



Fire and Ice Sermon Series

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Six Sermons on Galatians 2:21

by Robert Traill

*“I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law,
then Christ is dead in vain.”*

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Grace and Justification

By Robert Traill

Sermon One in a series of six sermons on Galatians 2:21.

“I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.” — Gal. 2:21.

The scope of the apostle Paul in this epistle, is to reprove the church that he writes to, for a great and sudden apostacy from that faith of the gospel that they were planted in. The apostle Paul himself was one of the main planters amongst them; and quickly after his removal from them false brethren crept in amongst them, and perverted them from the simplicity that was in Christ: their great error lay here, in mixing the works of the law with the righteousness of Christ, in the grand point of the justification of a sinner before God. Throughout this epistle the apostle argues strongly against this error: they had not renounced the doctrine of Christ; they did not deny justification by faith in him; but they thought that the works of the law were to be added to their faith in Christ, in order to their justification.

I shall only take notice briefly of a few of his arguments against this error, as they lie in the context, to lead you to the words that I have read, and mean to speak to.

The former part of the chapter is historical, telling them what he had done, and what had befallen him some years ago; how he was entertained and received by the great servants of Christ at Jerusalem, Peter, James, and John, that seemed to be pillars, and were indeed so: see the first ten verses. The next thing that he breaks forth into, in point of arguing with them, is upon the account of Peter's

dissimulation, and Paul's reproof of him. The point seemed to be very small: Peter had made use of his Christian liberty in free converse with the believing Gentiles; but when some of the brethren of the Jews came from Jerusalem, he withdrew himself, and separated from them, fearing them of the circumcision; fearing that they would take it ill: a weak kind of fear it was, and upon this small thing the apostle set himself against him with great zeal. "I withstood him," saith he, "to the face, because he was to be blamed," (ver. 11). By this withdrawing the use of his Christian liberty, he hardened the Jews, and he weakened the hands of the weaker Jewish converts, that thought the wall of partition between the Jews and Gentiles was not yet taken away.

1st, His first argument against mingling the works of the law with faith in justification, is taken from the practice of the believing Jews. What way did they take to be justified? "We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ; even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified," (ver. 15, 16).

2dly, His next argument is taken from the bad effect and sad consequence of seeking righteousness by the law, (ver. 17), which, because it is something hard to understand, I would explain it a little in a few words: "But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves are also found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid." This is to say, "If so be we that have sought righteousness in Jesus Christ, if we have yet any dealings with the law in point of righteousness, we are found sinners still; and if a justified man be found a sinner, why then Jesus Christ, instead of delivering us from the bondage of the law, is found a minister of sin."

3dly, His third argument is yet strongest of all, and some way the hardest, (ver. 20), "For I through the law am dead unto the law, that I might live unto God." As if he should have said, "For my part, all the use that I got of the law, the more I was acquainted with it, it slew me the more, and I died the more to it, that I might live to God; all that the law can do to me in point of justification, is only to condemn me, and it can do no more." And whensoever the law enters into a man's conscience it always doth this; "When the commandment came, sin revived, and I died: the commandment slew me," (Rom. 7:9,11).

4thly, His next argument is taken from the nature of the new life that he led, (ver. 20), "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the

Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” Words of extraordinary form, but of more extraordinary matter: words that one would think seem to be some way opposed to one another: but yet they set forth gloriously that gracious life that through Christ Jesus is imparted to justified believers. “Christ died for me, and I am crucified with Christ; and yet I live, but it is Christ that lives in me, and Christ lives in me only by faith.”

My text contains two arguments more, drawn from a common natural head of arguing against error, by the absurdities that necessarily flow from it; and they are two the greatest that can be, “Frustrating the grace of God,” — and “making the death of Christ to be in vain.” And greater sins are not to be committed by men: the greater sin, the unpardonable sin, is expressed in words very like to this, (Heb. 10:29): “Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God; and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite to the Spirit of grace?” And how near to one another are frustrating the grace of God, and doing despite to the Spirit of grace, and making Christ’s death to be in vain, and counting the blood of the covenant an unholy thing!

There are two words to be explained before we go any further: 1st, What is the grace of God? 2dly, What is it to frustrate the grace of God?

First, What is the grace of God? The grace of God hath two common noted acceptations in the scripture.

1. It is taken and used in the scripture for the doctrine of the grace of God, and so it is frequently used; the gospel itself is called the grace of God, (Tit. 2:11): “The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men:” that is, the gospel; for it is the teaching grace of God that is there spoken of, called by the apostle “the gospel of his grace.” And this grace of God may be received in vain. Many may have this grace of God and go to hell. Pray that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.

2. By the grace of God in the word is understood the blessing itself; and this is never frustrated: that grace that called Paul, that grace that wrought mightily with him, that was not given him in vain: “The grace that was bestowed was not in vain, for I laboured more abundantly than they all; yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.” The gospel of the grace of God is frequently frustrated, but the grace itself is never so.

Secondly, What is it to frustrate this grace of God? The word that I remember in the original is used, (Mark 7:9): “Ye make void (or reject) the

commandments of God.” It is the same word with that in my text: to frustrate the grace of God, is to defeat it of its end, to miss the end of it. Luke 7:30, it is said the Pharisees and Lawyers frustrated the grace of God against themselves; or, as we read it there, “they rejected the counsel of God against themselves.” The true grace of God itself can never be frustrated; it always reaches its end, for it is almighty: but the doctrine of the grace of God is many times rejected; and the apostle here in the text speaks of it as a sin that they are guilty of that speak of righteousness by the works of the law. There is one thing that I would observe in general from the scope of the apostle, viz. that in the great matter of justification the apostle argues from his own experience: the true way to get sound light in the main point of the justification of a sinner before God, is to study it in thy own personal concern; if it be bandied about by men as a notion only, as a point of truth, discoursing wantonly about it, it is all one in God’s sight whether men be sound or unsound about it; they are unsound in heart how sound soever they are in head about it. The great way to know the right mind of God about the justification of a poor sinner, is for all to try it with respect to themselves. Would the apostle say, “I know how I am justified, and all the world shall never persuade me to join the righteousness of the law with the righteousness of Christ.”

There are four points of doctrine that I would raise, and observe from the first part of these words:

1. That the grace of God shines gloriously in the justifying of a sinner through the righteousness of Christ.
2. It is a horrible sin to frustrate the grace of God.
3. All that seek righteousness by the law do frustrate the grace of God in the gospel.
4. That no sound believer can be guilty of this sin.

I would speak to the first of these at this time: That the grace of God shines gloriously in the justifying of a sinner by the righteousness of Christ alone. When the apostle speaks of it, how frequently is this term “grace” added? “Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,” (Rom. 3:24). “That being justified by his grace, we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”

There are four things to be explained here, that will make our way plain to the proof of this point. What is justification? Who is it that doth justify? Who are justified? And upon what account?

1st, What is justification? We read much of it in our Bible, and the doctrine of it is reckoned one of the fundamental points of the true Christian

religion, and so indeed it is. This grand doctrine, the fountain of our peace, and comfort, and salvation, was woefully darkened in the Popish kingdom; and the first light of the Reformation, that God was pleased to break up in our forefathers' days, was mainly about this great doctrine. Justification is not barely the pardon of sin; it is indeed always inseparable from it; the pardon of sin is a fruit of it, or a part of it. Justification is God's acquitting a man, and freeing him from all condemnation; it is God's taking off the condemnation that the broken law of God lays upon every sinner. "Who is he that shall condemn? It is God that justifies," (Rom. 8:33). Justification and condemnation are opposites; every one is under condemnation that is not justified, and every justified man is freed from condemnation. Justification is not sanctification; it is an old Popish error, sown in the hearts of a great many Protestants, to think that justification and sanctification are the same. Justification and sanctification are as far different as these two:— There is a man condemned for high treason against the king by the judge, and the same man is sick of a mortal disease; and if he dies not by the hands of the hangman today, he may die of his disease to-morrow: it is the work of the physician to cure the disease, but it is an act of mercy from the king that must save him from the condemnation. Justification is the acquitting and repealing the law-sentence of condemnation; sanctification is the healing of the disease of sin, that will be our bane except Christ be our physician.

Justification and sanctification are always inseparable, but they are wonderfully distinct. Justification is an act of God's free grace; sanctification is a work of God's Spirit: sanctification is a work wrought within us; justification is something done about us, and therefore justification is everywhere spoken of in the word in the terms of a legal act.

2dly, Who is he that justifies? I answer, God only: "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifies," (Rom. 8:33). Who shall condemn? He only can justify that gives the law: he only can justify that condemns for sin: he only can justify that is wronged by sin, (Mark 2:7). The Pharisees blasphemed, it was in their darkness; but yet the truth that they spake was good, though the application of it was quite naught: "Why doth this man speak blasphemies? who can forgive sin, but God only?" In the case of the man sick of the palsy, whose sins Christ first forgave before he healed him of the palsy — so that the forgiveness of his sins was his justification, and the healing of his disease was as if it were the type of his sanctification — their application was wrong, in that they did not know that Christ was God, and that he had power on earth to forgive sins: but the truth itself was sound — "none can forgive sins but God only."

Justification is an act of the judge; it is only the judge and lawgiver that can pronounce it: and “there is but one lawgiver,” saith James, “that can both save and destroy,” (chap. 4:12). None properly offended by sin but God, and nothing violated by sin so immediately as the law of God.

3dly, Who is justified? Every one is not justified. What sort of a man is he that is justified? Justification is the acquitting of a man from all condemnation, and it is God’s doing alone; but what sort of a man is it that is justified? Is it a holy man? A man newly come from heaven? Is it a new sort of a creature, rarely made and framed? No: it is a sinner: it is an ungodly man: “God justifies the ungodly.”

The man is not made godly before he is justified, nor is he left ungodly after he is justified; he is not made godly a moment before he is justified, but he is justified from his ungodliness by the sentence of justification: when he is dead in sins and trespasses, quickening comes, and life comes, (Eph. 2:1).

4thly, Upon what account is all this done? And this is the hardest of all. You have heard that justification is the freeing of a man from all charge, and that it is done by God alone, and given to a man before he can do any thing of good — for no man can do any thing that is good till he be sanctified, and no man is sanctified till he is justified; but the grand question is, “How can God justly do this?” saith the apostle, (Rom. 3:26). “That he might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.” How can God be just, and yet justify an ungodly man? “To justify the wicked, and to condemn the righteous, are both an abomination in the sight of God,” when practised by man, Prov. 17:15. How then can God justify the ungodly? The grand account of this is, God justifies the ungodly for the sake of nothing in himself, but solely upon the account of this righteousness of Christ, that the apostle is here arguing upon: “Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood,” (Rom. 3:24, 25). When God justifies a man, the righteousness of Christ is reckoned to him, and God deals with him as a man in Christ; and therefore his transgressions are covered, and the man is made the righteousness of God in Christ, because Christ is made of God unto him righteousness, (1 Cor. 1:30), “Of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us righteousness.” Where is the poor man’s righteousness that is justified? It is in Christ Jesus. For, (2 Cor. 5:21), “He hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” And to be made the righteousness of God, is nothing else but to be made righteous before God in and through Jesus Christ.

