



Fire and Ice Sermon Series

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The Necessity And Profitableness Of Good Works Asserted

By Ebenezer Erskine¹

“Having, therefore, these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” — 2 Cor. 7:1.

“Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.” —Rev. 22:14.

“If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.” —John 7:17.

Preface

THE following discourse is one of those for which I am become a debtor to the public, on the occasion mentioned in the preface of that upon Rev. 3:4. Although I am abundantly aware of my poor management of this important subject; yet I am not conscious of swerving, in any one point of doctrine, from the word of God, and the approved standards of this church: and, if in the least jot I have departed from them, either in this or any other of these sermons charged with heterodoxy, I am so far from pretending to infallibility, that I hope I shall never be ashamed publicly to retract what, upon conviction, shall be found to be amiss.

I look upon it as one of the most difficult things that belongs to us ministers, in the dispensation of the everlasting gospel, so to divide the word of truth, as to deliver it in the order and connexion in which God has laid it in the new covenant. Indistinct views here cannot miss to lead both ourselves and hearers into a maze and labyrinth of confusion, and exceedingly mar the sweetness of divine truth, with the success of the gospel. Every truth of God, even in itself; and abstractly considered, is precious; but the beauty, lustre, and sweetness of divine truth is never seen or felt, until the truth be known “as it is in Jesus.” All the truths of divine revelation meet in him, as the beams in the sun, or as the spokes of a wheel in their centre; insomuch, that, if any truth of God be handled, or any duty of the law inculcated, abstractly from him, it is taken out of its

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proper place where God has set it, and, consequently, cannot miss to lose its savour and beauty: and, therefore, it was not without ground the apostle expressed himself; as we have it, 1 Cor. 2:2: “I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.” He is the glorious “foundation laid in Zion,” and “another foundation can no man lay;” and if in building, we do not keep our eyes continually on this *chief corner stone*, we cannot avoid making very confused and irregular work. In a particular manner, when we inculcate *good works* upon our hearers, if we do not lead them, in the first place, to *work that great work of God*, namely, to “believe on him whom he hath sent,” we do but encourage them to build castles in the air, which fall down as fast as they are reared up. All our works will be found to be but empty ciphers in the day of the Lord, if this foundation be not first laid. The *root* on which they grow, namely, that of the old Adam, being *rotteness*, the *blossom* cannot miss to *go up as the dust*.

It is the ruin of thousands in the visible church, that whenever the law of God has pricked or wounded their hearts, and brought them under any concern for salvation; that, being “married to the law,” as a husband, they run to it for relief. Hence it is the ordinary dialect of awakened sinners, before the revelation of the remedy, “What shall we do?” or, “What good thing shall we do to inherit eternal life?” And, accordingly, they fall to doing and working; and there they rest; by which means, these very duties, which should lead them to Christ, prove a bar and hindrance of their coming to him. But, since the fall of Adam, the law was never given to man with a design that he should rest or stay in it, but, that man, by the law, might be carried forth to him, who is “the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.” I acknowledge, that they who rest in the law and its works, may find some sort of peace and ease for awhile; but true, solid, and lasting peace, can never be found on this side of Christ.

We do not read of any plaster that the stung Israelites were to make use of for their healing, but only *looking* to the *brazen serpent*. If they had made a confection of the best herbs in the wilderness, or a plaster of all the most efficacious ingredients in the world, and with it heaped up mountains of prayers, or poured out seas of tears, all would not have helped, if they had not *looked* to the *brazen serpent*. God had appointed *that* as the *only way of relief*; and, therefore, nothing else could perform the cure. So, here, God hath set up his Christ, as the *only way of life*; he hath lifted him up upon the pole of the gospel, “that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” And though we should spend our whole time and strength, in praying, mourning, and other acts of obedience, all would be of no avail, unless we made use of God’s remedy, in a way of believing, and that is, “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.” Isaiah 45:22.

But, say you, by this means we may lay aside praying, reading, hearing, and other duties of obedience, altogether. I answer, By no means. I do not advise you to leave off duties, but only as a plaster for healing your wounds, or as a ground of acceptance. Duties, indeed, are subservient to the cure, but they themselves are not the cure. For instance, prayer is a *seeking* of the cure, but not the cure itself: in reading and hearing,

we are directed *how to come* at the cure, but these are not the cure. We would reckon it a piece of prodigious folly, for one in distress to reckon himself healed, merely upon his seeking and getting a physician's advice, though he never apply the remedy prescribed. By our works of obedience, before conversion, like the man lying at the pool, we only study to have a deportment suitable to those who wait for divine mercy; and by our obedience, after conversion, we only express our gratitude for the cure, which he, in his sovereign grace has wrought, by the Spirit's application of the blood of Jesus: but still these works of obedience, whether before or after conversion, are not the cure. It is a known maxim among sound divines, *That, being justified, we work, but we do not work that we may be justified.* So, then, let us never put our duties in the room of Christ. The man that rests in any thing on this side of Christ, will at last rest on this side of heaven. All our duties and works of obedience will be but as ropes of sand, or chains of glass, too brittle to draw our souls up to glory.

It is very observable, that the order and connexion betwixt duty and privilege is quite inverted in the Covenant of grace, from what it was under Adam's covenant. In the last of these, duty was the foundation of privilege; but, in the first, namely, the new covenant, privilege received by faith is the foundation of duty. In Adam's covenant, man was first to do his duty; and on that ground, in a way of pactional debt, he might expect and plead the reward of life. But now, man having forfeited life by the breach of that covenant, God will have him to take life as a free gift through Christ; and thus to set his seal to his record, "that he hath given to us eternal life, in his Son Jesus Christ;" and thereupon, as a fruit and evidence of life received, he will have us perform the duties of his law.

It is pleasant to observe, that, when God published the law at Mount Sinai, he ushered it in with the great new covenant grant, "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." Here is the object and foundation of their faith; and upon this he founds their obedience to the precepts of the moral law. "Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy," &c. If the commandments of the moral law had been set first, and God had said, "Do these things, and I will be your God;" this had been a pure covenant of works, indeed. But, first, he reveals himself as *their God in Christ*, a reconciled God and Redeemer; and, upon this footing, presses obedience to his commandments. So that, I say, the order of doctrine laid in the dispensation of the gospel, is first to lead the sinner by faith to Christ, and to God in him; and upon this to inculcate obedience to the law as a *rule of duty*. This order of doctrine I find accurately observed by the Westminster Assembly, in compiling our excellent Confession of Faith and Catechisms; where they tell us first *what we are to believe*, and then the *duties which God requires of man*. The same method we find the apostle Paul observes in most of his epistles. So that this is no new scheme, but *the good old way*. And if this order of doctrine be inverted, we disturb the comely order which infinite wisdom has laid in the dispensation of the new covenant, and infallibly return back to an old covenant of works.

