”

Such, my dear Sister, are the inconsistencies of the doctrine which you say you now fellowship. The doctrines which you have renounced, relate to subjects of infinite importance, and I must entreat you, by the love of Christ, by his honour, and by the experience which I trust you have

had, in his salvation, that you deny him not the glory due to him, for loving you with an everlasting love, renewing your heart, and washing you from your sins in his own blood. O say not, "he has done no more for me than he has for unrenewed sinners." Infinite Mercy! forgive, that such a thought should ever enter the breast of one of thy dear, redeemed, blood-bought children.

Yours affectionately.

LETTER VII.

THE DIVINE PURPOSE.

Dear Sister,

I have attempted to show, that the salvation of sinners is effected "by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost." Now, I think it must be admitted that God does not effect this work accidentally, because, in all his work, he acts with infinite intelligence, and therefore with design. St. Paul affirms, that "God worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." In this passage, the apostle represents the divine will or choice, as directing in all the operations of the divine power; and at the commencement of his work, the nature, and consequences of all his operations are perfectly before him. When, therefore, God regenerates the heart, he designs to do no more nor less than what he effects, namely, he designs to regenerate the heart.

He also carries on the work of grace, sanctifying and preparing the soul for a state of glory above, all which he does intentionally, or according to the counsel of his own will. Nothing is more plainly declared in the Scriptures, than that salvation, from its commencement to its completion, is of the Lord. All the redeemed in heaven are represented as ascribing salvation to Him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb. Now with respect to those in heaven, must it not be evident, that when God began in their hearts the work of grace, he designed to perform exactly what he has accomplished, namely, their complete salvation? If this be denied, I would ask, did he design to do more than he has done, and if so, what was it, and why did he not effect his design? But if he designed less, what circumstance induced him to do more than he designed? Divine inspiration teaches us, that "he is in one mind, and none can turn him, and what his soul desireth, even that he doeth." Or will any say, that

when he began the work, he had no design respecting it, how, or what he would do. But this is denying him the attribute of intelligence; and besides, we have seen from the Scriptures, that he worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.

Some affirm that God designs to perform a certain work, in the salvation of sinners, upon condition that they perform another certain work. But has this even the appearance of Scripture doctrine? Surely this is placing dependence upon works, because all the operations of divine grace and mercy, are suspended upon conditions to be performed by man. Still, those who labour to support this doctrine, often use the term *free grace*; and should you hear them, when declaiming against predestination, you would conclude that they considered themselves the only people who held the doctrine of free grace. But would not their system be more consistent with itself, should they drop the term free grace, and substitute the term free works? It is a solemn, but melan-

choly fact, that they are proclaiming salvation by works, and the term free grace only serves to deceive themselves and blind the eyes of their unwary hearers.

But here I must be permitted to ask, What work has God designed to do, provided the unholy, impenitent sinner performs another certain work? Does he regenerate the heart upon this condition? Where is the Scripture evidence of it? Does he pardon upon this condition? Does he adopt the soul into his family upon this condition? or shed abroad his love in the heart upon this condition? No, it is all a delusion, and eminently calculated to dishonour God, foster the pride of man, and destroy the immortal soul.

If, in preparing those for heaven, whom the Lord has already received into that state, he wrought in them, and for them, after the counsel of his own will; if, when he began the work he intended to carry it on; if he thus designed to save, I would seriously ask, when did he conceive that design? When did the thought first enter

the Divine Mind? When did he decide upon the subject, and become fixed in a purpose to do it? Was it as soon as they were regenerated? Then he was undetermined about doing the work, till he had effected an important part of it. Or was it at the time of their birth? But what authority have we for fixing upon that date? Was it at the time he made man? Who can answer in the affirmative? Was it when he originated the plan of the universe, and purposed in himself to form angels and men; when he devised the mysterious method of man's salvation? And when was that? When did Jehovah first think of the work of creation, and become fixed in his purpose to do it? When did he first resolve, and become determined to give his Son a sacrifice for our sins? These questions I propose with solemnity, and, my respected friend, you will seriously meditate your answers.

As there is no beginning of days, nor end of years with Jehovah, so there is no succession of thoughts or ideas with him,

as with creatures. He fills immensity with his presence, and eternity, as the place of his abode ; and a succession of thoughts, or ideas, is incompatible with his adorable perfection. Therefore, whatever thoughts (if I may with solemnity so speak) or ideas, or plans, or purposes, now exist in the Divine Mind, always existed there, and always will. "He is in one mind. With him there is no variableness, nor shadow of turning. He is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever."

From the predictions and promises of divine revelation, we may feel assured that many more of our fallen race will be saved from the power and guilt of sin ; and we are assured also that it will be the work of God, and that he will call them by his grace, according to his purpose. Now, unless we believe that new purposes arise, from time to time, in the Divine Mind, we must believe, that at this time he has a purpose to save all those whom he will hereafter gather in.