These things considered, the proof of this point is very easy — That the grace of God shines gloriously in the way of justifying a sinner by the righteousness of Jesus Christ: I shall therefore add but a few things more in the proof of it.

First, In this way all is of God, and nothing of the creature's procuring, and therefore it is of grace. Grace always shines most brightly where man appears least; every thing that tends to advance the power and efficacy of man's working, always hinders the shining forth of the glory of the grace of God; but in this way of justifying us through the righteousness of Christ, grace shines forth most gloriously, because it is all of God: we do nothing in it. To instance in a few things here,

1. The finding out of this righteousness by which we are justified is of God alone. If the question had been put to all the angels in heaven, and to many worlds of men, if this one question had been put, How can a just and holy God justify a sinner? No created understanding could ever have been able to find out how it could be done; it was the infinite wisdom of God alone that found out this way. He will send his own Son to be a sinless man, that shall sustain the persons, and bear the sins, and take away the sins of all that shall be justified. The natural understanding of all mankind is this: when we know any thing of God, we know that it stands with his nature to condemn sin, and hate the sinner; but how it can stand with his justice to acquit a sinner, it is God only that could find out that.

2. As the finding out of the way of our justification is of God alone, so the working out of it is Christ's alone. There was no creature of God's counsel in finding out the way, so there was no creature Christ's helper in making the way. All the great work of fulfilling the righteousness of the law was done by Christ alone; none could offer to help in the great work of bearing the weight of his Father's wrath, and bearing the burden of the justice of God, for the sins of his church. Our Lord was the alone bearer of this; he alone brought in everlasting righteousness, and "put away sin by the sacrifice of himself," (Heb. 9:26).

3. The applying of this righteousness is only of God also. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to bring it close unto the sinner by faith; and here we have as little to do as in the former. There was none of God's everlasting counsel in the finding out this way, nor had Christ any helper in the work of redemption; and we help the Spirit of God as little in his work of applying this: for till the grace of God prevails upon the heart, there is a constant struggling against it. There are many poor sinners that have struggled with the Spirit of God seeking to save them, more than many believers have ever strove with Satan seeking to destroy them. All

unbelievers are led more tamely to hell by the devil, than believers are led quietly to heaven by the Spirit of God.

4. The securing all this by the everlasting covenant is of God only. We seal God's covenant by our faith for the benefit of it; but it is Christ's great seal that is its security, even the seal of his own blood: "This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many, for the remission of sins," (Matt. 26:28). And so much for this first thing: The grace of God shines gloriously in the way of justifying a sinner by the righteousness of Christ; because it is altogether of God, the sinner hath no hand in it.

Secondly, This will further appear, if we consider what vile creatures the receivers of it are; they have nothing to procure it, nothing to deserve it, but a great deal to deserve the contrary, In that, Rom. 5, they have three names: Ver. 6, we are called "ungodly," — "In due time Christ died for the ungodly." Ver. 8, we are called "sinners," — "Whilst we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Ver. 10, we are called "enemies," — "When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son." Here are three names: Ungodly! Sinners! Enemies! the highest words whereby ill-deserving can be well expressed; and it is the usual way of the Spirit of God to lay open the worst in a poor sinner, when God is about to give the best; and all they that receive it receive this grace under these names. "God be merciful to me a sinner," saith the poor publican; and "this man," saith our Lord, "went down to his house justified," (Luke 18:13, 14). "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief," saith Paul, (1 Tim. 1:15).

And not only is it so that they are undeserving and unworthy, but they are also very proud and vain, and have a great opinion of themselves; and must it not be great grace then to justify such men? "Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing," saith our Lord to the church of Laodicea;" and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:" even when Christ is courting them to buy of him his gold and white garment, (Rev. 3:17, 18).

Thirdly, The grace of God in justifying a sinner through the righteousness of Christ appears to be very glorious, even in the very naming of it: it is the grace of God; it must be great grace, for it is the grace of God; it is the grace of a holy God; it is the grace of a just God; it is the grace of a powerful God; it is the grace of that God that can do every thing: every name that exalts the glory of God, doth also raise the value of this grace: it is the grace of God towards vile sinners, and that makes it great indeed. Let us consider this grace of God a little.

This grace of God is dear to God, and therefore it is the more grace. The grace of God in justifying us is dear to God; it cost the Father dear to part with his own Son; it cost the Son dear to part with his own life to bring in this righteousness; and, if I may so say, it cost the Holy Ghost dear to work the faith of this righteousness in the heart of a poor sinner. When we consider how all things else that God did were easily done but this. When the world was to be made, no more is to be done but “Let it be;” but when the world was to be redeemed, “Let it be” will not do; a body must be prepared for the Son, and that body must be sacrificed for sin, and be slain, and sustain the wrath of God, and the curse of the law; and all this to bring in an everlasting righteousness.

Again, this grace that was so dear to God comes to us good cheap, we give nothing for it: the Lord will take nothing for it, we have nothing to give: the apostle doth not think it enough to say, “being justified by his grace;” but he adds, “being justified FREELY by his grace,” (Rom. 3:24), “Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life FREELY,” (Rev. 22:17). Taking implies some freedom in it, but taking freely is a redoubling of the expression. This grace of God that is so dear to God, comes good cheap to us, it cost us nothing.

Again, this grace of God is everlasting; it is the eternal garment of all believers, even of them that are in heaven. Saith the apostle, Rom. 5:21, “Grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Observe, neither grace, nor righteousness, nor eternal life, nor Jesus our Lord, cease in heaven; they are all there together; Christ as the author of eternal life, and worker of righteousness; and the believer as the possessor of eternal life, and the enjoyer of this life; and grace as the high spring of all: grace is in heaven; the reign of grace is only in heaven. That of Rev. 19:8. is by most understood to relate to the other world; and it is said there, that “unto the Lamb’s wife it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white;” and that fine linen is the righteousness of Christ, in which the saints stand everlastingly accepted before God. “Behold I and the children that thou hast given me!” saith our Lord, (Heb. 2:13), and their glory in heaven is to behold the glory that he had with the Father, as their head, before the world began, (John 17:24).

Again, it is grace, because it is very abundant: it is an usual thing in the Old Testament to call great things by the name of God, as the trees of God, the city of God, the river of God; now this grace of God is so called because it is great, exceedingly abundant: saith the apostle Paul concerning it, “The grace of our Lord Jesus was exceeding abundant towards me,” (1 Tim. 1:14). Did ever any of you know how many sins you had? Yet you must have a great deal more grace, or you can never be saved; there must be more grace than sin, or you cannot be

saved, (Rom. 5:20): “The law entered that sin might abound; but where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.” I do not say, no man can be saved unless he hath more inherent grace than he hath inherent corruption in him; but, unless there be a greater abundance of the grace of God for covering of sin, than there is of sin to be covered, no man can be saved: the apostle adds a much more abundance to it. One would think there was enough of sin and guilt in the disobedience of the first Adam; and so there was; but, saith the apostle, the matter is far greater here: “And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift; for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification: for if by one man’s offence death reigned by one, much more they which receive abundance of grace, and of the gift of righteousness, shall reign in life by one, Christ Jesus,” (ver. 16, 17, of that 5th chapter of the Romans). There is abundance of grace, and of the gift of righteousness through Jesus Christ, needful to save any sinner. When the Lord makes this matter to balance in the eyes of his people, and there are great discoveries made to them of the aggravations and of the multitude of their sins; this is a common wicked thought arising in their awakened consciences, Can God forgive? Can God pass by so many and so great transgressions? It is a sinful thought; the plain meaning of it is, “Is there more grace in God than there is sin and guilt with me?” We were all undone if it was not so; if Christ’s righteousness was not more able to justify than the first Adam’s sin was to condemn, no man could be saved. The grace of God shines in this way of the justification of a sinner by the righteousness of Christ, in that there is an abundance of it imparted to all them that partake of it.

APPLICATION. — You have heard that the grace of God shines gloriously in the justification of a sinner by the righteousness of Christ: in all your dealings, then, with God, think much of grace: they that never had an errand to God for the blessing of justification, they may possibly be saved; but they are not yet in the way to salvation that were never yet concerned about this question, How shall a man be acquitted before God? Or that never treated with God about justification. In all your dealings with God still remember grace: when you come for justification, plead for it as grace: when you receive it, receive it as grace: and when you praise for it, praise for it as grace; and thus will you behave as the people of God have done. When you plead for it, plead for it as grace; bring nothing with you in your hand, offer nothing to God for your justification; it is a free gift: if God be pleased to give it, in his great bounty, you shall be saved. You have no reason to quarrel if God doth not give it: you have no reason to fear but God will give it. Though you do not deserve it, yet he hath promised it. As there is a fulness of righteousness in Christ to procure grace, so there is a fulness of grace

in the tender of the gospel; and you are to believe that Christ is willing to make all this over to sinners.

When you receive justification, receive it as grace: sometimes we beg it as an alms, and sometimes in the gospel the Lord offers it as a gift, and we are to receive it as such. If the Lord tenders you the gift of righteousness through Jesus Christ, do not say you cannot receive it; do not say you are not meet for it. The question is, Are you in need of it? Are you not guilty? and is not a pardon suitable for the guilty? Receive it as a grace. The true reason why so many neglect right dealing with God for justification, and slight God's dealing with them about receiving it, is because their hearts stand at a distance from, and they have a sort of a quarrel with mere grace. As it is certain that nothing but grace can save the sinner, so it is as certain there is nothing more displeasing to the sinner than grace; than that good, which when received he must always own the bounty of the Giver, and never to eternity be able to say, "My own hand hath made me rich:" Christ will bring none to heaven that are in that mind. He that will not be rich in Christ, must be poor and condemned still in the first Adam. "Know ye not," saith the apostle, "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, though he was rich, yet he became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich," (2 Cor. 8:9). The riches of a believer stands in the poverty of Christ; and every true believer counts Christ's poverty his riches.

Do Not Frustrate the Grace of God

By Robert Traill

Sermon Two in a series of six on Galatians 2:21.

“I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.” — Gal. 2:21.

I told you the last day (what you may learn by your own reading), that the end in view of the apostle in this epistle is, to teach and defend the doctrine of the justification of a sinner by the righteousness of Christ, apprehended by faith alone. In the text the apostle hath two arguments for this truth, against the contrary error, with which the Galatians were plagued; and both arguments are taken from the absurdities that follow upon the contrary doctrine.

1st, That seeking righteousness by the works of law, doth frustrate and make void the grace of God.