This is the order I have aimed at in the following discourse: whether I have hit it right, or not, I leave it to others to judge. I do freely admit that, ever since I knew any thing of Christianity, I never found greater difficulty in any thing, than to bring my heart to fall in with this order of the new covenant. And even after the soul, as to the main, is brought to acquiesce in this new method of salvation; yet there is so much of the old Adam, I mean of a legal spirit, in us, as is still leading us insensibly back to Adam's covenant, namely, to expect mercy, grace, and glory, on the score of something wrought in us, or done by us. And our words, who are ministers, do many times betray the legality of our hearts: which I speak in a way of regret, from my own sad experience, not in a way of reflection upon others. And I make no doubt, but such as have a true taste of the gospel, may find something of this in the following discourse, though I have endeavoured to shun it as much as I could.

If by the publication of these imperfect scraps, any shall be provoked to handle this, or any of the other subjects, with more accuracy, which may be easily done, I shall heartily rejoice. And if either the church of God, or any particular soul, shall be edified by reading this, or any other of the quarrelled sermons, he owes no thanks to me, but only to that God, who, by his overruling providence, "makes the wrath of man to praise him:" and, for my own part, I desire to believe, "that the remainder of his wrath he will restrain."

E. E.

PORTMOAK,

June 6, 1726.

"This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God, might be careful to maintain good works: these things are good and profitable unto men." —Titus 3:8.

The apostle having, in the preceding part of this chapter, particularly from the 4th verse, and downwards, given a brief summary or epitome of the doctrine of the gospel, and of the free grace of God towards sinners, through the imputed righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ; he proceeds, in this 8th verse, to conclude the whole with a serious advice to Titus, what use to make of the doctrine of grace among his hearers; namely, upon that footing, to urge

them to the study of practical godliness as great gain: *This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, &c.*

Where these things are worthy of consideration.

1. We have the apostle's epilogue, or conclusion, with which he shuts up that grave and weighty subject, which he had been treating in the preceding verses, *This is a faithful saying*. Some, indeed, understand this as a preface to what follows; but I find the generality of interpreters rather connect this solemn affirmation with what went before, *and* particularly with what the apostle had asserted in the verse immediately preceding; to wit, "That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life;" and then immediately adds, *This is a faithful saying*. The apostle foresaw, by the spirit of prophecy, that the doctrine of grace would meet with unaccountable opposition in after ages of the world; and that opposition was already begun in his own day, as appears from his epistle to the Galatians; and therefore ratifies it with the greater solemnity, *This is a faithful saying*. From whence I observe, by and by, That us ministers of Christ are to declare the whole counsel of God, so there are some truths that need to be more vouched and dwelt upon than others; particularly truths that are more fundamental, and most controverted by gainsayers. Hence we find, there is sometimes an call for attention, or a watchword, added to some truths, requiring our more diligent attention, and serious entertainment. Thus the apostle here, considering the opposition the doctrine of grace would meet with from men of legal spirits, adds this word of attention to the close of it, *This is a faithful saying*. Ministers are watchmen, and set for the defence of the truth; and therefore, when any truth of God is in danger, they are to double their guard, and to support these truths that are most attacked by the enemy, that so they may not "fall in the streets." And if it be the duty of ministers to teach, inculcate, and support those truths that are controverted or contradicted; surely it is also the duty of people to study these truths, and the arguments that support them, that so they may be in a capacity to distinguish between truth and error, and "to give a reason of the" faith and "hope that is in them." The Bereans have a high commendation given them; they are called men of noble and excellent spirits, on this account, that they would not swallow down, by an implicit faith, the doctrines taught even by the apostles themselves: no, but they tried even the apostolic doctrine by the standard of the law and testimony. And this is a thing not only commanded and commended in the scriptures of truth, but most agreeable, likewise, to the dictates of right reason. How is it possible that people can obey the command of "contending for the faith once delivered unto the saints," if they do not understand the doctrine of faith, particularly these doctrines that are in danger of being

wrested from them? Ministers are called “stewards in the house of God, and stewards of the mysteries of God.” Now, you know it is very much the interest of the house or family, to see that their steward feed them with sound and wholesome food, otherwise they may come to swallow a stone instead of bread, or a scorpion instead of a fish. We call you to examine and try our doctrines at the bar of the word; and if they will not abide the trial there, let them sink and perish for ever. There is always reason to suspect any set of men who decline or shun any fair trial of their doctrines; for “he that doth truth, cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.” But,

2. In the words we have an apostolic command given to Titus, and in him to all ministers of the gospel: *These things I will that thou affirm constantly*. The word in the original rendered *affirm*, is borrowed from the practice of those who, when they buy or sell a thing, oblige themselves to maintain the claim and title against all law-suits or entanglements. Titus, and other ministers, are not only to teach the doctrines of the gospel, but to confirm and make them good against all the cavils or questions that may be moved about them.

3. In the words we have a particular doctrine which the apostle recommends to be taught by Titus, namely; “That they who have believed in God, should be careful to maintain good works.” Where notice the foundation of all good works, and that is *believing in God*; to wit, in God as he is manifested in Christ, “God reconciling the world to himself;” for out of Christ he cannot be the object of faith, but of terror, to a guilty sinner. Now, this believing in God is the very foundation of all good works: for “without faith it is impossible to please God:” and they that have believed, are enjoined *to maintain good works*. The word in the original is borrowed from the military, particularly such as set themselves at the front of the battle, and march forward to encourage the whole army to follow them. “Believers,” would the apostle say, “must not only do good works, but must be patterns and examples thereof to others;” according to that injunction of Christ; “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” But the significance of this you may meet with more fully afterwards.

4. We have a very cogent and weighty reason why believers are to maintain good works; why, says he, “These things are good and profitable unto men.” The apostle, in the 5th verse, had secluded good works from any causality or influence on our justification or eternal salvation: “Not by works of righteousness, which we have done, but according to his mercy, he saved us.” Now lest any should allege, that, in that case, good works were altogether useless, he adds this as a caveat, and says, “Do not mistake it, for although your good

works be not profitable for justification, yet they are good and profitable to men on many other accounts:” of which we may hear likewise afterward.

The doctrine I notice from the words is this: —

DOCT. “That as faith, or believing, is the source of good works; so these good works, which are the fruit of believing, are good and profitable to men.” Or, take it thus: “That they who have truly believed, are to be careful to maintain good works, these being good and profitable unto men.” The foundation of this doctrine from the words is obvious.

In speaking to it, I shall, through divine assistance, observe the method following:

- I. I would speak a little of those good works, which they who have believed in God are called to maintain.
- II. Of that believing in God, which is the source and fountain of good works.
- III. Show that these good works, flowing from faith, are “good and profitable unto men.”
- IV. Apply the whole.