I will now invite you to consider sever-

al passages of Scripture, which appear to me to teach us, that God, in saving sinners, works according to his own purpose, which is eternal. See Eph. i. 3—5. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ; according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love; having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.” Here the apostle speaks with great plainness; and if he had written in the present age, and with a design to establish the doctrine of election, I do not see what language he could have used which would have been more decisive. These things he affirmed God had done for him, and for the brethren that were with him, who were brought to believe, or trust in Christ, before his Ephesian brethren, to whom he was now writing. See verses 12, 13. “That we

should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation." The apostle does not say, as some now affirm, that they were chosen after they believed, but before the foundation of the world; and that after they believed, the Holy Spirit of promise was given to them, by whom their souls were sealed to the day of complete redemption; thus securing them from final apostacy and giving them an earnest of the heavenly inheritance. Nor does he say, they were chosen because they had repented, and turned to the Lord; nor on account of holiness which he foresaw in them; but that "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ chose them in him, before the foundation of the world, that they *should be holy* and without blame before him in love." See also Acts xiii. 48. "As many as were ordained to eternal life believed." The inspired historian has in this chapter given us an account of the preaching of St. Paul,

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and the various effects produced by the gospel upon the minds of his hearers, namely, that the Jews in general were incensed against him, and many of the Gentiles also did not obey the truth ; but, said he, “ as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.” This passage teaches us, that men are ordained, or appointed to eternal life, before they believe. I would also refer you to 2 Tim. i. 9. “ Be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel, according to the power of God, who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.” From these passages of Scripture, it is evident, that election is personal, unconditional, and eternal, as it must be, since the subjects of it were chosen in the Divine Mind before the world began, or before the foundation of the world. I might multiply passages of similar import, but it is altogether unnecessary. My Sister, it is matter of

surprise and lamentation, that you should so freely say, "I do not fellowship the doctrine of personal election." Surely, this persuasion cometh not of Him that called you. It is my prayer, that your mind may be enlightened by the word and Spirit of God, and you restored to the simplicity of the faith once delivered to the saints.

Yours, &c.

LETTER VIII.

OF ELECTION.

Dear Sister,

The perfections of God are a strong tower, into which the righteous run and are safe. They all harmonize with the system of truth revealed in the Scriptures, or rather, that system of truth is what it is, because God is what he is. Every doctrine, therefore, which is inconsistent with these perfections, must be false ; and every doctrine which is supported by the divine perfections, must be truth.

The knowledge of God is a divine perfection, concerning which Christians, in general, are agreed. In the Scriptures it is declared, that “ known unto God are all his works, from the beginning of the world. Neither is there any creature which is not manifest in his sight ; for all

things are naked and open to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. He is a Discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." The knowledge of God is intuitive ; he has not been instructed by any of his creatures, or by any of the events of his government. It cannot be said that he, at any period, received knowledge ; this would be to say there was a period when his knowledge was imperfect, and that it may be yet imperfect. Now, if God knows all things, as the Scriptures and reason abundantly declare, then there can be no addition to his knowledge. A period will never arrive when God will know any more than he now does. Can we extend our thoughts back upon the eternity of God, and fix them upon a period when he did not know all events and things which he now does, or ever will know? With great solemnity we must answer, No.

When all the events to be accomplished in this world are finished, there will be in glory a great multitude of redeemed sin-

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ners, which no man can number. But God will then know their number, and out of what nations and families they were gathered, and at what age he renewed their hearts, and by what means they were enlightened and convinced of sin; also at what age they died, and the very moment of time at which they entered the heavenly state. But if there can be no addition to the knowledge of God, then he now knows how many there will be, and out of what nation and families he will gather them, and at what age he will renew their hearts, and by what means he will enlighten and convince them of sin. He now knows at what age they will die, and at what moment of time they will enter the heavenly state. Now, can we fix our thoughts upon any period we call past, at which God did not know all these things? With respect to all his perfections, it is a sublime and glorious fact, that he is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever.

Nothing which is uncertain can be

known. If the salvation of those who will be saved were not now certain, in the mind of God, he could not know that they will be saved. But he knows who will be saved, and when he shall renew their hearts; it is therefore certain who will be saved, and also when they will be regenerated. Here we may inquire, What is the foundation of this certainty? Can it be discovered in man? Surely not, for it existed infinite ages before man was made; and, for the same reason, it cannot be found in angels, nor in any creature.