2dly, That it makes Christ’s death to be in vain: and there is nothing revealed by the Lord, in his word, more sacred, and more solemnly majestic than these two — the grace of God, and the death of Christ; and therefore it must needs be a great wickedness to enervate, and overthrow both these. From the first part of these words I observed four things, and have already spoken to the first of them, and would speak to the next at this time.

1st, The grace of God shines gloriously in the justifying of a sinner through Christ’s righteousness alone. All the revelations that are made of this great way of God’s justifying a sinner, are all made with a high deference to the grace of God, as the original thereof.

2dly, I am now to speak to this point — that frustrating the grace of God is a great and horrible sin: the apostle here brings it in as such, and denies his concern in it; “I do not frustrate the grace of God.” The scope of his discourse leads me to this head: “If I seek righteousness by the works of the law, I should

frustrate the grace of God; but I do not seek righteousness that way, therefore I do not frustrate the grace of God.” Frustrating the grace of God is a great and horrible sin: there are two things I would speak to upon this head — to shew you how this sin is committed — and then, wherein its greatness doth appear; for there are many that commit this sin, and when they have done, think nothing of it.

1st, How is this sin committed that the apostle here vindicates himself from? “I do not frustrate the grace of God.” This sin is committed two ways: 1st, By not receiving the grace of God when it is tendered. 2dly, By seeking other ways and expedients for righteousness than the grace of God.

First, Frustrating the grace of God is not receiving it; the grace of God is frustrated when it is not received: the right entertaining of it is by receiving it. The apostle exhorts the Corinthians, “We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also, that you receive not the grace of God in vain,” (2 Cor. 6:1). I have told you in what sense the grace of God might be received in vain, and in what sense it could not. The doctrine of the grace of God, the offer of the grace of God, may be received in vain, and rejected, as many times it is; but the grace of God itself cannot be received in vain, for it always worketh its effect wheresoever it lights. The grace of God is an irresistible principle of salvation: never man had one mite of the grace of God, but he was saved by it. Christ Jesus hath two quivers, if I may so say: there is a common quiver, out of which he draws some arrows, and shoots them at sinners, and they can fence against these well enough, and never be hurt by them; but then he hath other arrows, that are marked with his love, and sent by his power, and there is no guarding against them. As there are arrows of destruction, so there are arrows of salvation: “Let thine arrows be sharp in the heart of the king’s enemies,” is the prayer, Psalm 45. My work then is to shew how it is that the grace of God is not received.

1st, The grace of God tendered in the gospel, and the way of salvation by Jesus Christ, is not received when it is not minded. There is little hope of that man’s salvation that doth not think of salvation, or when the matter is neglected. “How shall we escape,” saith the apostle, “if we neglect so great salvation?” (Heb. 2:3). The true sense of the original word lies mainly in this, not so much in a stated formal enmity to it, but only in a careless indifferency about it: the grace of God is not received when it is not minded. Therefore, would you know when you profit by the gospel, know it this way: if what you hear from the word doth not occasion many thoughts in your hearts, you get no good at all. If the matter of salvation do not become the matter of your serious meditation, you receive the grace of God in vain. God may say concerning such men, “They will not so much as think of my proposals to them.”

2dly, People do not receive the grace of God when they do not see their need of it, when they do not see their absolute need of it. As long as a man hath this dream — and every natural man falls into such a dream — as long as a man thinks in his vain mind that any thing else but the sovereign grace of God can save him, this man wilt never receive the grace of God. It is impossible that a man can receive it till he see that nothing else will do his business. Woe be to them that think any thing but grace can save them: they are in a forlorn state indeed!

3dly, They that do not believe that the grace of God alone can save them, therefore they do not receive it; for as the grace of God is sent to men as that which they do simply stand in need of, and as that which nothing can supply the lack of, so it is sent as a sovereign remedy, that whatsoever ails the root creature it will cure them. So much for this first thing: They that do not receive the grace of God, are guilty of this great sin of frustrating the grace of God.

Secondly, This sin is also committed by men's taking other methods and shifts to obtain the favour of God than this grace alone; they frustrate the grace of God. I would speak a little to this under two heads: 1st, I would shew you the cause of it. 2dly, I would shew the effects that proceed from those causes.

I. Of the cause of it. The world is full of it: this heresy, if I may so say, runs through the whole earth; no man is quite free from it but only the sound believer. A man may be orthodox in his judgment, and subscribe to the orthodox doctrine, and Protestant truth; but every natural man is a heretic in this matter: he hath secretly something else in his eye to recommend him to God, and to make his state safe before God, besides the righteousness of Christ. Now the cause of this universal hankering after ways of people's own devising to do their business with God, without this grace of God through Christ, is what I would speak a little to.

It flows from nature: now nature is so strong a spring, that nothing but the mighty grace of God can turn it, it is so strong a principle. I would shew this in a little.

1st, The grace of God in saving sinners by Christ Jesus is above nature in its best state; it is above sinless nature. If you could suppose such a thing as this, that there was a man as holy as the first Adam was; if God should create another man as holy as the first Adam was, and bring to this man the doctrine of the righteousness of Christ, and of the grace of God in him, it would be above his nature. It is above sinless nature; it is that which Adam did not know, neither was he bound to know it, for it was not revealed to him; nor did he need to know it, for there was another way provided for his standing, that he might have kept.

2dly, This way is not only above sinless nature, but it is quite contrary to corrupt nature. If it be above sinless nature, it must needs be far above corrupt nature; but not only is it so, but it is also cross and contrary to it. There are in this corrupt nature four things that are its strength, and from that strength comes this enmity to this way of salvation.

1. There is in this corrupt nature dismal darkness and ignorance, expressed by the apostle in the abstract, (Eph. 5:8). "For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord." Not only are they dark and blind, but they are darkness and blindness. Now in this darkness, as to this matter, I will name two or three things: 1st, There is ignorance of the righteousness and holiness of God, (Rom. 10:3). 2dly, There is ignorance of the holy law of God, (Rom. 7:10). 3dly, There is utter ignorance of God's righteousness in Christ Jesus. A little to each of these:

1st, In every natural man there is an ignorance of the righteousness and holiness of God. I know that in man's nature there is a knowledge that there is a God, and that this God is a righteous and a just God. The greatest heathens, by the mere light of nature, have arrived at some competent knowledge of this; but the exactness of this righteousness of God never did any natural men know. They do not know the unspottedness of His righteousness, nor how unsufferable to him the least impurity is. Would any bold sinners venture to present to God their rottenness and vileness, if they knew God's righteousness? The righteousness of God is such a sublimely majestic thing, that no natural man can understand it, but he must be presently confounded.

2dly, Every natural man is ignorant of the strictness of the law of God; the severity of God's law in forbidding every sin, and in condemning every sinner, without any respect to any sin, or to any man that commits it. The law of God is an impartial rule of righteousness, that condemns every transgression; and it cannot do otherwise: it is the glory of the law so to do; its strictness makes it judge all sin; and its righteousness makes it condemn all sinners; and therefore, when this righteousness of God's law is once revealed, it presently breaks all the confidence of a natural man. "I was alive without the law once," saith the apostle Paul, Rom. 7:9, "but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." How could the apostle Paul be said to be without the law? I believe that the apostle Paul, even in his natural state, was better acquainted with the law, and the Old Testament, than any man in London now is; for the Jews, even to this day, teach their children with great carefulness: now the apostle Paul was one of the best Jews in all that country. How then could this man be said to be without the law? He had the law in his mind, and in his memory, and in his hands, and was

exceeding zealous for it — “I was,” saith he, “touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless,” (Phil. 3:6). Aye, but the man only thought so, when he did not know the law of God; but when the commandment came, it made another manner of discovery. It condemned those things in him that he never thought to be sin before, and it made other things in him to be exceeding sinful. All natural men are under utter darkness about this; and therefore it is no wonder that they betake themselves to other ways than the grace of God in Christ.

3dly, All natural men are ignorant of the righteousness of God in Christ.

2. In every natural man there is pride. Every natural man is a proud man; proud towards God. That which goes under the name of pride amongst men is greatly mistaken. Pride towards man is a base thing; but it is pride towards God that I am speaking of. The poor sinner thinks that he is not quite so bare and empty, but that he hath something of his own wherein he may stand accepted before God. Every natural man doth think so. It fares with a natural man as it doth with some poor men that are born of great families, whose fathers left them, as we use to say, a high birth, but a poor purse. Now this proud gentleman chooses a great deal rather to wear his own thread-bare coat, than another man’s livery. Just so it is with sinners: their father Adam was a great lord, — lord of this world, heir of righteousness, rich in stock — enough to have made all his posterity rich before God; but he broke and failed, and turned us all beggars into the world. But there comes another person, God’s own Son, and he offers to clothe the poor beggar; but the poor proud man had rather go to hell in the rags that his father Adam left him, than go to heaven in the robe that Christ offers him, dyed in his own blood.

3. In every natural man there is awful trifling about the great concerns of salvation. The truth is, people are not thoroughly awakened, nor in good earnest about the matters of salvation. It lies not near their heart as a weighty question, “What shall I do to be saved?” These thoughts do not press them, “I am a poor man that must shortly die, and this sickly carcass of mine will shortly moulder into the dust of the grave; but my soul must live for ever in, and enter upon an eternal state, as soon as the last breath of my body expires; and what shall become of me then?” The greatest part of the world trifle about this great question, “What shall I do to be saved, to be secure to eternity?” What a shameful thing is it to think of this! I have often told them that I have spoken to, — and it is to be told till it be mended, — that it were a happy thing if people would but spend half that time, nay a quarter of that time, in secret thoughts about salvation, that they spend in hearing the word of salvation; and it is a hard matter if people cannot be prevailed with about this. I can well assure you, that all the solid soul-thriving of the hearers of the gospel is not so much in what they hear, in the preaching of the

word, as in what they digest in their secret thoughts and meditations about it. Now, is it any wonder that people take to any courses about their salvation, when they thus trifle about it? For if the end be not precious in a man's eyes, you can never expect to have him thoughtful about the means.