I. I say, I would *speak a little of good works*. Where I would show,

1. What works they are that may be called *good works*.
2. What is meant by *maintaining good works*.

First, What sort of works they are that may be called *good works*. In general, then, you would know, that, considering the law as a covenant, or an abstract rule of righteousness, as contradistinct from the gospel, there are no works done by men that can be called *good works*; for “there is none that doth good” (in this respect,) “no not one: In many things we offend all.” The most blameless and perfect actions of the most consummate believer that ever drew breath in God’s air, while in this state of sin and imperfection, cannot perform a work legally good, because of the mixture of sin that attends his best performances. And hence it is, that we find the saints in scripture claiming, that they could not *stand, if God should mark iniquity*; that *all their righteousness is as filthy rags*; that their *goodness extendeth not to him*. O sirs, if God should “lay

judgment to the line, and righteousness to the plummet,” we, and all our good works, would be for ever rejected, like *reprobate silver*. And therefore we have little reason to think or imagine, that God is a debtor to us for any thing we do, or that our good works do procure the favour of God, his acceptance, or a title to life. But our works are called *good works*, as having a respect to the law, considered as a rule of duty, in the sweet hand of a Mediator. He makes his “yoke easy, and his burden light,” to his people, by accepting of their weak efforts and endeavours through his perfect obedience and satisfaction, as good, though attended with manifold imperfections. Now, to constitute in action good in an evangelical sense, there are several things requisite.

1. To make a work a good work it must be done by a good and holy person, renewed by the Spirit of Christ and justified by his merit. It is beyond all dispute and controversy, that the person must first be accepted of God, and reconciled to him in Christ, before the work can be accepted. Abel’s person was accepted of God, and then his offering. And hence it is, that “the sacrifices of the wicked” are said to be “an abomination to the Lord.” The very “ploughing of the wicked is sin.” The matter is this: God is angry with their persons, and he hates and loathes them while out of Christ; and therefore nothing that comes from them, or that is done by them, can be acceptable. And therefore, I say, to make works good and acceptable to God, they must be done by a person that is in a gracious and reconciled state.

2. To make a work a good work it must be a thing required and called for by the law of God. The reason of this is plain, because it is God’s will that makes any thing sin or duty; and if it be not agreeable to his revealed will, he may say unto us, “Who hath required this at your hand?” Hence Christ confronts the Pharisees, saying, “In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.” And therefore, if you would do any work acceptable to God, you must take care, that the thing you do be required and commanded of God. Indeed, there are some actions that are of an indifferent nature; that is, God has left men at a perfect liberty, whether to do them or not. But then it should be remembered, that these actions, in the case of offence or edification, cease to be indifferent, and fall under some commandment of the moral law. In which case Paul says, (1 Cor. 8:13,) “if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth.” It was a thing indifferent, whether Paul did eat flesh or not; but when offence was likely to follow his eating, he would abstain from it as much as though it were expressly forbidden in the law of God, because, in that case, it became a breach of the law of love and charity.

3. To make a work a good work it must be done out of a right principle. It must be done out of a principle of faith, as was already hinted; for no work can be acceptable without this, Heb. 11:6. And there is a twofold faith requisite in a good action. (1.) A general faith of persuasion, that the thing we do may be done lawfully. And of this the apostle speaks when he says, "Whatsoever is not of faith, is sin," Rom. 14:23. And, (2.) A particular justifying faith, believing the acceptance of what we do, only through the Lord Jesus Christ, and his merit and mediation. Again; a good work must be done out of regard to the authority of God commanding: and that not simply with a respect to the authority of a God the Creator; for thus a Heathen, or a Mahometan, may obey God, and do good actions; but out of a respect to the authority of a God in Christ. We must eye the authority of the Creator in our obedience, as coming in this blessed channel, otherwise it is not a true Christian obedience: for we Christians are "under the law to Christ;" and when we are so, we are "not without law to God," seeing God hath commanded us to "hear his voice," and to "obey him," as our "Lord, King," and "Lawgiver." And "whatsoever we do in word or deed," we are to "do all in the name" and authority "of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the glory of God by him." And, farther, good works must be done with simplicity and godly sincerity, avoiding hypocritical and Pharisaical ostentation in the discharge of duty: for "his soul which is lifted up, is not upright in him," Hab. 2:4.

4. To make a work a good work, it must be done to a right end. It must be done to the glory and honour of God, this being the principal and ultimate end of our being, according to that direction of the apostle, 1 Cor. 10:31: "Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." It must be done as a declaration of our gratitude to God for redeeming love. We are "bought with a price;" therefore we are to "glorify him in our bodies and spirits, which are his." They must be done, also, with a view to the edification of others, Matth. 5:16. But these, and many other things to this purpose, will fall in to be spoken to more particularly, when we come to the fourth general head proposed in the prosecution of the doctrine.

Secondly, I come to inquire what may be the significance of that phrase of being *careful to maintain good works*? To this I answer briefly in the following particulars.

1. It implies a diligent attendance to the rule of the word; according to that of David, Psal. 119:9: "Wherewith shall a young man cleanse his way?. By taking heed thereto according to thy word." The man makes God's statutes "the man of his counsel." And when he is called to this or that piece of service, he takes advice of his counsellors, whether he may do or forbear. They are "a lamp unto his feet,

and a light unto his path.” As Israel looked to the pillar of cloud, and of fire, in all their motions and travels, for direction through the wilderness; so the gracious soul looks to the law or testimony in every step of his way towards the Canaan that is above.

2. It implies an anxiety or solicitude of soul, to have his actions managed and ordered according to that rule. It is the very desire of his soul, to be found in the Lord’s way; as it was with David, Psal. 119:5: “O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!” he desires not only to have his outward walk, but the inward frame of his very soul, all the thoughts of it, moulded in an agreeableness to the law of God: Psal. 119:80: “Let my heart be sound in thy statutes; that I be not ashamed.” Such is his concern for this, that he lays up the law of God in the very cabinet of his heart, as an antidote against sin: Psal. 119:11: “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.”

3. It implies a holy watchfulness against all the temptations, motions, or occasions of sin, either in thought, word, or action. “I said, I will take heed to my ways,” says David. The man sets a watch over his heart, according to that command, “Keep thy heart with all diligence: for out of it are the issues of life.” He sets a watch over his eyes, and makes a covenant with them; and over his lips, lest sin should either enter, or go forth by that door.

4. It implies an embracing of every opportunity for doing good works that God puts into his hands, and improving the same. When God puts the opportunity or talent in his hand, he studies to lay it out for the Master’s use, and his own and others’ profit and advantage; according to that direction of Solomon, “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.”

5. It implies a going on, or progress in the duties of obedience, without returning back again to the old trade of sin. The Christian is not like the “dog returning to his vomit,” or “the sow that was washed to wallow in the mire;” no, but “the righteous holdeth on his way;” he “maintains good works;” he “waxes stronger and stronger;” he “forgets the things that are behind, and reacheth forth unto things that are before.”

6. The word here, as I hinted in the explication, implies an exciting or influencing of others to the study of good works. The word, as I said, is borrowed from captains or commanders, who go in front of the battle, encouraging the soldiers of the army to follow their example. The believer studies to exhibit a good copy, and to recommend holiness and good works to others, by his practice; so that others, seeing his good works, may be encouraged to do the like.