Some have said it was certain they would be saved, because it was certain that they would repent and believe the gospel. But the question returns, What rendered it certain that they would repent, or even that the means of repentance would be used with them? As before the creation of the heavens and the earth, God knew he should create them, that event was certain. What was the foundation of the certainty that God's infinite wisdom

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and power would be employed in that work, but his determination to perform it? If he had been determined not to do it, it would have been certain that the work would not be done; and if he had been indifferent, it would have been uncertain whether the work would be done or not done; for it all depended upon him. As before the foundation of the world, God knew that his only begotten and dearly beloved Son would, in time, become incarnate, and suffer and die for our sins, that event was certain. But what rendered that event certain? Was it not the purpose of God that, in the fulness of time, he would send forth his Son? Surely it was, for the whole of this wonderful plan depended exclusively on him. As before the foundation of the world, God knew how many and who would be saved, when and where they would pass their probationary state, and also at what period of their lives he should renew their hearts, and at what moment of time they would enter his kingdom above, all these

things must have been certain. But what could have rendered it certain, infinite ages before they existed, that God's power and wisdom and goodness would be employed in effecting this wonderful event, but his own determination? This merciful purpose of God includes what St. Paul has termed his grace, which was "given us in Christ Jesus before the world began."

This, my dear Sister, is what we understand by the doctrine of Election, and to us it is a matter of lamentation, that so many professors of religion reject it with contempt. And it is a consideration still more affecting, that any of the beloved children of God should become so bewildered in darkness, and deceived, as to say, "I do not fellowship the doctrine of personal election." This doctrine, I suspect, has been greatly misrepresented to you, and many objections presented to you against it. Some of these objections can be made only against the false representations given of the doctrine, and

others may, with equal consistency, be made against doctrines which are fully admitted by the objector. In my next communication I shall notice some of these objections. In the mean time, let us pray that the promised Comforter may lead us into all truth, and that the truth may make us free. When we are searching after divine truth, it is of great importance that we should possess a humble, teachable frame of heart, that the love of God and of his truth should be the principle of all our efforts.

I remain yours, &c.

LETTER IX.

OBJECTIONS TO ELECTION CONSIDERED.

Dear Sister,

It is affirmed, by some, that though the doctrine of personal election appears to be supported by several passages of Scripture, and also to be concluded from the known perfections of God, yet it cannot be true, because it destroys man's free agency. In reply to this objection, it may be observed, that the personal, eternal election of those who are saved is positively declared in the word of God ; it ought, therefore, to be admitted as truth, whether we can reconcile it with our own inferences or not, or even with other Scripture doctrines. We know, also, that we are free agents, because we are conscious that we do act freely. Now, suppose we cannot see the consistency of election with free agency,

this does by no means prove that one or the other must be false. I suppose that you admit that God knows what your future actions will be, and that therefore it is certain what your future actions will be. But do you not act as freely as though he did not know? If it were possible for him not to know, what advantage should you then enjoy with which you are not now favoured?

Again I would ask, What effect does the purpose of God have upon your mind, while you know nothing about that purpose? And when it is revealed, it will not destroy free agency, but will become a motive to action, either good or bad, according to the disposition of the heart. To act in view of motives, or, which is the same, to act according to our own choice, is to enjoy the highest degree of free agency of which we can conceive. The purpose of God is a decision of the Divine Mind, which exists in himself, and can have no possible effect upon the free agency of man. St. Peter informs us,

that the murderers of the Son of God did whatsoever his hand and his counsel determined before to be done ; and yet they acted as freely as though God had not determined those things. And they were as criminal, for the same apostle charges them with the guilt of murder, saying, "Ye have taken and with wicked hands have crucified and slain him." Those who are saved act freely in repenting, believing, and obeying the gospel ; and those who choose darkness rather than light, choose and act freely also.

It is further objected, that if it is certain who will be saved and who will be lost, then it is useless to preach the gospel to impenitent sinners, or use with them any other means of salvation. Now, in examining this objection, I must request you to exercise the candour of a sincere inquirer after truth. The gospel should be preached, and other means of salvation used with impenitent sinners, because God works by means, and because he has appointed the use of means as the instru-

ment in his own hand. The use of means is as distinctly included in the purpose of God, concerning man's salvation, as is their salvation itself. St. Paul informed his terrified companions, that God had revealed to him, that, though the ship in which they were tossed and driven would be lost, yet the life of each individual should be spared, and not a hair of their heads perish. But when they were about to leave the vessel, hoping they might save their lives by swimming to the shore, he said to them, "Except ye abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved." This was to be the means of their preservation; and though it was the purpose and promise of God, that they should be saved, yet this appointment of God could not be accomplished, unless his appointment of the means was accomplished also; that is, one part of God's purposes cannot be accomplished, and the other parts not be accomplished. Here, then, are means of salvation which God has appointed, and his purpose concerning the sinner's salva-

tion cannot be accomplished, except his purpose concerning the means is accomplished also. It is also the divine command that we should use the means of salvation with impenitent sinners, and it is not safe for us to say of any of God's commands, that they are useless. We consider it as truly our duty to labour to have the gospel preached "to every creature," and to assure our fellow men, from God, that "He now commandeth all men every where to repent," as though all depended upon the use of means,—and we have much more encouragement.