4. In all natural men there is unbelief of God's word. It is a hard question to resolve, What was the first sin? Any child can tell you, that the first sin of mankind was eating the forbidden fruit: it is true, the first sin was ripe in that action; but what was the first wandering thought from God? Whether it was the man's discontent with the state that he was made in; or aspiring after a higher state than that in which he was made; or a jealousy of God; or unbelief of the word of God: that unbelief was in it is most certain. The serpent began his temptation this way, "Yea, hath God said ye shall not eat of every tree in the garden? Hath God said you shall surely die? Ye shall not surely die," (Gen. 3:1,4). The scope of his temptation was this, to bring in sin and ruin upon the world, by making sinless Adam to doubt of the truth of God's threatening; and he well knew that if once the majestic faith of the truth of God's threatening was weakened in their minds, that they would soon make bold on the sin. God's threatening was as a kind of fence against the sin: "In the day that thou eatest, thou shalt surely die." "Assure thyself of death if ever thou meddle with the forbidden fruit." Satan knew that death was terrible to man, and that he would not easily rush upon it; "aye, but," saith he, "God hath not said ye shall surely die, but you shall live, and be as gods, if you transgress." Sirs, the devil brought in the first sin and ruin upon mankind, by the unbelief of God's word of threatening. And he brings in the eternal ruin of men under the gospel by unbelief of God's word of promise: every natural man hath an evil heart of unbelief in him, as the apostle warns all to take heed of, (Heb. 3:12), "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God." This matter of unbelief is many ways spoken of in the word: the way of salvation by Jesus Christ, and his righteousness, stands all in the word of God. If you ask the last question concerning a man's faith, you must resolve it into the word of God: there are, indeed, many questions that go before it, but this must be the last. If you ask, How may a sinner be saved? The answer is, By the righteousness of Christ. If you ask again, Who is this Jesus Christ, whose righteousness will be the salvation of all them that have it? He is the great Son of God, that took our sins on him. Well, but how shall this righteousness be mine? By faith alone: if I lay hold of it, and venture my soul on it, it is mine? Aye, but the last question is, How do you know that it shall be so? God hath said it in his word, Acts 10:43, "To him give all the prophets witness, that, through his name, whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." Now, every natural man having unbelief in him, God's word

hath no weight on him. We find they proclaim their unbelief in every thing. When God commands, they proclaim their unbelief in disobeying; when God corrects them, they proclaim their unbelief in rushing again upon the same courses that God punishes them for; when God threatens and warns the sinner of his danger in such a sin, the man proclaims his unbelief by staying still in it: and what are all these but acts of gross unbelief? When God commands, the man thinks that God means not as he speaks: when God threatens, the unbeliever thinks God will not do as he threatens: when God promises, saith the same unbelief, “Though God speaks fair, he will not be as good as his word.”

Now, is it any wonder that every natural man takes another way of salvation besides the righteousness of Christ, when every natural man hath these four woeful things in him? And, indeed, none can do otherwise till these four things are overthrown in him — till the darkness is removed by the illumination of the Spirit of God — and the pride be brought down by humbling grace — and the security of the conscience be brought down by awakening grace — and till the power of unbelief be broke by the Spirit’s working faith. So much for the causes of this.

II. I am now to shew what the effects are that flow from these causes; or, what flows from this woful natural aversion in all men from the grace of God, and from their inclinations to frustrate it.

1st, Hence it comes to pass that the world is filled with fancies and devices of men to please God.

This runs through the whole earth: the religion (if I may call it by that name) of the Pagans, the religion of the Turks and the Mahometans, and of the Papists, however they may differ in a great many points of doctrine, and particular circumstances of worship, yet they all agree in this; all these religions, and all religions in the world, except the true, are filled with many devices of men to render themselves acceptable to God. The Lord brings them in (Micah 6:6), making this inquiry, “Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” Pray take notice here: one of the grossest idolatries that ever was in the world, and the most abominable act of it, is this, when parents, to pacify God for their sins, have offered their children in sacrifice to their idols: this hath been frequently practised in the world, and, it may be, is at

this day in some parts of the world. Whence can this be, that there should be so strange a violation of one of the strongest bonds of nature? It is not to be supposed that these people did so because they did not love their children: no doubt but they loved them as well as you do yours; but only, here lay the matter: they were under a strong conviction of sin, and under strong desires to please God; and they were ignorant of the true sacrifice, and therefore they offer to God what they think best, and what they love best; and that they hope God will accept most kindly from them. Sirs, you think there are many fopperies in Popery, fit only to be laughed at, and so indeed there are: their whipping themselves about that time of the year they call Lent; and great persons do this, kings, and queens, and lords, and great men. One would think it strange that so many great people should play the fool so: the true reason of it lies here, — they have a conscience of sin, and they know they are sinners, and they do not know the true way of peace with God through the righteousness of Christ, and they are taught these foolish ways, and therefore they pursue them. And truly, if the light of the gospel should be darkened yet much more in England, I cannot tell how many poor, helpless professors amongst us might be drawn even into this foppery. It is natural for all men ignorant of the righteousness of God in Christ, to devise ways of their own to render themselves acceptable in the sight of God.

2dly, The next effect of this woeful aversion from the grace of God, in justifying us by the righteousness of Christ, is in men's going to the law, and the works of it. I do but name this, because I shall speak more largely to it by itself, under the third and next doctrine.

3dly, I would speak something to the sad effects of this, that are found even in them whom God saves. This aversion from the grace of God is so natural, that it puts forth itself strongly in them that the Lord is at work savingly upon; and I will name a few things about this, that some here can witness to, and I am sure that many more can witness to them than are here.

1. Hence it comes to pass that, in many who are saved in the issue, there is a long sorrowful trouble of mind that they live under, and all the world shall not persuade them what the true cause of it is. They are full of sorrow and complainings; no other language to be heard to God or man, but many sorrowful complaints; their corruptions are strong, their souls dead and dark, their consciences disquieted. And what is the true reason of all this? They are yet averse from giving glory to the sovereign grace of God in saving them by Christ. Many sorrowful hours many of the elect of God have gone through in the strength of this corruption, and they have never seen it till a long while after. It is a shame and reproach to professors, and a dishonour to our Lord Jesus Christ, that so many

in whom the root of the matter is, have their hearts sinking within them when relief is so plainly provided for them. The true reason is, because they are averse, and not willing, nor inclined to be indebted solely to grace, and to have all their supplies singly from it.

2. From hence it also comes to pass, that there are so many outbreakings of sin, or at least the working of it in the hearts of many that the Lord hath a mind to save, and doth work savingly upon. How many poor creatures are there that know this? That from the time that the Lord first began to deal with them, and made them serious about salvation, their corruptions have grown more strong, and Satan more formidable and vexing; and, it may be, they are left of God to commit some gross sin, that they were never guilty of before. Whence comes this? It is not only from the strength of temptation, nor is corruption grown stronger; but here lies the reason: Now God hath begun to awaken them, and they are not yet disposed kindly to yield themselves up unto the entire conduct of grace; not willing to give the grace of God its proper employment: but this is the way people generally take whensoever they are awakened, and made serious about salvation; then they fall to work, and set about duty — they pray, and hear, and read, and repent, and labour to reform their conversation, and in the mean time they are utterly unacquainted with employing Christ; and, therefore, the Lord in his righteous judgment leaves them to themselves, and lets them see that they must stand upon another bottom, or they will surely totter and fall; that they must be quite weaned from themselves, and all things made new in Christ, or nothing will be done rightly.

3. And thus some, as they live sorrowfully all their days, so they also die sadly: they have been leaning on their own righteousness as far as they could all their life long; sometimes hanging upon one twig, and sometimes upon another; and one breaks, and the other breaks, and here they get a fall, and there they get a fall; but at last, if the Lord hath mercy upon them, they are made to see the vanity of all these shifts, and then they betake themselves in earnest to that which is without them, to a righteousness that they have no hand in, that is wrought out by Christ alone, and given by pure grace. So much for this first head, How this sin of frustrating the grace of God is committed.

2dly, I am now to shew the sinfulness, and the greatness, of this sin of frustrating the grace of God. The apostle is here vindicating himself from it: “I do not,” saith he, “frustrate the grace of God.” Now, there are two things especially that aggravate all sins, and the more of them there be in any sin, the more sinfulness is there in that sin. 1st, The direct tendency of any sin to damnation. 2dly, The direct enmity that there is in any sin to the grace of God; and

wheresoever there is a sin that is especially framed both these ways, that sin must needs be a great one.

1. This sin of frustrating the grace of God is directly against man's salvation, and tends directly to damnation. All sin against the law tends to damnation by its desert; every sin deserves hell. Every sin against the law of God works out wrath by deserving; but sin against the gospel works out wrath by special activity, by its apt acting; and there is a great difference between these two: a man that commits a sin against the law, he commits a sin that deserves death; but he that sins against the grace of the gospel, in that very sin he works out his own death. Other sins expose a man to the wrath of God as a judge, but this sin is like self-murder, the man executes the law upon himself. Every man by nature is under a sentence of condemnation; but rejecting the grace of God leaves and binds a man under that condemnation: there is no other remedy for it, but only the grace of God through Christ; therefore rejecting that, is rejecting the only remedy.

2. This sin is directly against the glory of God. There is a great deal of the glory of God concerned in his grace. This grace of God tendered to us through Jesus Christ, is God's great plot and contrivance for his own glory; and frustrating of it is all that man can do to frustrate God, and to disappoint him in his main design. Blessed be God, no creature can do this; but woe be to them that do all they can against it. The Pharisees "rejected the counsel of God against themselves," (Luke 7:30). Sirs, God would never have suffered the first Adam to have fallen, unless he had had a greater contrivance for his own glory in raising him up again. God would never have suffered the dishonour that sin's entrance brought upon him in the world, unless he had designed the bringing about of greater glory to himself by the manifestation of his grace. Therefore, "where sin hath abounded, grace hath much more abounded;" and that brings a great deal more honour to God than sin brings dishonour. The grace of God is the very heart and the inmost character of God; and to frustrate this, is to kick against the very heart of God. The grace of God is all through Jesus Christ; it flows through him, and therefore all reflections upon the grace of God reflect upon him. The grace of God is offered to men by the Holy Ghost; and, therefore, refusing and frustrating the grace of God is rejecting of the Holy Ghost. In a word, this grace of God is the great scope of the whole Bible; and to frustrate the grace of God, is to make the whole Bible in vain, both Old and New Testament too. The Holy Scriptures are able to make us wise unto salvation, but it is through faith that is in Christ Jesus, (2 Tim. 3:15).

APPLICATION. — There are only two words that I would speak to for the improving of this doctrine. Is frustrating the grace of God such a horrible sin? Then, 1st, Do you all beware of it. 2dly, Receive this grace of God; for there is no other way to avoid the frustrating of the grace of God, but only by receiving it.

1st, I would have you all beware of this sin of frustrating the grace of God; but, more especially, I would direct a warning of fear against this sin unto several sorts of persons.

1. Unto moral, civil, well-natured people, good livers, as we use to call them. Through the mercy of God, some are born of a better nature, as we call it, than others; of a sweet easy temper; and it is a great mercy to have a well-tempered mind, by a natural constitution, as well as it is to have a well-framed body. Now, when this virtuous natural temper hath the advantage of a godly education, these sort of people come quickly to look very well; and, therefore, they ought to take great heed. You civil, well-natured people, do you have a great care of frustrating the grace of God, for it is a sin that you are especially tempted to. There are some people so ill-natured, and of so bad a temper, that they need, as we use to say, a great deal of the grace of God to save them. And are there any that do not need the grace of God? The Lord save any of you from thinking so! He is in a woeful case indeed that thinks he doth not need the grace of God. Moral, civil people are in great danger of this sin: they think they have a good stock of their own to set up with, and therefore they do not borrow of Christ.