7. *Lastly*, This maintaining of good works must needs depend upon doing all by faith, and improving the strength of Christ: “I will go in the strength of the Lord God: I will make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only.” But this leads me to the *second* general head.

II. The *second* general thing proposed in the method, was, to *give some account of this believing in God, which is given as the character of those who maintain good works*. Here I would, 1. Show what believing in God implies. 2. Give some of the qualities of this believing. 3. Show the influence that it has upon good works.

First, What believing in God implies.

1. It implies the knowledge of God, in a suitableness to the relation which he has made of himself to us, through Christ, in the gospel. I acknowledge, that the very Heathens may know his eternal power, by the things that are seen; but there is no saving knowledge of God by a guilty sinner, but as he is in Christ: 2 Cor. 4:6: “God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ.” And whatever fine notions or speculations people may have of God, and of his excellencies, as discoverable in the works of creation and providence; yet, if their notions of him be not regulated by the gospel-revelation, and if this revelation of a God in Christ be not opened by the Spirit of wisdom, rending the veil of ignorance and unbelief that is upon the mind by nature, there can be no saving, satisfying, or sanctifying knowledge of God, and consequently no true faith, or believing. Indeed, a rational knowledge may produce a rational faith, and an historical knowledge may produce an historical faith; but it is only a saving illumination of the mind with the knowledge of a God in Christ, reconciling the world to himself that can produce a saving faith. And this knowledge is so essential to faith, or believing, that we find it frequently in scripture called by the name of knowledge: “I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord. By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many. This is life eternal, to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.”

2. To believe in God, implies a firm and steady assent to the truth and veracity of God speaking in his word. It is to believe and credit what he says, on his own testimony. This is called a “receiving the record of God, a setting to the seal that God is true, a believing of the report of the gospel.” When the man hears “the word of the truth of the gospel,” he is ready to cry out, with the apostle, “It is

a faithful saying.” This word is established in the heavens; yea, “heaven and earth shall pass away,” but this word of God “endureth for ever.”

3. To believe in God is to trust that this word of a reconciled God in Christ is not only true in the general, but that it shall be true to me in particular, that it shall be made good to me. He takes up God in Christ as a promising God, promising peace and pardon, grace and glory, in Christ; and he takes up the promise, as coming to him in the offer of the gospel, as the immediate ground and foundation of his faith: Acts 2:39: “The promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off; even as many as the Lord our God shall call.” Now, I say, the man taking up the word of grace and promise in this way, trusts the promiser for the performing thereof to his own soul: he takes it as a sufficient security for all promised good, saying, “Here is my substance: This is all my salvation.” Hence faith acted upon the promise of God is called “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen,” Heb. 11:1. And this is what many notable divines, both abroad and at home, call the assurance of faith, or the appropriating persuasion of faith; because there is not only a persuasion of the truth of the promise, but a persuasion of it, with application and appropriation of it to the man himself in particular. And this is all I say at present about the ingredients of faith in God. I come,

Secondly, To give some of the properties and qualities of it. And there are these few following that I mention:—

1. It is a staying, quieting, or composing grace. It will settle the mind under the greatest storms and disorders: Is. 26:3: “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee.” Hence the believer, under clouds of desertion, temptation, and affliction, is directed to “trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God,” Is. 1.10.

2. It is a receptive or a taking grace. It gives nothing to God, as other graces do; but only takes or receives from the Lord: it does not come to give but to get. Hence it is expressed by a *taking*; Rev. 22:17: “Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely;” or, which is the same thing, a *receiving*, John 1:12: “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.” Faith is, in scripture, sometimes compared to the eye: “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth,” Is. 45:22. You know the eye, when it beholds external objects, does not give any thing to what it beholds, but only takes in the image or impression of what it sees, and conveys that to the mind: so, faith does not add or give any thing to God; it only beholds him, and the discoveries he has made of his grace, and glory, and love, and

faithfulness, in Christ, and impresses the soul with them. Hence we, by “beholding his glory as in a glass,” are said to be “changed into the same image,” 2 Cor. 3:18.

3. Although it be only a receptive grace with respect to its object, yet, where implanted, it is a mighty operative grace with respect to its subject: for, as you may hear afterward, it influences every good word and work; and therefore all true obedience is called “the obedience of faith.” So that an idle or inactive faith is but dead, like the body without the soul.

4. It is a radical or rooting grace. It roots the soul, as it were, in the root of Jesse, the plant of renown. And itself is the root of the other graces of the Spirit, by which they are made to grow and blossom. As the tree strikes its roots into the ground, and from thence draws fatness, sap, and moisture, conveying a digested nourishment to the several branches, by which they are made to bud and flourish, and bring forth fruit; so, faith ingrafts and unites the soul to Christ, deriving spiritual sap, and moisture, and fatness, by which every other habit of grace is drawn forth to a lively exercise.

5. It is a most humble and lowly grace. It carries the man quite out of himself into Christ for all. Hence it is called a “submitting unto the righteousness of God,” Rom. 10:3. A very strange expression! Shall it be reckoned submission for a condemned criminal to receive a pardon? Is it submission for a naked beggar to receive a robe? Yet thus it is: the pride of our hearts will not stoop so low, as to be obliged to the Son of God for righteousness, pardon, and life. And this is the very thing that makes faith, or believing, so difficult. What difficulty is there for a naked man to receive a garment to cover him? What difficulty for a poor man to receive a gift? What difficulty for a weary man to sit down and rest? But the thing that makes this difficult is the pride of our hearts, together with our ignorance both of our malady and remedy. Now, I say, faith breaks the pride of the heart, and submits, or lies down, as it were, at the foot of sovereign grace, heartily content to be indebted to Christ for all. The man is content to be a fool, that Christ may be his *wisdom*; content to be a criminal, in the eyes of law, and justice, and conscience, that Christ may be his *righteousness*; content to own himself a polluted filthy sinner, that in him he may be *sanctified*; content to own himself a slave, that he may be a free man in Christ and share of his *redemption*. This is true gospel-humility, indeed, and what the high and lofty One regards: Is. 57:15: “Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, I dwell with him that is of a contrite and humble spirit.” “Though God be high yet hath he regard to such as are” thus “lowly.”

6. It is an elevating and ennobling grace. Though it be an humbling grace, yet it is a most exalting grace; it elevates the soul above this lower world, it looks down on it as a dunghill, and mounts up with wings toward the land that is very far off; it enters within the veil, and takes a view of things invisible and particularly of an unseen Christ, and triumphs in him: “Whom having not seen, we love; in whom, though now we see him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory.” it mounts so high, that it will even dare to sit down upon the throne with Christ in glory: hence we are said to “sit together with him” by faith “in heavenly places.”

7. It is a cheering and a comforting grace. We are “filled with all joy and peace in believing. I had fainted,” says David, “unless I had believed.”