Again, I remark, it may be said of any individual, that he will be saved or lost—the husbandman will, the present year, have a crop, or he will not—the youth who is sent to school will become a scholar, or he will not, and God must know which; and the event will be as God knew it would be. Why, then, does not the husbandman say, It is useless for me to obey the command of God, and till the ground, and sow the seed, or use any

other means? It is certain with God, whether I shall reap the fruits of my labour or not; and if I am to have a crop, I shall have it, whether I use the means or not; and if I am not to have a crop, I shall not, let me do what I will. Why should not the student say, If I am to be a scholar, I shall be, and if I am not to be, I shall not be, therefore I will not weary myself with study, nor be any more concerned with my books? This is precisely the language of the objection before us. If I am to be saved, I shall be, whether I try to obtain salvation or not; and if I am to perish, I shall perish, however earnestly I may try to be saved. Why should we condemn this false and delusive reasoning in the husbandman and in the scholar, but approve of it in the impenitent sinner? We cannot be at a loss for the origin of this reasoning in either of the former cases; and is not the cause equally obvious in the latter? It is the love of sin and hatred to holiness, which suggest this soothing but ruinous

sentiment, "If I am to be saved I shall be, let me do what I will." Here I must request you to pause and consider. Is the Christian to be beaten off from his views of the plain declarations of God's word, by so unreasonable, corrupting, soul-destructive a sentiment, which was bred in the moral disorder of the heart of ungodly men? a sentiment, which, if adduced for any other purpose but to put down election, would be rejected, as unworthy of a serious refutation!

If the above objection has had any weight on your mind, then you must believe, that if God had no purpose or determination respecting the salvation of sinners, and did not know what would take place respecting it, then ministers would have great encouragement to preach the gospel, and sinners to hope for salvation.

But this is a gross mistake. There would be no encouragement at all; because, the carnal mind is enmity against God; it is not subject to his law, neither

indeed can be. Therefore, the hearts of unrenewed men are opposed to the duties which the gospel requires, and their dispositions are averse to the blessings which it offers. They are insensible of their diseased state, and therefore reject the remedy. They are blind to their guilt and danger, and therefore refuse the offers of mercy. The influence of means is insufficient to subdue the irreconciliation of the impenitent, unbelieving heart. The believer in election is encouraged to preach the gospel, not by the power of means, nor by any disposition in the unrenewed heart, but by the purposes and promises of God. We are assured that he will make his word quick and powerful. He has said to his Son, "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power."

As to impenitent sinners having no encouragement, I would observe, it is readily granted, that the doctrines of the Bible do not afford that encouragement which they desire. But can this be evidence

to a Christian that these doctrines are not true? The wicked desire encouragement to live in sin and without God in the world, and they cleave to those individuals, and adhere to those doctrines, which offer them this encouragement. The gospel offers encouragement to all who become reconciled to God, repent, believe in the Lord Jesus, and forsake their sins. Such have the promise of pardon, and an interest in all the blessedness of heaven. This is all the encouragement the nature of the case admits, and it is all that a good man will desire.

We are charged, by the objector, with believing that some will be saved, though they live in sin, and that others will be lost, though they should repent and believe in Christ; but the charge is false. We hold up no such doctrine, nor can it be inferred from the purposes of God. Though God worketh all things, both in the natural and moral world, after the counsel of his own will, it is not true, that in harvest, some will return bringing their

sheaves with them, whether they sow or not; and it is an impressive truth, written among the purposes of God, "He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned."

It has been asked, If some of the elect should not repent and believe in Christ, what must their final condition be? Or if some of the non-elect should repent and believe, what must be their final state? for all penitent believers have the promise of salvation. What then would become of election? In reply, I also would inquire, Did ever such an instance occur, or have we any evidence that one ever will? If, at the day of judgment, one, who shall have endured faithful to the end, should be standing on the left hand of the Judge, when he shall bid that guilty multitude to depart from him into everlasting fire, what would become of him? Then shall the King say to them, on his left hand, Depart from me. This address will be made to every one on his left hand. But one or more of

them were believers in Christ, and proved faithful unto death, and consequently, were heirs of the promise of life. Now I ask, what would be his final state? If some of those, whom it is impossible to renew to repentance, should, nevertheless, repent, what would be the consequence? If some of those, whom God has cast forever off, and condemned to suffer the vengeance of eternal fire, if some of them, in their gloomy state of endless despair, should repent and believe in Christ, would they remain in hell, or would they receive pardon, and be taken to heaven? If pardoned and received, what would become of the word of the Lord, which had gone out of his mouth, by which they had been doomed to endless punishment?