2. People that have taken upon them the profession of religion, had need to take heed of this sin of frustrating the grace of God. They have taken upon them a profession, it may be they know not how, nor wherefore; but it is come upon them. If you be clothed with the garment of profession, have great care of this sin. There are many that profess the grace of God, that yet are strangers to the thing itself, and they are in a very dangerous case.

3. They that boast of outward privileges should have a care of this sin of frustrating the grace of God: they were baptized when they were children, and have heard the word, and attended upon ordinances, and they begin to think themselves fair before God for the hope of eternal life. They are blameless in their walk and conversation. Let such people, in an especial manner, take heed of this sin. I can assure you that a blameless conversation hath been a great temptation to a great many too undervalue the grace of God, and the righteousness of Jesus Christ. These sort of people were never sick at heart.

4. Awakened souls; they whose consciences are awakened, have great need to take heed of this sin of frustrating the grace of God. The Lord sometimes

makes both light and fire too to dart in upon the consciences of poor sinners, and they begin to see and feel what they never saw nor felt before; and when it is thus with them, sometimes, they think things are a great deal better with them than they were before; and, sometimes, they think it is a great deal worse with them; and they that in their awakening think it to be a great deal worse with them than it was before, are in a more hopeful state than they that think it is better with them; for it is not a thorough awakening, if the person thinks that awakening to be enough. Such people should take heed of this sin, lest they frustrate the grace of God, for there are two things that they are especially endangered by.

1. By the force of this conviction they set about duty, and that pretty warmly; and these are lovely things in the eyes of poor creatures that never knew before what praying and reading the word of God were; but when once their consciences come to be awakened, they begin to get alone, and cry to the Lord. Now, when the soul is in this ease, it had need take great heed of this sin of frustrating the grace of God. How many poor awakened sinners are there that have made a pillow to sleep to hell upon with their own duties and performances, as if it were by the righteousness of the law! And thus they do not submit to the righteousness of God in Christ, nor do they attain to the rest that remains for the people of God, (Rom. 10:3, Heb. 4:9).

2. If they do not sit down upon their duties, then, on the other hand, they are apt to be quite discouraged, and to give up all for lost. An awakened conscience, if it be thoroughly awakened, is upon the point of despair; and the point of despair is the point of ruin, or the point of salvation, as God pleases to issue it. It is the turning point. When the poor sinner's conscience is awakened to see its lost and undone condition, in that case he is just on the point of winning or losing for evermore. If the man hearkens to God, and gives glory to his grace, by trusting in Jesus Christ alone for salvation, the bargain is made for evermore; but if the poor sinner turns aside, and stops in any thing short of this, then either the disease grows greater, or else a hardness comes in the room of it, that is worse than the disease itself. That is the first exhortation:—Have a great care of this sin of frustrating the grace of God. And, to that end,

2dly, Give the grace of God a hearty welcome. There is no other way to prevent the sin of frustrating the grace of God, but by receiving and welcoming it. Welcome the grace of God for your work, but not for the devil's work. All God's work, that which God craves of you; all that you may give to the grace of God to do for you; all the work that you have to do with God, that you may give to the grace of God to do for you; only do not set the grace of God to do the devil's work; that is sinning, turning the grace of God into wantonness. The grace of God

will do every thing for us but the devil's work. And, if I may so say, he hath a great deal of the spirit of the devil in him, that will give so precious a thing as the grace of God to do the devil's work. Aye, but how shall we receive the grace of God? I answer, three ways. 1st, Doubt not your need of it. 2dly, Do not delay your accepting it. 3dly, Do not question your title to it.

1. Doubt not your need of it. If the Lord hath a mind to save you, I know very well there will be no great need of this caution. Every sinner that God saves effectually, is a person that not only thinks he is needy of the grace of God, but he thinks he is more needy of it than any body else in the world; that if there was any such man in the world that could be saved without grace, he was the farthest from such a one; that if there was any man in the world that needed more grace than ordinary, he was the man.

2. Do not delay your accepting of grace whensoever it is revealed to you. Whensoever you have the offer of the grace of God, whensoever you are about the means of grace, labour to get this grace itself, "Therefore the Holy Ghost saith, To-day if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." (Heb. 3:7). You may not hear his voice to-morrow; hardness of heart grows mightily by delays.

3. Do not question your title to it. I mean this, — Make no doubt but that it is as lawful and as allowable in God's sight for you to lay hold on the saving grace of God, as ever it was for any sinner in the world. I do not mean that graceless people should presently think that they have a title to the grace of God; for no man hath a title to it till he receives it. But this I say, the offer of the grace of God, in the gospel, gives fair warning and liberty for every one to embrace it. "He that will, let him come, and take of the water of life freely," (Rev. 22:17). And that which is thus freely offered, and freely given, should be thankfully welcomed, and thankfully received, when it is enjoyed.

Do Not Seek Righteousness by the Law

By Robert Traill

Sermon Three in a series of six on Galatians 2:21.

“I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.” — Gal. 2:21.

When I first entered on these words, I told you what the scope of the apostle was in this epistle: he is here brining forth arguments against that error that the Galatian churches were plagued with; and arguments for that truth of the gospel that he had planted amongst them, and taught them. The truth was this, That the righteousness of a sinner for justification was only in Christ. The error of the Galatians lay in this, That something of the righteousness of the law was to be mixed therewith. My text contains two arguments against this error, drawn from a common natural head of arguing against error, by the absurdities that necessarily flow from it. Now there are two grand absurdities that flow from this doctrine of the law in point of justification, 1st, That it frustrates the grace of God; 2dly, That it makes Christ's death to be in vain: and two more abominable things cannot be well thought of; and people have great need to fear, and to take heed of any doctrine that hath any tendency to either of them. The first of these the apostle expresses in his own person: “I do not frustrate the grace of God.” And here he speaks as a believer, and not as a minister nor an apostle; so he discourses from ver. 16, speaking of himself and the rest of the godly, like ordinary believers, that betook themselves to this way of relief by Christ's righteousness alone. I propose four observations to speak to.

1st, That the grace of God shines gloriously in the justifying of a sinner through the righteousness of Christ: and this I have spoke to.

2dly, That frustrating the grace of God is a great and horrible sin; for so it is expressed by the apostle, “I do not frustrate the grace of God.” As if he should have said, “Blessed be God, I am not in that road; I am not one that frustrates the

grace of God; I am saved by it.” How the grace of God is frustrated, and how great the sin is, I spoke to the last day. The revelation of the grace of God, and the tender of it, and the urging of it, may be frustrated, and is, by many: but the grace itself, in its powerful conveyance by the Holy Ghost on the hearts of men, always reaches its end. The grace of God is irresistible in its thorough powerful application: this I also spoke to; and would only add a word or two further about the greatness of this sin of seeking righteousness by the law, and thereby frustrating the grace of God.

1. This is a sin that but few in the world can commit. The greatest part of them that go to hell cannot commit this sin; they never frustrated the grace of God. Indeed all that are finally guilty of it go to hell; but all that go to hell are not guilty of this sin. The greatest part of the world never frustrated the grace of God, for they never heard of it; and, therefore, our Lord pronounces a woe against Capernaum, against Chorazin and Bethsaida, and tells them that they were in a worse case than Sodom and Gomorrah, than Tyre and Sidon, (Matt. 11:21), because the grace of God was never offered them as it was to the others. Sirs, let me tell you, the worst quarters in hell are for those persons that are nearest to Christ, and yet not in him by faith: of all sinners such drop deepest into the pit.

2. The devils are not guilty of this sin. There is not a devil in hell, nor out of it, that is so guilty of this sin of frustrating the grace of God, as thousands of professors in London are. The devils are haters of the grace of God; but the grace of God was never tendered to them: they only hate the grace of God as it is tendered to men, and envy it; but the grace of God was never offered to the devils. The way of preserving the holy angels, and the way of justice to the damned spirits, proclaim greatly the wonderful privilege that we have in the gospel. The holy angels are kept, and they received grace, for the election of grace fell on them: they are called the elect angels. When that great apostasy was in the upper house, all the reprobate angels fell of their own accord, and all the elect angels stood: and that election of grace towards angels ran through Jesus Christ, who was to be their preserving head. There is something that looks like this in the word of God.

But recovering grace to angels was never given; the angels that stood had preserving grace given them, to keep them in their first station; but the angels that fell had no recovering grace given them, “Christ took not on him,” saith the apostle, “the nature of angels, but was born of the seed of Abraham.” And thence it came to pass, that the devils themselves are not guilty of this sin of frustrating the grace of God. Surely then people had need to take great heed that they be not guilty of a worse sin than that which the devils can commit. There is no creature

that hath frustrated the grace of God, but that creature that hath the offer of the grace of God.

3. Frustrating the grace of God is a sin that none that are in hell are guilty of. All that are finally guilty of it on earth are sent to hell, but none that are in hell are guilty of it; for when once that last sentence is executed upon them, the door of grace and mercy is for ever shut upon them. So that it is the gospel-sinner only who can frustrate the grace of God, who is guilty of that sin; and that but a small part of the world are guilty of it; that the devils in hell are not guilty of it, that all the damned in hell are not guilty of it, though they rage, and roar, and blaspheme; and ail sorts of wickedness we may well conclude to be in their miserable state: but frustrating the grace of God is a sin not to be found in hell, because grace enters not there. So much shall serve for this second point of doctrine, That it is a horrible sin to frustrate the grace of God. I come now to speak to the next doctrine.

3dly, To seek righteousness by the works of the law, is to frustrate the grace of God: for this is the scope of the apostle's argument. It is to shew that there is no righteousness to be had by the law; and this is one argument that he proves it by, "I do not," saith he, "frustrate the grace of God." It is, as if he should have said, "If I sought righteousness by the works of the law, I should frustrate the grace of God; but I do not seek righteousness by the law, for I am dead to the law, and therefore I do not frustrate the grace of God." There are two things under this doctrine that I would speak to — 1st, What is it to seek righteousness by the law? 2dly, How doth it appear that seeking righteousness by the works of the law is frustrating the grace of God? For they that are guilty of this sin of seeking righteousness by the works of the law, they are very loath to take in this, that they frustrate the grace of God: they will say, that they give all respect to the grace Of God; even the self-righteous Pharisee could claim to have the grace of God, (Luke 18:11), "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men;" "I thank God, that I am so good as I am;" when he was a poor, vain, self-conceited man all the while.

1. What is it to seek righteousness by the works of the law? By law here I mean the holy spotless law of God. The law of man hath nothing to do in the point of righteousness before God. This seeking of righteousness by the law is righteousness in God's sight; the apostle states the matter so. No man is justified by the law in the sight of God. That a man is justified by the law in the sight of men, nobody can deny. We should be very careful to justify ourselves in the sight of men by the law, and our conformity to it; but this righteousness here spoken of is righteousness in the sight of God, and righteousness by the law of God; and it stands in three things.