8. It is a bold and confident grace. Hence we read frequently of the “*boldness of faith*,” and the “*assurance of faith*,” Heb. 4:16; Heb. 10:22. It is disputed at this day, whether assurance be of the essence of faith. I incline not to call it by the name of *assurance*, because some frivolously object to that word; but I choose rather to call it by the name of the *certainty* of faith. I do not design to enter much upon that controversy at present: all I say of it is only this; that there cannot miss to be a certainty in faith, because doubts and fears vanish before it. “Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?” How faith can fill the soul with “joy and peace,” yea, with “joy unspeakable, and full of glory,” if it have no certainty in it as to these things in which it rejoices, is what I think no man is able to account for. How a man can rest on Christ, and apply him and his salvation to himself in particular, and yet not believe “that he shall be saved through the grace of Christ,” to me appears a paradox. I do not say, that faith excludes doubts out of the believer; but I say that faith excludes doubting out of its own nature. Light excludes darkness out of its nature; and yet there may be much darkness in a room where there is some light. Certainty may be of the nature of faith, although there be much darkness and doubting in the believer, through the prevalence of ignorance and unbelief that remains in him, and will remain, while he is clogged with a body of death. So, in like manner, love excludes enmity out of the nature of it; and yet, in the believer, who loves Christ, there is much remaining enmity, by which his love is exceedingly weakened: so the certainty of faith is weakened through the remaining unbelief that is still in the believer’s heart. But now here it would be remembered, that, although there be a certainty in the nature of faith, a certainty of trust, rest or confidence in God, grounded on his promise in Christ; yet there is a great difference betwixt this certainty of faith, and the certainty or assurance of sense or reflection, which some call a *discursive assurance*: for the certainty of sense is built upon the soul’s own experience or feeling: but the

certainty of faith is built on the promise, and Christ in the promise. The first sort of assurance is not at all in the nature of faith; but the last sort of assurance or certainty, is what is, and has been owned, by all the stream of reformed divines, both at home and abroad, ever since our happy reformation from Popery. I shall only add here, that the difference betwixt the certainty of faith and of sense, is very evident and obvious; for the one has a respect to what the soul feels and sees at present before it: but the other, to wit, the certainty of faith has a respect to things promised which are not seen or felt otherwise but as they lie in the womb of the promise, and in the veracity of the promiser. To give you a few instances: By the certainty of faith, Moses, and the believing Israelites, knew, before they came out of Egypt, that they would have a passage through the Red sea as through dry land; but, by the certainty of sense, they knew it, when they saw the waters file off on every hand, making a lane for Israel to pass on. By faith acted on God's promise, they knew that the walls of Jericho would fall down at the sounding of rams' horns; but by the certainty of sense, they knew it, when they saw them actually fall flat before them. By the assurance of faith Abraham believed, without staggering, that he should have a son, because God had promised it; but, by the assurance of sense, he knew it, when he got Isaac in his arms. By the assurance of faith, Abraham, and the Old Testament worthies, believed that the Messiah was to come in the fullness of time; but, by the assurance of sense, John the Baptist, and others, knew it, when they saw him manifested in the flesh, and beheld his glory, saying, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." By the certainty of faith, we under the New Testament are persuaded and assured, that Christ is to come again the second time; but, by the certainty of sense, we shall know it, when we shall see him descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and trump of God. By faith we are assured of the resurrection of the dead, and of our own resurrection in particular; but, by sense, we shall be assured of it at that day, when the voice shall be heard, commanding the sea to give up its dead, and the earth to give up its dead. Thus, I say, there is a great and visible difference between the certainty of faith, and the certainty of sense. By faith acted upon the promise, I believe the remission of sins, and of my sins, through Christ; but, by the certainty of sense, I am assured of this, when God by his Spirit seals his pardon on my soul with a perceptible smile of his countenance. By faith I believe God to be my God, because he has said it in the covenant, "I will be their God;" but, by the certainty of sense, I believe this, when he reveals and manifests himself to my soul. By faith, grounded on the promise of eternal life in Christ, I believe my own salvation in particular; but, by the certainty of sense, I believe, because I have believed, or because God has discovered himself to be a saving God to me, by the operation of his Spirit upon my soul. So, I say, faith is a

bold and confident grace; it intermeddles with, applies, and appropriates, and makes use of the goods of the testament of Christ as its own, the testament being confirmed in the blood of the Lamb; and this testament it not only pleads, but rejoices in. The language of faith is not properly, *May be*, or, *Peradventure it shall be so*; though I grant that a weak faith may many times lurk under a may be: but, I say, let faith be stripped of its incumbrances, or of those things that are opposite to its nature; let it but get a full view of the promise, and faithfulness of the promiser, it will set its foot on unbelief, and all discouragements, saying, It shall be, because God hath said it. Thus you see faith expresses itself; Mic. 7:7-10: I will look unto the Lord: I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me." And ver. 8: "When I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me." And, ver. 9, at the close: "He will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness."

9. It is a very quick-sighted grace. It can see relief coming to the soul at a vast distance, saying, "I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." It can look through frowning dispensations, and see love in the heart of God.

10. It is a strengthening and establishing grace: "Except ye believe, ye shall not be established." It is by faith that we are "strengthened in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." Faith, in a manner, wields the very arm of Omnipotence, and cries with Paul, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

To conclude, faith is a patient grace; it waits on the Lord till his time come for the accomplishment of his promise. Unbelief is hasty: "I said, in my haste, All men are liars: but he that believeth, shall not make haste." Its language is, "I will look unto the Lord: I will wait for the God of my salvation. The vision is for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come, it will not tarry."

Thirdly, I now proceed to inquire what influence this faith has upon good works?. *Answ.* There are several things that are inlaid with the very nature and exercise of faith, which cannot miss to influence, holiness and good works. As,

1. True faith unites the soul to Christ who is the very root and fountain of all holiness. "From me," saith the Lord, "is thy fruit found Except ye abide in me, and I in you, (to wit, by faith,) ye cannot bring forth much fruit." Indeed, a person in a state of nature may bring forth many fruits that are morally and materially good; but, without union with Christ, we can do no work that is spiritually good and acceptable; for, "as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me." We may as well "gather grapes of

thorns, or figs of thistles,” as expect works that are spiritually good from a person out of Christ. Why? The reason of it is plain: his “root” is but “rotteness,” while he grows upon the old Adam: and therefore his “blossom shall go up as dust.” While a man is growing upon the old Adam, he is married to the law as a covenant; and therefore all his works are but dead works: and can ever dead works be acceptable to the living God? We must be “dead to the law by the body of Christ,” and “married to that better husband, before we can “bring forth fruit unto God,” Rom. 7:4.

2. Faith works by love; and “love is the fulfilling of the law.” Love to God in Christ is the next and immediate fruit true and saving faith. Now, the heart being oiled with the love of God in Christ, this makes the man to abound in good works: “The love of Christ constrains us,” says the apostle. Love makes a man to keep God’s commandments. Love will make a man to run through fire and water for him. “Many waters cannot quench love,” &c. Cant. 8:7. “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” Rom. 8:35.