Now these questions may all be easily disposed of. At the day of judgment, there will be none of the faithful on Christ's left hand; and none of those incorrigible sinners, who will be destroyed with everlasting destruction from the pres-

ence of the Lord, will ever repent and believe. So, also, none of those whom God designed to save, will he leave to die without repentance and faith; and none of those whom he does not renew, but leaves to their own choice, will ever repent. Sinners will not repent, either in the present or future world, unless their hearts are renewed. It has been asked, Why then does God require them to repent? We reply, because it is their duty, and infinite righteousness cannot cease to require that which is morally right for man to do; and because it is a direction, which, if obeyed, would promote the creature's happiness, therefore, infinite benevolence cannot cease to enforce it.

It has also been asked, Why are pardon and life held out to all who shall repent? We answer, To encourage those who do truly repent, that none of them may despair of salvation, and to manifest the divine goodness. It will also show, that those who perish, never complied

with any suitable terms of salvation, but maintained their obstinacy and continued their rebellion against God.

The foundation of every objection to the sovereignty of God is an unwillingness that he should rule and govern his own kingdom according to his own choice. But what must be the character of those who have any thing to fear from the government of infinite righteousness and goodness? What must be the temper of that heart which refuses to yield up the government of himself and all things to God? What must be the desires and designs of a being who is unwilling that God should choose and direct in all things pertaining to himself and his fellow beings? Or what have we to fear from the purposes of God? Can there be any unrighteousness in them? Are we afraid that if God does his pleasure with us, and all his creatures, that he will fail, in any instance, of doing infinitely right and well? Why, then, oppose the sovereignty of God, and call it a hard, soul-chilling

doctrine? Are God's ways hard? Is the manifestation of his sovereign pleasure chilling to our joys? What, then, must be the nature of those joys?

Again I ask, What have we to fear from the purposes of God? If he is qualified to govern all things for the best, both in time and in eternity, he must be qualified to determine how to govern. If all God does is wise and good, it was wise and good for him to purpose to do it. If God has a right to renew the hearts of some, and to leave others to their own choice, after reproofing and warning them, and offering them pardon and life, upon the only possible terms, then he had a right to purpose so to do. What have we to lose by the purposes of God? If we are saved, it will be by being "called according to his purpose" of mercy, and if we perish, it will be owing to the obstinacy of our own hearts, to which God purposed to leave us. And what is the difference between being saved according to his eternal purpose, or

according to a purpose of his, which might be formed in time? Would infinite perfection choose, at one time, that which, at another, he would reject or alter? O may we be humbled into the dust before Jehovah, while we realize our moral blindness and rebellion against him, and be inspired with the spirit of that memorable prayer, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done."

Yours, &c.

LETTER X.

ON FALLING FROM GRACE, AND ON
JUSTIFICATION.

Dear Sister,

The little time we have been travelling the Christian course has been sufficient to corroborate the words of our Lord, "In the world ye shall have tribulation." The united influence of the world, the flesh, and Satan, often renders the situation of believers perilous.

Now it is believed, by some, that many of them will be overcome and finally perish. This I do not, I cannot believe, and I will lay before you some of my reasons. If I believed that salvation depended upon the efforts of the creature, I should not only expect that some, but that all would perish. If the moral condition of all men is alike by nature, and "God does no more for one than for another,"

we have reason to fear that not only some, but all will perish. What is there to secure the salvation of any? No doubt that many have fallen away and lost their religion, and it is to be feared that the last state of such is worse than the first. But it should be observed, that the religion which they lost, was that which they "got" by their own seeking and resolutions. They began the work themselves, and it was carried on without any more divine assistance than those have who never begin it; and it is to be expected that such, in time of temptation, will fall away. But the question before us is, whether any, whose hearts the Lord has regenerated, will fall away and perish. It is a simple but important question, On what does the safety of the saints depend? upon the Lord Jehovah, or upon themselves? If upon themselves, no doubt many, if not all, will finally perish; but if upon the Lord Jehovah, I see not why they may not be safe. Has the Lord, any where in his word, informed

us that he should leave some to perish whose hearts had been regenerated? Where is the passage? But if he has nowhere given us this information, why should we *believe* that he will leave any to perish. If there were any in the time of the apostles or prophets, who, after their hearts had been renewed by the Holy Spirit, had fallen and perished, surely we might reasonably expect that so awful an event would have been recorded by the pen of inspiration. We might expect that their names would have been given, and the circumstances of their destruction. But there is no such event recorded in the sacred pages. It is true that the fall of some professors is mentioned, and their names given, but there is not the least degree of evidence that any of them had been regenerated. But if the fall of mere professors is recorded with so much particularity, surely, if any, even one, had sunk to everlasting darkness and misery, who was once a renewed, pardoned, adopted child of God, we