1st, Righteousness by the law is that which obtains a man's acceptance with God. That is righteousness by the law that procures a man's acceptance with God; upon the account of which he stands before God as a righteous man, and is dealt with accordingly. Now, he that seeks righteousness by the law in this sense, is one who dreams, that by doing and obeying what the law requires, he may work out that for which he may stand righteous and accepted in God's sight. And that is one way this sin is committed.

2dly, In this righteousness before God by the works of the law, there is an expectation of impunity for all that is past in transgressing the law. And we find that this must necessarily be the righteousness of a holy man, who stands in a state of acceptance with God; but the righteousness of a man who hath been once a sinner must be by having that which may bring him into a state of impunity and safety of all the transgressions that he hath been guilty of before. Now, men are guilty of seeking righteousness by the works of the law this second way, when they do, or think to do, that for which God will forgive all their transgressions, and forget all that they have done: and of this the Pharisee made no question: though he was a sinner, yet he comes and prays, and expects acceptance in God's sight, and the forgiveness of his sins, upon the account of the good that he had done.

3dly, In this righteousness by the works of the law there is a title to eternal life. He that, by what he doth, expects to have a right conferred upon him to eternal life, is a man that seeks righteousness by the law: "Good Master, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" said the poor young legalist, (Matt. 19:16). I would gladly have eternal life, and would gladly have a right to it: Master, tell me what good thing shall I do to get it. These are the three ways by which men seek righteousness by the law:—To do that whereby a man may obtain acceptance before God: To do that for which he may obtain pardon and impunity from God: To do that for which he may have a right conferred on him to eternal life. But, you will say, this is so gross Popery, that there is no Protestant guilty of it. Alas! alas! every natural man is guilty of it; and it is only the almighty power of the Spirit of God that can erase it out of their hearts. I will offer you some plain proofs of this.

1. How many are there, when their hearts are examined, must acknowledge that their eyes are altogether on the precepts of the law, and not a thought on the promises of the gospel? How many poor creatures are there that begin to be thoughtful about their salvation, insomuch that they make people that are about them, who are ignorant and charitable, think that they are hopeful Christians. But try these people this way, and you will find that all the exercise of their religion is

about the precepts of the law, and they have no exercise at all about the promises of the gospel, he that minds only the precepts, is only a doer; and he that minds not the promise, he is no believer: for the precept is the rule of practice; but it is the promise that is the foundation of faith. Now, how can that man be reckoned a believer, that hath no heart-exercise about the promises?

2. A great many people are mightily taken up about their own works, and but very little about Christ's. Our righteousness doth not stand in our own works; but stands in Christ's works, what Christ did, and suffered for us in his life, and death, and resurrection; therein stands our righteousness. Now, how many poor creatures are there that reckon it a great matter, and glory mightily in their own doings: if they pray, and hear, and read, and can but make any sort of reformation in their conversation, how big do these things appear in their eyes! But Christ's life and death, and all his great performances for our salvation, are mean and low, and of small esteem with them. And do not these sort of people seek righteousness by the law? Aye surely.

3. They look for eternal life, but they look for it as a reward of works, and not as an inheritance given by gift and grace; and all servants and slaves must do so, and all natural men are slaves, they are children of the bondwoman, (Gal. 4:31); they work for fear of punishment, and in hopes of the crown: they work for wages; the wages they love, and would have, but the work they hate. Whereas the believer acts just the contrary; he loves the work, and he expects the wages as the gift of grace from the blessed Father he serves. The apostle makes a great distinction between these two; "Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ, (Gal. 4:7). Every man that is for righteousness by the works of the law is a servant; he looks upon God as his master, and the law as his master's will, and he sets about obeying with all his might. Now, is not this a good servant? Yes. But all such servants go to hell: you must be children, for none but children are saved. And, indeed, there are none true servants to him, but they that are children: they are but slaves, and are cast out, that do not serve with their love, and expect the inheritance only as a gift of grace. So much for that first thing, What it is to seek righteousness by the works of the law.

2. I am now to shew you, that seeking righteousness by the works of the law, is to frustrate the grace of God: and I would shew it — first in point of doctrine — and then in point of practice.

1st, As to point of doctrine. In the matter of righteousness before God, the law and the gospel are perfectly opposite, and they are only so in this point. The

law and the gospel agree sweetly together in all things else; but in this point of the righteousness of a man before God, the law and the gospel are quite opposite one to another. The gospel comes to bring in another salvation than the law thought of; and the law destroys the salvation of the gospel. The law and gospel, in point of righteousness before God, are exactly opposite; “And if by grace, then it is no more by works, otherwise grace is no more grace; but if it be of works, then it is no more of grace, for otherwise works were no more works,” (Rom. 11:6). Grace and works, in the point of righteousness before God, are perfectly opposite; “You are saved by grace,” saith the apostle, “not of works, lest any man should boast,” (Eph. 2:8, 9).

2dly, Let us bring this matter into practice, and you will find that all men express this in their attitude; both the self-righteous man, and he that is not so. Not only is it asserted in point of doctrine, that works and grace are thus inconsistent, but we always find it, even in the spirit and temper, both of the one and of the other.

1. He that seeks righteousness by the law, is a man that never saw his need of grace: and you may be well assured that that man will frustrate the grace of God, who never saw his utter need of it. He was never so far emptied, but he expects and imagines that he shall be able to work out a righteousness for himself, and so is not brought under any conviction of his utter need of the grace of God; whereas he that is for the grace of God in Christ alone, is a man that hath a great need of the grace of God, and sees himself undone without it.

2. This self-righteous man sees no glory in the grace of God shining through the righteousness of Christ; there is no excellency in it to him. Every natural man is in this mind; he sees a great deal of glory in his own doings: in a beautiful conversation, in brave gifts, and in a shining walk before men; he sees a great deal of beauty and glory here. Every natural man thinks there is a great deal of glory in his own performances. The self-righteous Pharisee came boasting in his own performances; “God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican: I fast twice a week, and I give tithes of all that I possess,” (Luke 18:11, 12). These were great things in the man’s esteem, and so they are in the eyes of every natural man. But for that righteousness that is lodged in Christ, that is wrought out by a man without him, by one that came down from heaven, and is gone up thither again; that hath all this righteousness seated in him, and gives it forth to us by mere grace; no natural man thinks any thing of this. But the believer is a man that hath an high esteem of the

righteousness of Christ. How doth the apostle Paul speak of this? “I count all things but dung, that I may win Christ; and be found in him, not having on mine own righteousness,” (Phil. 3:8, 9).

3. Every natural man is averse from the grace of God, and therefore he must needs frustrate the grace of God. He is averse from it: but every believer is just of another mind. Sirs, if all men’s hearts were known to us, as they are to God, here is one thing that would determine every man’s state, What way do you best like to go to heaven in? “I would gladly be very holy,” saith the poor man, “that I may be very happy when I die.” Saith the believer, “I would gladly be clothed with Christ’s righteousness, and get eternal life as the gift of his grace; and I know that by being in Christ I shall be sanctified.” But no believer seeks sanctification as his righteousness, and title to glory: it is a preparation for glory, and the way that leads to glory, to all them that are saved according to that blessed method, “Whom he justified, them he also glorified,” (Rom. 8:30); and by glorification there, both sanctification and eternal life are well understood by most. — So much for the third doctrine, That seeking righteousness by the works of the law frustrates the grace of God.

I would now speak a few words to the fourth doctrine, and then make some application of both together.

Doctrine 4. No true believer in Jesus Christ can frustrate the grace of God. The apostle is here speaking of it in the account that he is giving of the grace of God working in him: “I through the law,” saith he, “am dead to the law, that I might live to God;” and “I live by Christ, and by faith in him, and, therefore, I do not frustrate the grace of God.” He is not speaking of the great attainment that some few Christians arrive at; but he is speaking of that which is common to the state of all Christians: “I do not frustrate the grace of God.” Before I come to the proof of this, I would lay down a few cautions, to prevent mistakes.

1st, It must be allowed that a great many who have been made Christians have been long enemies to the grace of God; and there is not a greater instance of this than the good man that speaks in my text, the apostle Paul. He was a great heart-enemy to Jesus Christ; and he was an enemy to Christ, if I may so say, with a good conscience, according to the real light that the poor man’s blinded conscience had: “I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth,” (Acts 26:9). “I never heard a name that I hated so much as the name of this Jesus of Nazareth; and I hated it from the heart, and my conscience prompted me to it.” When our Lord met him by the way,

“Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” little did the poor man think Christ died for him, and should be a blessed fountain of life to him. A believer may be a great enemy to the grace of God, before the grace of God makes him a believer.

2dly, It may not be denied but that a true believer may take in doctrines contrary to the grace of Christ in their tendency, though he perceive it not. I should be loath to think that all these Galatians, that are here so sharply reprov'd by the apostle Paul, were rotten-hearted people; there might be many sincere people amongst them, imposed upon by the cunning of them that lay in wait to deceive. There may be, through darkness, perplexed heads in many honest hearts, about several points concerning the grace of God, It is not for us to measure, anybody's state according to the principles that they profess, unless they be very bad.

3dly, It is not to be denied but that in a fit of temptation, even a true believer may abuse the grace of God; he may turn it into wantonness, and may grow light and vain, because of his mistaking the nature of the grace of God. Several have done so, and God knows how to tame them that do so; and the severest fatherly rebukes of the law are upon them that wax wanton because of his kindness. These things being premised, I would briefly shew how it is that a good man cannot frustrate the grace of God.

1. Because good men are all grace's captives. Every believer, as a believer, and when he is made a believer, is made a captive of the grace of God. How are men saved, think you? We cannot see which way they are saved; the word goeth forth, and people hear it; but we do not know who gets good, and when they get good by it. I will tell you when men are saved; when the grace of God comes and lays hold of them, and claps hold of a poor sinner — "This man shall be my captive, and I will save him." All believers are captives to the grace of God, and, therefore, they cannot frustrate the grace of God; they are all subdued by this grace, and made "willing in the day of his power." (Psalm 110:3).

2. No believer can frustrate the grace of God, because he is dead to the law, as the apostle's word is in the context, (Gal. 2:19). And there are two things needful to make a man dead to the law; — to know the law; and to know himself: and whosoever knows both these, is a man dead to the law. He that knows the purity, and the spotlessness of the law of God, and he that knows his own heart, and its vileness, this man will naturally draw this conclusion, "Surely this law can never do me any good. I can never fulfil it, and it can never save me; if there be not another way of salvation than by the law, I am gone for evermore." "I through the law am dead to the law," saith the apostle; "I need no more, to make me

despair of life by the law, than to see the law: it commands what I cannot do, it threatens what I cannot avoid nor bear; and therefore, I am dead to the law, that I might live to God;” — “my life must come in another way than by the law.”