3. Faith is a shield to quench the fiery darts of Satan. When temptation without, and corruption within, are forming a conspiracy against the work of grace in the soul, by which the whole work is endangered, then faith breaks the plot, and countermines it. When Adonijah’s conspiracy had carried the whole strength of the kingdom of Israel, it was broken by making application to David: “Hast thou not said, that Solomon shall reign?” So, when temptation and corruption have carried the matter to a great height, the conspiracy is broken by faith’s application to Christ: O Lord, hast thou not said that grace shall reign, and that “sin shall not have dominion over me?” And thus the soul is made to go on its way, “rejoicing to work righteousness.”

4. Faith applies the promises of the new covenant and fetches grace from thence, for obeying the precepts of the law. So that faith, as it were, travels between the precept and the promise: it carries the man from the precept to the promise and from the promise to the precept. As, for instance, when the law says, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind;” faith runs to the promise, where God has said, “I will circumcise their hearts to love me.” When the law says, “Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and make him thy dread;” faith, in that case, runs to the promise for the grace of fear: “I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me.” Does the law say, “Thou shalt know the Lord,” and acknowledge him for “thy God?” Well, faith looks to the promise, “I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord.” Does the law oblige us to “keep all

his commandments?” Faith runs to the promise, and applies it “I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes.”

5. Faith has an influence on good works, as it beholds the authority of a God in Christ interposed in every commandment of the law. The eye of natural reason may see, as was hinted, the authority of a God Creator, as is plain in the case of the Heathens; but it is only the eye of that faith, which is of God’s operation, that can behold the authority of a God in Christ, and receive the law out of his hands. In this respect we are told, “that no man can call Jesus Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.” And when the law is received from his mouth, it does not reflect dishonour upon God as a Creator. O! When a God in Christ is viewed by faith, the soul cannot but cry out, “He is my King of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth; His commandments are not grievous His yoke is easy, and his burden is light:” for I see it no more a covenant of works to me, but a rule of obedience, sweetened with redeeming love and grace. Thus, you see what influence faith has upon good works.

III. The *third* general head proposed in the method was, to *inquire in what respect good works are profitable to men.*

But, first, I would show you, negatively, in what respects they are not profitable to men.

1. Then, They are not at all profitable to men for justification or acceptance before God: for “by the works of the law,” says the apostle, “shall no flesh be justified.” Our justification and acceptance, both as to our persons and our works, go upon quite other ground; viz. upon the everlasting righteousness, the obedience and death, of the Son of God, as our surety, apprehended by faith. It is *in him* “that all the seed of Israel shall be justified, and shall glory.” Indeed, the generality of men, that are trained up in a Protestant country, will tell you, that they do not expect to be justified by their own righteousness, but only by the righteousness of Christ. But alas! How few are they that really and actually submit to this righteousness! There is a cursed bias in the heart of man to lean to something in himself. Is not this the language of thy heart many times? O! If I had such an emotional experience, such a melting heart, such love, such a degree of humility and obedience, then I think God would accept of me, and love me, on that account. But, sirs, let me tell you, that it is not on account of any thing wrought in you, or done by you, that God accepts of you, but only on account of the doing and dying of the Son of God. I may say to all legalists, that are looking for acceptance with God on the ground of the law, and their own obedience, as the

prophet Isaiah says to a set of men in his day, Is. 59:6: “Their webs shall not become garments, neither shall they cover themselves with their works.” So, then, good works are not at all profitable to righteousness and justification. Hence, (Is. 57:12:) “I will declare thy righteousness, and thy works, for they shall not profit thee.”

2. Good works are not at all profitable to found a claim or title to heaven, or yet to any blessing and mercy promised in the whole covenant of grace; for heaven, and all the blessings that lie on this side of it, come to us in the way of a free gift. God gives Christ, his unspeakable gift, and with him he freely gives us these things: “The gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.” I acknowledge, indeed, that in God’s covenant of promise there is a connexion and order established, for conferring of these promised blessings to us; so that when God gives one thing, it is a pledge of another thing coming; when he gives grace, to be sure he will give glory; when he gives a mourning heart, it is a sign that comfort is coming, because that is God’s method and way, “to give the oil of joy for mourning, and to revive the heart of the humble.” But though the tears of gospel-mourning be a sign and evidence of comfort coming, yet they are not the condition for which God bestows comfort. So God has connected faith and salvation together in the covenant; so that “he that believeth, shall be saved:” but it is not our faith that entitles us to salvation; no, but faith unites the soul to Christ, in whom we recover our right to the forfeited inheritance. It is by virtue of the soul’s union with Christ by faith that it is entitled to all the promised blessings. Hence all the promises are said to be “in him yea, and in him amen.” There is no promise in the Bible, but it is made in the first instance to Christ as the head, and in him to the members of mystical body. Just as it was in the first covenant, to wit, the covenant of works; the promise of life, upon condition of perfect obedience, was made directly to Adam as the covenant head, and, in him, to his posterity: so in the new covenant, of which Christ is the Head, the promise of life, and every thing belonging to it, is first made to him; and, in him, to all his spiritual seed and offspring: and in this respect, all the promises are in him *yea* and *amen*. Christ is the first *heir of all things*; and the title of the younger brethren is only through him, or by virtue of their union with him. Thus, good works, I say, are not profitable to men, in order to found a title to heaven and eternal life.

3. As our good works are not profitable to men in any of these respects, so neither are they profitable to God, as though he had any advantage by them: Job 22:2, 3: “Can a man be profitable to God, as he that is wise may be profitable to himself? Is it any pleasure to the Almighty, that thou art righteous? Or is it gain to him, that thou makest thy ways perfect?” Hence David acknowledges, that “his

goodness extended not to the Lord.” Alas! we are ready to think, that God is much indebted to us, when we do this or that. Have we fasted and prayed, mourned and repented, kept the Sabbath, attended ordinances, and performed this or the other duty; and yet will not God be pleased with all? No, no; do not mistake it; you that bring these things as a price in your hands, to recommend you to God, all your duties are but like the *cutting off of a dog’s neck*, and the *offering of swine’s blood* upon his altar. And, therefore, he will say to you, as he said to Israel, Is. 1:11: “To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me.”

But now, you may perhaps say to me, By this way of speaking you make good works profitable for nothing at all. What strange doctrine is this? I answer, although they be not at all profitable in any of these respects, but wholly unprofitable and pernicious; yet good works, when done out of a principle of faith, are really profitable on many other accounts. As,

1. They are profitable, as they are the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith: Jam. 2:18: “Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works.” And, ver. 22: “Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? From whence it is plain, that works are profitable, as the fruits and evidences of true faith. We know that there is sap and life in the tree by the fruits, the leaves, and blossoms, that it puts forth; so we know our faith to be a true faith, by the fruits of holiness and good works. Yea, our good works will be brought forth, at the last day, as the evidence of our faith; and therefore it is said, Rev. 20:12; “They were judged according to their works.” Works are not a ground of confidence, but an evidence; they are not the foundation of faith, but the fruits of it: and the believer’s comfort may be increased by the sight of good works, though it is not built on them. In a word, they manifest our claim and title to the crown, but do not at all procure or merit the same. *We have peace with God*, and with conscience, by the righteousness of Christ; and by holiness, or good works, our peace of conscience is maintained and evidenced to us.