cannot possibly account for the silence of the inspired writers concerning the dreadful event. Why, then, should we believe in the total apostacy and endless misery of any of the saints of God. The case of Judas is sometimes referred to, by our opponents, but we have no evidence that he was ever regenerated, but much to the contrary. It is true that Judas was numbered among the immediate disciples of Christ, but the most important object ever answered by him was the fulfilment of the Scriptures, in doing which he acted the part of a most hardened wretch. While his character stood the fairest that it ever did, he was known to be a thief, and destitute of compassion for the poor, which very strongly marks the character of an unregenerated man. Speaking to the twelve, Jesus said, "I have chosen you twelve (i. e. to the apostleship), and one of you is a devil." Does this indicate that he was a renewed man? Does it not rather indicate that he was in the gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity? And again, "Ye are clean, but

not all. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed on him, and who should betray him?" Does this passage teach us that they all believed on him, and that afterwards one fell from grace and betrayed his Lord? Does it not plainly teach us that the eleven believed on Jesus, and that one, viz. he that betrayed him, did not?

Several passages have been adduced, which, it is said, imply a possibility of the saints falling so as to perish; from which it is inferred, that if there is a possibility of it, there must be a high degree of probability that some of them will perish. But a natural possibility by no means proves that the event ever did or ever will take place. I will state a case: Jesus said to the unbelieving Jews, "If I should say that I know him not, I should be a liar like unto you." Now it is true that Jesus had natural power to deny that he knew the Father, and thereby become a liar, from which it appears there was a natural possibility of his doing it. But

are we, from this form of expression, to believe that there was danger that Christ would become a liar, and so fail in the great work of redemption? Surely not. What, then, would it prove, if exactly this form of expression were used, in Scripture, in relation to the saints falling away? Surely it would prove nothing more than it does in the above case, which is nothing at all.

When inquiring into the safety of believers, we shall obtain much assistance by considering their justification. By what, then, are believers justified? They are justified either by grace, or by works, or by grace and works together. The Scriptures, abundantly, and with great plainness, declare, that by the deeds of the law, or by works, no one shall be justified in the sight of God. If believers are justified partly by works and partly by grace, we would ask, What proportion of works is absolutely necessary? What is the least amount, which, when incorporated with the grace of God, will justify

the soul? Must there be two thirds, or will one half, or one quarter be sufficient? But where is there any Scripture for such a method of justification?

The subject matter of the believer's justification is, the righteousness and atonement of Jesus Christ. "Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus." Hence, "Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth righteousness without works." It is by faith that the soul becomes interested in the merits of Christ; he therefore is said to be "the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. There is, therefore, no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus," and such persons do not walk after the flesh, but after the Spirit. By these passages it is made to appear, that the righteousness by which the saints are justified is perfect and immutable. How then shall they ever fall under the law and perish? "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? it is God that justifieth.

Who is he that condemneth? it is Christ that died." Rom. viii. 33, 37. Here, my Sister, I would ask, On what do you depend for perseverance in the way to eternal life? upon your own efforts, or upon the work of the Holy Spirit? And upon what do you depend for justification, when you shall appear at the bar of God? How does it dishonour the work of the Holy Spirit, and the merits of Christ, to talk of the Spirit's relinquishing the work of grace in the soul, and of God's condemning to eternal death those whom he had pardoned and justified wholly on account of the merits of his dear Son. When he justified them freely by his grace, it was in full view of all their iniquities, past, present, and to come. As that for which they were justified remains unchanged, how shall they ever be delivered up to the curse of the law?

In further proof of the safety of all believers in Christ, the following passages are quoted from the word of God: Job,

xvii. 9; John, x. 28; 1 Cor. i. 8, 9; 1 Peter i. 5. Phil i. c. ~~The right-~~
 teous shall hold on his way." Said Jesus,
 "I give unto them eternal life, and they
 shall never perish, neither shall any pluck
 them out of my hand. Christ shall also
 confirm you unto the end, that ye may be
 blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus
 Christ. God is faithful, by whom ye
 were called unto the fellowship of his
 Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. They are
 kept by the power of God, through faith,
 unto salvation." St. Paul said he was
 "confident of this very thing, that he
 which hath begun a good work in the
 saints, will perform it until the day of
 Jesus Christ." More proof of this doc-
 trine might be produced, but I deem it
 unnecessary.