So much shall serve for the opening of these truths. It would now follow to make some Application; which I shall do in two things, respecting all the doctrines that I have raised from this former part of the verse. By these doctrines here delivered by the apostle, you are called to try the spirits, to try the doctrines you hear, and you are called to try your own state; for every doctrine that is contrary to the grace of God is a doctrine that Christians should hate. And your eternal state is to be determined by these things — What are your heart-thoughts of the law of God? What are your heart-thoughts of the righteousness of Christ? And what are your heart-thoughts of the grace of God? And every one that knows truly what his inward sense of these things is, may soon come to some conclusion concerning his spiritual state: but I shall speak more fully to these things the next opportunity.

Examine Yourselves in the Light of God's Grace

By Robert Traill

Sermon Four in a series of six on Galatians 2:21.

“I do not frustrate the grace of God; for if righteousness come by the law, then is Christ dead in vain.” — Gal. 2:21.

From this first argument of the apostle for the justifying of a sinner through the righteousness of Christ, and not by the righteousness of the law, I have raised, and opened, and spoke something to four doctrines—

1st, That the grace of God shines gloriously in the justifying of a sinner through the righteousness of Christ.

2dly, That it is a dreadful sin to frustrate the grace of God.

3dly, That all who seek righteousness by the law, they do frustrate the grace of God.

4thly, That no true sound believer can be guilty of this sin. Frustrating the grace of God is a sin that no believer can commit.

I would now come to make some application of these, which I, mean to prosecute from these two heads:—

I. To warn you to take heed and to try the spirits, as the apostle exhorts (1 John 4:1), according to this doctrine.

II. Try your own state according to your heart-thoughts of this matter.

I. You are to try the spirits — you are to try the doctrines that you hear. When the greatest measure of the Holy Ghost was poured out upon the churches, and when extraordinary officers were raised up amongst them, and in a time when some of the apostles were living, by one of them was this exhortation given, “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God,” (1 John 4:1). And it is very observable, that the scope of that text that the apostle there lays down, leads us plainly to the doctrine that I am upon, “Believe not every spirit, for there are many false spirits, and antichrists, that are gone out into the world.” But you will say, How shall we know them? Saith the apostle, “Every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is not of God: every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is of God” (ver. 3). Now, by a very usual phrase that was well understood then, and it is not hard to be known now, by “spirit,” doctrine is meant. Every doctrine that tends not this way is not of God. Aye, but, you will say, Where are there any that say Christ is not come in the flesh, save the Jews? The apostle seems to make this a grand mark of antichrist. Now, in antichrist’s kingdom (and that is a fitter name for them than that of the Church, for with the church they have nothing to do) it is every where asserted that Christ is come in the flesh; for they have made a great part of their religion to consist in carnal, wicked representations of Jesus Christ; they have made a goddess of his mother, and they have made a puppet-show of his life and death, by their ridiculous representations. Aye, but the main thing that Christ came into the flesh for, that is forgotten by them; and of this the apostle speaks (ver. 10), “He hath sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” Christ’s business in this world was to be made a sacrifice for sin; and they that do not hold him forth as a sacrifice for sin, do, in effect, say he is not come in the flesh. Now, concerning these doctrines that I would warn you against, I would branch them forth into a few heads.

1. There are doctrines darkening the grace of God, and the righteousness of Christ, that you should beware of. The gospel is called by the apostle, “the gospel of the grace of God,” twice in one discourse to the church at Ephesus (3:2,7); and the “word of his grace,” (Acts 20:32). What judgment then should Christians make of such men’s spirits, that are called ministers, and will be called so, and yet you may hear them preach from one end of the year to another, and never hear a word of the grace of God, or the righteousness of Christ? If they be sound in the faith, it is well; but the very concealing of these things is a great sin, and a great snare to people; the very name of the gospel is the gospel of the grace of God: it is miscalled by the name of the gospel, if the grace of God runs not through every vein of it.

2. There are doctrines perplexing the grace of God; they make it dark, and they make it intricate: they perplex the doctrine with methods, and they perplex people's consciences with their doctrine. There is no church canon in all the world that is much worth regarding, but that which we have in Acts 15; for those that were called by the name of General Councils, for the first three hundred years after Christ, have many weaknesses and follies in them; and they began to savour of a degeneracy already begun, though in the main points of the truths of the gospel they remained sound. In Acts 15:1, certain men that came down from Judea had taken up this conceit, and "taught the brethren, that except they were circumcised after the law of Moses, they could not be saved." Observe where they laid the stress of this thing, "except ye be circumcised after the law of Moses, ye cannot be saved." You know very well, that the apostle Paul looked upon circumcision as a very indifferent thing: sometimes, in his travels, he ordered some to be circumcised, but at other times he would not; he looked upon it as a matter of indifference, for the avoiding of scandals, and so the apostle reckoned it no great matter: "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing." Aye, but when once it came to be broached into a doctrine, and a necessity laid upon it, "Except ye be circumcised after the law of Moses, ye cannot be saved," — let us see what this awful reverend assembly at Jerusalem say to it; the apostles, and elders, and brethren, a blessed company they were, a blessed church, worth all the churches in England, without any reflection: "Forasmuch as we have heard that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying you must be circumcised, and keep the law; to whom we gave no such commandment," (Ver. 24): they trouble you, and they pervert your soul. Sirs, There are four questions, that must always be preserved plain; plainly delivered, and plainly known by all good men: — 1st, What is that righteousness in which a sinner can stand safe before God? The plain answer to it is, That it is the righteousness of Christ only. 2dly, How come we by this righteousness? The gospel answer is, By grace alone; it is given us as a free gift, we do not buy it. 3dly, How are we possessed of this righteousness? By faith alone; there is no putting on this raiment but by faith alone. 4thly, What warrant hath a man to believe on Jesus Christ? The plain gospel answer is, Only the promise of the gospel. And here are two things I would caution you about, and the most part of people's mistakes lie about them. 1st, The law is no gospel but as it leads to Christ; the law not leading to Christ is against the gospel, and the gospel against the law; but the law leading to Christ serves the gospel, and the gospel serves the law by fulfilling it. 2dly, The doctrine of holiness, as it flows from Christ, is gospel; but the doctrine of holiness, without Christ, is no gospel. To make this plain: Whosoever they be that teach people to be holy, and tell them how they

may be holy, and urge them very hard that they must be very holy, for this end, that when they are holy they may believe on Jesus Christ; these people pervert and distort the gospel: but if people be persuaded of the necessity of holiness for salvation, and that they must believe on Jesus Christ that they may be holy, this is gospel. That is the second thing: Have a care of those doctrines that distort and confound the truths of the gospel.

3. There are mixing doctrines: they that would mix something with the grace of God. The grace of God they will not disown, the righteousness of Christ they will not deny; but they will put something in with them in the matter of justification. Take heed of this matter; it is a shame that this should be talked on as a matter of controversy; it is a point that every one's conscience should be fully satisfied in, as they expect salvation from the hand of God. Indeed, good men may jar and jangle about terms that neither of them well understand; but when the matter comes to a particular person's own case, there should be a full satisfaction in this point — that the righteousness of Christ for our justification must stand pure and unmixed. It is a corrupt thing to mix any of the works of the law with the grace of God; and herein lay the error of the Galatians: the grace of God, and the righteousness of Christ, they liked very well; but they would join the law of Moses therewith. Let the law of Moses keep its own place, and be the rule of our sanctification; but in our justification, it hath no place at all. God never gave it any place there, and all they are fools that do: it never served any man that way.

4. There are blaspheming doctrines, opposing and blaspheming the grace of God; and the land is full of them. You may have heard of a sort of people, the Socinians, and they are gross enemies to the grace of God. These strike at the very root of the grace of God, and the righteousness of Christ. If Christ be not the true God, how can he save a sinner? It is impossible that the righteousness of a creature can atone for the unrighteousness of a creature. It is the Godhead of Christ that adds that infinite virtue to his sacrifice that we are saved by. So much for this first exhortation, "Try the spirits."

II. I would exhort you to try your own state by this doctrine, "I do not frustrate the grace of God;" and as this hath been handled, it calls you to try yourselves about three things:— 1st, What are your real thoughts of God's law? 2dly, What are your real thoughts of Christ's righteousness? 3dly, What are your real thoughts of the grace of God? A little to each of these.

First, What are your real thoughts of God's law? — And although you may think this a far-fetched concern, yet it, is not so far-fetched but it comes near

to the point: judgment will be made of a man's state before God, according to his real thoughts of the law of God. Good men have always great and high thoughts of God's law, and they have low thoughts of themselves: "I esteem all thy precepts concerning every thing to be right, and I hate every false way," (Psalm 119:128). "The law is holy; the commandment is holy, just, and good: the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin, (Rom, 7:12, 14). But you will say, "Does not everybody think so of the law of God?" I answer, No. No natural man hath a good thought of the law of God. Every corrupt, unrenewed man hath one of these three thoughts concerning the law of God:—

1. The natural man thinks the law of God easy to be kept. It is a graceless proverb that some people have in their mouths sometimes, and it flows from the corruption of their hearts, "That it is an easier thing to please God than it is to please man." Indeed, if they would take God's way, it is an easy thing to get his favour; but, according to the sense that it is commonly spoken in, it is a wicked saying and flows from this wicked meaning, — that the natural man thinks the law of God easy to be kept, and thereupon the Scribes and Pharisees (and so do all that seek righteousness by the law), they expound the law of God so largely that one would think any body might keep it. Therefore, when our Lord hath a mind to break down this fortress of self-righteousness, he explains the law of God in its true strictness. The Pharisees' doctrine was, that nobody broke the sixth commandment but he that murdered a man; that no man broke the seventh commandment, but he that committed adultery with his neighbour's wife; that nobody broke the ninth but he that fore-swore himself: and, indeed, if this had been all the interpretation of the law of God, that part of it that concerns our duty towards man had been no hard thing. Blessed be God, a great many good people, and bad people too, have not been guilty of these gross transgressions; but when the spiritual meaning of the law comes to be considered, who is innocent? "I had not known lust," saith the apostle, "unless the law had said, Thou shalt not covet," (Rom. 7:7). "The commandment came to me in another sense, with that brightness that soon convinced me of sin." This is the first thought that people have of the law of God — that it is easy to be kept.