2. They are profitable, as they are testimonies and evidences of our gratitude to God for the wonders of his grace and love manifested in and by Jesus Christ. Hence says David, Psal. 116:12, 13: “What shall I render unto the Lord, for all his benefits towards me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord.” 1 Pet. 2:9: “Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.” The works of obedience, are, as it were, thank-offerings to God for the benefits bestowed on us; and when men have not a conversation suitable to their mercies, they despise the

goodness of God. Hence is it that the Lord complains of such, saying, “Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish people and unwise.”

3. They are profitable and needful for strengthening our assurance: 1 John 2:3: “Hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.” And, ver. 5: “Whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.” 2 Pet. 1:5, to ver. 10. From all which you see, that assurance is strengthened and confirmed by the fruits of holiness and good works. We read, that “the Spirit beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:” and it is well, when, with the witness of the Spirit, we have that of water, that is, sanctification and purity of heart and life.

4. They are profitable, as they are edifying to others: Matth. 5:16: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” Christ does not there encourage vain-glory and boasting, but proposes the true end of our visible or external holiness, namely; that others may have matter of praise to God for his grace abounding toward us; and that they may be also engaged to the study of holiness and practical religion by our example. It was a saying of Jerome, “That he loved Christ, dwelling in Augustine.” We ought so to walk, as others may love Christ dwelling in us. It is an exhortation to believing wives, 1 Pet. 3:1, so to walk, that their husbands may be *won* to the Lord. So that, I say, good works are edifying to others.

5. They are profitable, as they serve to adorn the profession of the gospel: 1 Tim. 6:1: “Let as many servants as are under the yoke, count their own masters worthy of all honour; that the name of God, and his doctrine be not blasphemed.” Tit. 2:5, 9-12. Thus, they serve to adorn religion. The church is the Lord’s garden; and you know the fruitfulness of the trees of the garden serve exceedingly to adorn it; whereas barrenness, or bad fruit, is a disgrace, and makes the garden to be ill spoken of. When men, professing godliness, have not a suitable walk and conversation, it makes enemies and strangers to conclude, that all religion is but a fraud or cheat, and that there is no reality in it; whereas, a fruitful conversation stops the mouths of the enemies of religion: 1 Pet. 2:15: “So is the will of God, that with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.”

6. They are profitable, as they manifest our implantation or ingrafting into Christ: Eph. 2:10: “We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”

7. There is an analogy and proportion between good works and glory: Rom. 6:22: “But now being made free from sin and become servants to God, ye

have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.” But I will not continue with this.

IV. I proceed now to the *last* thing in the method, which was the *application*.

First, This doctrine may serve for *information*, in these two or three particulars

1. See hence the right way to attain true morality, or how you may come to do good works to purpose: you must *believe in God*, and by faith be united to the Lord Jesus Christ. The apostle, Rom. 7, tried to do good works by the strength of nature, but it would not do with him; for “the commandment which was ordained to life, he found to be unto death.” And I do verily believe, that none shall ever make a better hand of it than he did, try it who will, by the strength of nature. The law, of itself, only irritates corruption. instead of mortifying it: for, says he, “when the commandment came, sin revived.” Like a serpent that is dulled with the cold, it lies as if it were dead; but when brought to the heat, it revives and spits venom: so corrupt nature, when brought to the commandment, or the commandment brought to it, it revives and gathers strength, and discovers more malignity than it did before: “Sin, taking occasion by the commandment, works in us all manner of concupiscence.”

2. See hence, how unjustly ministers, who endeavour to preach the doctrine of the grace of God, or who preach down works in the matter of justification, are attacked as enemies to good works and holiness, or as if they separated between faith and good works. This was a false accusation cast upon Christ himself, which made turn offer that vindication, Matth. 5:17: “I am not come to destroy the law or the prophets, but to fulfil the law. This was a charge against the protomartyr Stephen, Acts 6:13, that he “spoke blasphemous words against the holy place, and the law.” And this also was a charge against the apostle Paul and his doctrine: hence it is that he anticipates that objection Rom. 3:31: “Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.”

3. See hence the folly of those who, under a pretext of grace, or of faith in Christ, give way to licentiousness, as many carnal gospellers do. Whatever pretences such may have to faith, yet they are strangers to it, and never felt the effect of divine grace on their own souls; otherwise it would “teach them, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, they should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.” It is no new thing for corrupt nature to abuse the

doctrine of the grace of God. This was an evil the apostle complains of in his day; hence he takes notice of some who argued, that they might sin, that grace might abound, Rom. 6. But though the doctrine of grace may be abused, while it lies floating in the head; yet when it gets into the heart, it engages to holiness in “all manner of conversation.” In a word, though the doctrine of grace may be abused, the habit and exercise of grace cannot be abused to sin.

Use 2d of exhortation. Is it so, that it is they, and they only who believe, that do and can maintain good works? Then my *first* exhortation is, O believe in the Son of God. We read of a company, John 6:28, who came to Christ, asking him, “What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?” Christ’s answer is, ver. 29, “This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.” This is the great and fundamental precept that lays the foundation of all true obedience; for all true obedience is *the obedience of faith*. And therefore study to obey that great commandment, 1 John 3:23: “And this is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ.” But I will not enlarge upon this use at present.

The *second* exhortation is to them that have believed, that you may “be careful to maintain good works.” Time will not allow me to enlarge upon this either: only consider, by way of motive, shortly, that, as every person of the adorable Trinity bears a share, according to their particular economy, in the work of man’s redemption; so there is an obligation, arising from every one of them, tying us to the study and maintenance of good works. The Father has elected you from eternity, and loved you with an everlasting love. And why did he elect you? It was to holiness or good works: Eph. 1:4, 5: “He hath predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, that we should be holy, and without blame before him in love.” The Son has redeemed us with his blood, not only that we should be liberated from wrath, but that we should be holy, and abound in the fruits thereof: Tit. 2:14: “He gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” The Holy Ghost is our Comforter, and he dwells in us as in a temple; and therefore we are bound and obliged not to grieve him: “Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy.” Thus, I say, every person of the adorable Trinity, and their relation to us, obliges us to the study of good works. Again; the covenant of grace, and the promises of it, not only encourage but oblige us to the study of good works: 2 Cor.

7:1: “Having these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

But I must of necessity pass other motives, and conclude the whole with a few directions or advices. Take these following: —

1. If you would do good works, take care that your state be right, I mean, take care that you have a station in Christ the second Adam; for, without this, you cannot bring forth fruit, either pleasing to God, or profitable to your own souls. Thou art but a thorn and thistle in God’s vineyard, whilst thou art in a state of nature; and therefore there is no good fruit of obedience that can grow upon thee. See that you have the Spirit of Christ within you; and for this end plead that promise, Ezek 36:27: “I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes.” It is the Spirit of the Head that animates all the members of the body: he helps our infirmities in prayer, and in other good works also.