It may now be proper for us to consid-
 er the effects which the doctrine of the
 perseverance of the saints will have upon
 those who cherish a hope that they are
 believers. Some have said that it en-
 courages negligence in duty, and pro-

motes licentiousness. No doubt it will ~~have this effect upon all~~ however religious, whose hearts have not been regenerated. Such persons do not love God, nor the duties he requires. It is true, they may watch and pray, and be very zealous in religion, and careful to avoid vice; but they are excited thus to live by fear of the wrath to come, or by believing that their attaining future happiness depends upon their efforts. Now, let such persons be fully persuaded that they shall be saved, and I have no doubt but they will become negligent in religion, lose their zeal, and turn again to those ways which are most congenial with the desires of their hearts. And it must be so, for when the motive by which they were induced to be religious is removed, they will neglect religion. When that restraint which held them back from carnal pleasure is removed, they will again walk in the ways of their own hearts. And on this account, some truly pious persons have feared that if this doctrine

should prevail, many professors would entirely neglect religious concerns. But they would be false professors, and for this reason I would to God that it might prevail. It would be a blessing to the church, if all hypocrites and deceived persons might discover themselves and be removed out of it. And nothing is so likely to discover their character as the truth of God's holy word. They cannot endure the pure doctrines of the Scriptures, but choose darkness rather than light, and the reason is obvious. But those whose hearts have been renewed, are not induced, by a gracious assurance of salvation, to neglect duty, or indulge in sin. They are constrained, by the goodness of God, to love and serve him. They realize his goodness, not only in beginning the work of their salvation, but in promising to carry it on. And besides, they are encouraged to fight the good fight of faith, by an assurance of victory ; to endure the storms and temptations of life, by an assurance of safely entering

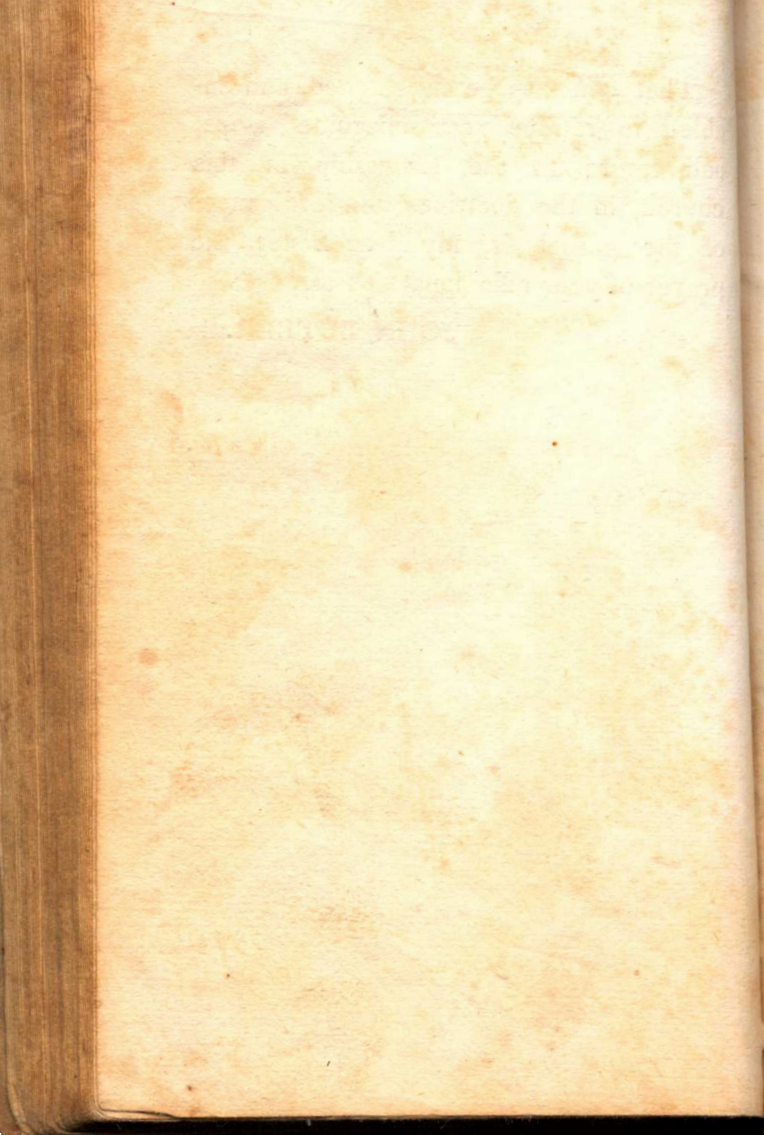
the haven of eternal rest. The delight, also, which they find in wisdom's ways, will effectually induce them to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord. Any person who can say, "If I believed in the certain perseverance of the saints, I should lose my strongest motive to love and serve God," is most certainly in a graceless state.

O, when will men cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord ! I would affectionately warn you, my dear Sister, against the errors which I have pointed out in these letters. I cannot be fully persuaded that you have, forever, renounced the precious doctrines of the gospel. Can you not unite with me in saying, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength." And is not the following sentiment the language of your heart ?

"Jesus, my God, I know his name,
His name is all my trust ;
Nor will he put my soul to shame,
Nor let my hope be lost."

That you may be enlightened, and enabled to retrace your misguided steps, and return to the fellowship of this church, in the doctrines and ordinances of the gospel, is, my dear Sister, the prayer of your affectionate pastor,

JOHN BUTLER.



SPIRITUAL AND DIVINE LIGHT.

The remarks which follow corroborate the general principles in the preceding Letters. They are from a sermon by President EDWARDS.

IN this spiritual light, there is a true sense of the divine and superlative excellency of the things of religion; a real sense of the excellency of God and Jesus Christ, and of the work of redemption, and the ways and works of God revealed in the gospel. There is a divine and superlative glory in these things; an excellency that is of a vastly higher kind and more sublime nature than in other things; a glory greatly distinguishing them from all that is earthly and temporal. He that is spiritually enlightened truly apprehends and sees it, or has a sense of it. He

does not merely rationally believe that God is glorious, but he has a sense of the gloriousness of God in his heart. There is not only a rational belief that God is holy, and that holiness is a good thing, but there is a sense of the loveliness of God's holiness. There is not only a speculative judging that God is gracious, but a sense how amiable God is upon that account; it is a sense of the beauty of this divine attribute.

There is a twofold understanding or knowledge of good, that God has made the mind of man capable of:

1. That which is merely speculative or notional; as when a person only speculatively judges that any thing is, which, by the agreement of mankind, is called good or excellent, viz. that which is most to general advantage, and between which and a reward there is a suitableness, and the like. And the other is, that which consists in the sense of the heart; as when there is a sense of the beauty, amiableness, or sweetness of a thing, so that

the heart is sensible of pleasure and delight in the presence of the idea of it. In the former is exercised merely the speculative faculty, or the understanding, strictly so called, or as spoken of in distinction from the will or disposition of the soul. In the latter, the will, or inclination, or heart, is mainly concerned.

Thus there is a difference between having an opinion that God is holy and gracious, and having a sense of the loveliness and beauty of that holiness and grace. There is a difference between having a rational judgment that honey is sweet, and having a sense of its sweetness. A man may have the former, that knows not how honey tastes ; but a man cannot have the latter unless he has an idea of the taste of honey in his mind. So there is a difference between believing that a person is beautiful, and having a sense of his beauty. The former may be obtained by hearsay, but the latter only by seeing the countenance. There is a wide difference between mere speculative rational

judging any thing to be excellent, and having a sense of its sweetness and beauty. The former rests only in the head; speculation only is concerned in it; but the heart is concerned in the latter. When the heart is sensible of the beauty and amiableness of a thing, it necessarily feels pleasure in the apprehension. It is implied, in a person's being heartily sensible of the loveliness of a thing, that the idea of it is sweet and pleasant to his soul; which is a far different thing from having a rational opinion that it is excellent.

2. There arises, from this sense of the divine excellency of things contained in word of God, a conviction of the truth and reality of them; and that either indirectly or directly.

First, indirectly, and that two ways :
1. As the prejudices that are in the heart against the truth of divine things are hereby removed, so that the mind becomes susceptible of the due force of rational arguments for their truth. 2. It not only

removes the hindrances of reason, but positively helps reason. It makes even the speculative notions more lively. It engages the attention of the mind, with the more fixedness and intenseness, to that kind of objects, which causes it to have a clearer view of them, and enables it more clearly to see their mutual relations, and occasions it to take more notice of them.

Secondly, a true sense of the divine excellency of the things of God's word more directly and immediately convinces of the truth of them ; and that because the excellency of these things is so superlative. There is a beauty in them that is so divine and godlike ; that is greatly and evidently distinguishing of them from things merely human, or that men are the inventors and authors of ; a glory that is so high and great, that, when clearly seen, commands assent to their divinity and reality. When there is an actual and lively discovery of this beauty and excellency, it will not allow of any such thought as that it is a hu-

man work, or the fruit of men's invention. This evidence, that they that are spiritually enlightened have, of the truth of the things of religion, is a kind of intuitive and immediate evidence. They believe the doctrines of God's word to be divine, because they see divinity in them; i. e. they see a divine, and transcendent, and most evidently distinguishing glory in them; such a glory as, if clearly seen, does not leave room to doubt of their being of God, and not of men.

Such a conviction of the truth of religion as this, arising, these ways, from a sense of the divine excellency of them, is that true spiritual conviction that there is in saving faith. And this original of it, is that by which it is most essentially distinguished from that common assent, which unregenerate men are capable of.