2. In all your works or duties of obedience, keep your eye upon the *chief corner-stone* that God hath *laid in Zion*. You know a mason or builder cannot fail to make very irregular work, if he do not keep his eye upon the foundation and corner-stone of the house; his work will be marred. Just so it is here; if we do not keep our eye on Christ by faith, as the foundation laid in Zion, the foundation of acceptance, the foundation of assistance, we can never yield acceptable obedience to God. And when either the merit or Spirit of Christ go out of sight, immediately the heart turns legal, by which all our duties are spoiled and marred.

3. Study always to keep up the lively impression of this awful truth upon your hearts, that God could find matter of condemnation against you, not only from your worst sins, but from the best of your duties. The most holy and heavenly man that ever breathed, durst not adventure the salvation of his soul upon the most heavenly thought that ever he conceived. Due impressions of this will help to keep your hearts right in point of righteousness; so as not to build your acceptation before God upon your good works, but only on the works of the Son of God. The apostle, I find, has a notable word to this purpose, 1 Cor. 4:4: “I know nothing by myself, yet am I not hereby justified.” The apostle’s meaning is (*I know nothing by myself*) as if he had said, ‘I am not conscious to myself of any unfaithfulness in my ministry, or trust that God has reposed in me; my conscience does not smite me for neglect of duty, (*yet am I not hereby justified.*)’ As if he should say, ‘Though I have laboured more abundantly than all the rest; though I have fought the good fight, finished my course, kept the faith, (*yet am I not hereby justified;*)’ all this will not make a righteousness by which I may expect to be justified or accepted of God. No: he accounted all as dung and loss, in the point of

justification, “that he might be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness.” So that you see, even in the presence of your best graces, works, and duties of obedience, free grace through imputed righteousness, is to be your only sanctuary and city of refuge.

4. Whenever you are helped to do any thing in obedience to the law, still remember what you do is done in a borrowed strength, and that will keep you humble; for it is a vain spirit that is proud of what is borrowed: 1 Cor. 4:7: “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?” And therefore do not “sacrifice to your own net;” for it is not free will, but free grace, to which thou art beholden. “It is God which worketh in us, both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”

5. Beware of legal ends and motives in the performing of good works.

Quest. What are these? I answer,

1st, it is a legal end in obedience, when a man obeys, or does good works, to make an atonement for his former sin. Some, when they have fallen into any sin of omission or commission, for which their consciences check and challenge them, will purpose, vow, and resolve, that they will do better in time coming: and thus they think they will make God amends for what injury they have done to him and his holy law. This argues a legal spirit. There is nothing that can atone for the guilt of sin, but the ransom and propitiation that God hath found.

2dly, When a man yields obedience, only to still the clamours of an awakened conscience, or to keep his conscience easy. Alas sirs, though our own righteousness and good works may appease and stop the mouth of conscience; but they will never “purge the conscience from dead works.” Nothing less can satisfy conscience, God’s deputy, than what satisfies divine justice; and that is the blood of Christ applied by faith. And therefore it must needs argue or discover a man to be of a legal spirit, that licks himself whole with his good works. Good works are not to be neglected: but they are not to be rested in, or upon, as a righteousness.

3dly, When a man yields obedience to the commands of the law, only that he may be kept out of hell. It is true, indeed, there is a filial fear of God as a Father, and of his fatherly displeasure, which is one of the principal springs of gospel obedience, according to what you have, Jer. 32:40: “I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me.” But there is a vast difference between this, and a slavish fear of hell and eternal damnation: there is as great a difference between the one and the other, as between the fear that a loving child

has to an affectionate father, and the fear that a condemned criminal or malefactor has of his judge: the one is driven to obedience through terror, but the other is drawn to obedience through love. I do not deny but a child of God, through the prevalence of temptation, desertion, or unbelief, may come to be under such a spirit of bondage; but then it is not his privilege, but his punishment. And in so far as the child of God is actuated in his obedience by a “spirit of bondage unto fear,” his obedience is legal: for when he acts like himself, like a believer indeed, he “serves the Lord without fear,” without slavish fear of hell and wrath, “in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of his life,” Luke 1:74, 75.

4^{thly}, When a man performs good works, to procure a right and title to heaven and glory. For, as I was saying, our title comes only by Jesus Christ; Christ is the first heir of eternal life, and we are “joint-heirs with him.” But you may say, Are we not told, Rev. 22:14, “Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city?” For making this clear to you, you should know, that there is a twofold right to glory, which is the thing there spoken of, to wit, a legal and evidential right. (1.) I say, there is a legal or a law right. You know the title to life and glory was forfeited by the breach of the law in the first Adam; and it must be recovered again by a perfect obedience to the law: and whose obedience can do this, but the obedience of Christ imputed to us for righteousness? So that, I say, we come to have our law right and title to glory, and other blessings, only recovered in Christ, and by the imputation of his righteousness to us, by which “the law is magnified, and made honourable.” But, (2.) There is a right of evidence, by which our right, through Christ, is evidenced, and cleared up to our own souls. And this is the right that I conceive is spoken of in the scripture last mentioned. “They that do his commandments,” and yield obedience out of gospel principles and motives, give evidence of their *right*, through Christ, to heaven and glory; and they shall “enter in through the gates into the city of the new Jerusalem.” But to make our own obedience, our own holiness or good works, the ground and foundation of our claim to the glories of heaven, is grossly legal and Popish. Thus, I say, study to beware of doing good works out of legal motives and principles; for these are like the dead fly, that makes the apothecary’s ointment to stink.

6. My last advice is, Study to yield obedience out of gospel principles, ends, and motives, I shall not enlarge upon these, because they were hinted at already. Obey and do good works, with an eye to the glory of God, out of a principle of gratitude to him that has bought you with his blood. And yield obedience, that in this way you may maintain fellowship and communion with God. It is the man “that hath clean hands, and a pure heart, who hath not lifted up

his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully, who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord, and who shall stand in his holy place.” The duties of obedience are like wagons or chariots, which bring the soul to Christ, and the embraces of his love, though they be not the procuring or meritorious cause of the least blink of the Lord’s countenance. And then, to conclude, study the duties of obedience, not that you may obtain a title to heaven, which is the fruit of the Redeemer’s purchase; but that you may attain an aptitude and meetness for partaking of “the inheritance of the saints in light:” for though there be no connexion of merit, yet there is a connexion of congruity and suitableness between begun holiness here, and consummate holiness hereafter. It is among the irreversible decrees of Heaven, that unholy, unsanctified sinners, continuing so, “shall never enter into the kingdom of God.” “No unclean thing shall ever enter the gates of the new Jerusalem.” And therefore beware of thinking, that when we lead you to Christ, as the only foundation of your title to eternal life, we thus encourage any in a way of sin or unholiness. No; the grace of God, in the gospel, teaches us better things, namely, to “deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.”

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