2. When they are forced to retreat from this, and they find the law of God to be so strict a rule that it reaches to the word, and thoughts, and heart, to the least motion either from within or without, then they begin to hope that the threatening will not be fulfilled: if God gives so severe a law, that reaches to all, even to the least sins, then they hope God will not punish every sin with the curse of the law. The Lord, by Moses, warns the people of this, "And it come to pass, when he hears the words of this curse, that he shall bless himself in his heart,

saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of my own heart, to add drunkenness to thirst,” (Deut. 29:19). The secure man is very unwilling to take up the holiness and the strictness of the law of God as forbidding every sin; but he is far more unwilling to believe that God means to execute the threatened vengeance for these sins. And what sorry pleas have they? “God is merciful.” Aye, so he is, but not to them that despise his law. God is not merciful to any law-breaker; but God is merciful in providing a law-keeper to save us; but he hath no mercy for the law-breaker. If a man expects life by the law, he must die by it. “Aye, but Christ hath died for sinners;” and so he hath; but Christ was sent to fulfil the law, and not to take it away. Christ came not to make the law of God less strict in commanding than it was, nor less severe in threatening; but Christ came to take both upon his own back, and all that believe in him shall be saved from both. Christ took not away the law, but fulfilled it; and it is the reckoning of that fulfilling of the law by Christ to us, that is our salvation; and thus “the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us.” The righteousness of the law was fulfilled by Christ, and this is reckoned to a believer; and so the righteousness of the law of God is fulfilled in him; fulfilled by Christ, and so fulfilled in the believer in him.

But now suppose the light of the word drives a man from both these vain imaginations, and he sees the law to be so holy that no man can escape its threatenings; When the natural man is thus forced to retreat from these two, then,

3. He rises up in rebellion against the law, and blasphemes the law of God. Sirs, there are a great many poor creatures that complain grievously that many blasphemous thoughts follow them: I do believe that next unto the advantage that Satan may have over some bad-tempered minds, and ill-disposed bodies, I am apt to believe that the main root of all these blasphemies, is this point of doctrine that I am upon. When the poor creature was secure, he thought he could easily fulfil the law of God, or avoid the curse of it; but when he comes to see both these to be in vain, then, unless grace subdues the man’s heart, it naturally rises in rebellion against the law of God. “Why did God give such a strict law, that nobody can keep, but every one must be destroyed by it?” These very thoughts arose in Paul’s mind: “Was then that which was good made death to me? God forbid,” (Rom. 7:13). The apostle Paul never knew himself to be a sinner till the law came; and the more close the law came, it slew him the more, and quickened sin in him more. Now, how can any one think well of that law that slays the sinner, and enlivens the sin? “God forbid,” saith the apostle, “that I should say this was the end for which the law was made; but this was a blessed end in Christ’s hand.” “By the commandment, sin appeared to be exceeding sinful,” that Paul might see his

exceeding need of a Saviour. And there are two things that raise these rebellious thoughts against the law of God.

1. When clear light about the law shines upon the man's conscience, then all the Babel-building of their own works are thrown unto the ground: their praying, reading, hearing, holiness, it is all thrown to the ground by the law of God;— the law condemns them utterly in point of righteousness. The law indeed commands them in point of practice, and it commends them as things pleasing to God; but in point of righteousness before God, the law condemns them utterly; the only language of the law is this, "Do all, and live; fail in the least, and die:" — and thus the man sees all his own righteousness is gone. And how unwilling are people to yield to this? What a great matter is it for a man to be able to do so? When a poor awakened sinner, that never knew the grace of God, or the righteousness of Christ, when he hath by the force of good education, or the power of the word, been brought under some conviction of sin and duty, he then sets about praying, and reading, and hearing, and reforming, and, it may be, hath been doing something at this for several years; but in the mean time was an utter stranger to Jesus Christ. Now what a great matter is it for a man to forego all this, as if it had no worth in it? But why should not a man be willing to part with it? "I count it all but dross and dung," saith the apostle, "that I may win Christ," (Phil. 3:8). This blasphemous frame is expressed in Ezek. 33:10, and it hath reference to the point that I am upon: "Therefore, O thou Son of man, speak unto the house of Israel, Thus ye speak, saying, If our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we live?" The meaning is this: "The Lord is here, by his severe prophet, plaguing us with reproofs from the word of God for our sins, and the execution of God's threatenings are upon us in his judgments; now if we be sinners, and God deals thus severely with us, what shall come on us?" Saith the Lord, (ver. 11), "There is a way of escape, 'Turn and live;' but have a care you do not trust to your own righteousness: for if you do, you are gone for good and all." Ver. 13, "When I say to the righteous, he shall surely live, if he trust to his own righteousness, and commit iniquity, all his righteousness shall not be remembered; but for his iniquity that he hath committed he shall die for it."

2. When the sinner once finds that he is forced to forego all that he hath got already, he then also sees that there are no hopes for the time to come; that he hath no hopes at all of a righteousness by the law; and this the poor sinner reckons like the putting him into hell: he is as sorry to part with the rotten props of his own righteousness, as if the taking it away was the casting him into hell; when it is the only way to save him from it. No man can be a believer on Jesus Christ, but he that despairs of righteousness by his own doings. This is the first thing I would

have you examine yourselves about, What are your secret thoughts of the law of God? There is no righteousness can come by it; and that is the excellency of the law; it is none of the law's fault, but its glory, that no righteousness can come by it: it is a rule of righteousness, but it is no means to confer righteousness upon a sinner. The law can give eternal life to a sinless man; but it can give no life to a sinner: "If there had been a law that could have given life, verily," saith the apostle, "righteousness should have been by the law," (Gal. 3:21); righteousness should certainly have come that way.

2dly, Try what your thoughts are of the righteousness of Christ. By the righteousness of Christ, I do not mean his divine excellency, as he is the Son of God, equal with the Father; nor the excellency of the man Christ Jesus, on whom the Spirit was poured forth without measure: but I mean, that righteousness that this God-man wrought out for us, as our Redeemer, for our justification, by his life and death; this is called the righteousness of God, (Rom. 10:3). And every one may know his state towards God by his thoughts of this:— every despiser of it is a stranger to God, and every spiritual admirer of it is a man acquainted with God.

1. The believer hath high and esteeming thoughts of it, as an only righteousness, and as a very glorious one. Let us compare a little what righteousness there is, has been, or can be. The first righteousness lasted but a little while; that of the first Adam and Eve; it may be, it was not a day old; however, it was a very short one. Now, there is no comparison between Christ's righteousness and this: it is true that this comes the nearest to it; and the apostle Paul takes notice of this parallel, (Rom. 5.) The first Adam stood in the place of all his posterity, and they all stood in him, and with him as long as he stood; and this was a pretty glorious obedience that the first man performed, and if he had continued in it the time of his trial, it was to have been reckoned for the benefit of all his posterity; but it was but the righteousness of a man; it was but the righteousness of a creature; it was a righteousness that would have continued happiness, but it could bring no happiness to them that had once lost it. If such a thing could have been imaginable, that the first Adam had stood, and one of his posterity had fallen, the first original righteousness would never have been able to have obtained pardon for that sinning offspring of Adam. But the righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ is that which brings in a pardon, and a title to eternal life, to them that had forfeited all. There is another righteousness, a little one, hardly worth that name, that is performed by believers, in obedience to the holy law of God; but this comes no way near to it. If we may speak of the righteousness of the law, that is in hell. There are some poor creatures that do not imagine what hell is; they think it is the place that in all God's creation may be best spared; but let me

tell you, hell is as useful a place as any:— it is there where the righteousness of the law is proclaimed; every lash that is there given by the justice of God to the damned, proclaims aloud the righteousness and the holiness of the law. But I hope none will make any comparison between that righteousness that the law squeezes from the damned by their punishment, and that righteousness that the law found in Christ when it bruised him for our iniquities. Every believer hath high thoughts of this righteousness of Christ.

2. And not only so, but every believer hath venturing thoughts on this righteousness of Christ: the man not only thinks highly of it, but he builds upon it, and betakes himself to it. The righteousness of Christ is like a curious ark or ship, whereby all that are embarked in it, shall be safely landed in heaven. Now it signifies nothing for a poor man to stand upon the shore, and to commend the ship, and say it is a splendid vessel; he must get into it; if ever he hath a mind to escape the destruction of the world, he must get into the ark, Christ. The apostle hath an elegant similitude, “By faith Noah being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark, to the saving of his house! by which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith,” (Heb. 11:7). Pray observe, the state of Noah and every man’s state by nature are alike. God tells Noah, “An hundred and twenty years hence I will drown this whole world; and not a man, nor beast, nor fowl of heaven shall escape.” Sirs, it is not so long, by one half almost, to that time when we shall all be in eternity! An hundred and twenty years was but a small time to them, who lived seven or eight hundred years. We are just in the same case: warning is given us by the course of nature, and by the word, that in a few years more we may be all turned out of this world; and our dying is of equal importance, as to our eternal state, with Christ’s coming: what difference is there if thou shouldst die this week, or if Christ should come to judge the world this week? Thy eternal state is equally concerned in both. Now, God tells Noah, “I have provided an ark for thee: I will drown the whole world; but I will provide an ark for thee.” But after the man had builded it, he must get into it, or he could not be saved by it. Now, here comes in the tidings of the gospel; we are not bid to prepare an ark, but we are told that God hath already prepared an ark, his own Son, who was hewed and framed by the justice of God, that he might be made a fit lodging for poor sinners. Now, the work of all them that would be saved, is to get into Jesus Christ, and to betake themselves to this righteousness, and when they have done so, to rest quietly there. But yet this righteousness of Christ, as much as it is, and should be, spoken of in the preaching of the word, yet multitudes of professors never once thought of it; they often think we must be holy, and that Turks understand as well as you; but pray, how do you think to come by your boldness? Without righteousness? Never man shall be holy

without the reckoning of Christ's righteousness to him; without which you can never partake of Christ's Spirit to sanctify you. This seeking, and studying, and framing a holiness, without employing Christ, doth these two things:— it dishonours Christ utterly;— and it renders holiness altogether impossible. It is utterly impossible there should be a spark of true holiness in that heart that is a stranger to faith in Christ Jesus. Morality and Pagan civility there may be; but true gospel holiness is a blessed consequence of faith in Jesus Christ.

3dly, Try your state by your thoughts of the grace of God; what your thoughts of God's holy law are, and what your thoughts of your own righteousness are:— and then what your thoughts of the grace of God are. And wheresoever the grace of God is, there will be right thoughts of it framed in the heart; and they will be many, and serious, and very deep, and reverent; for the matter is very great. What greater thing can a man be exercised about than the grace of God towards great sinners? Oh, what a weighty subject is this for meditation! and this I dare say, that he that hath but few and small thoughts about the grace of God, never had one spoonful of the grace of God in himself: for all the grace that is in believers is but as a little drop from this great fountain; and wherever it is really communicated, the fountain from which it flows will be greatly admired. There are a few things concerning these thoughts that I would speak a little to.

1. See that your thoughts of the law, and of the grace of God, and of the righteousness of Christ, be such as are squared with the word of God:— we must think of these things as God hath spoken of them in his word: and not frame thoughts to ourselves, from our own imagination. What saith the word of God concerning the law, and the righteousness of Christ, and the grace of God appearing therein?

2. Let your thoughts of these things be such as you have when you are nearest to God. Pray take heed to this: all that are Christians, understand a little of this, what it is to be nearer to God one time than another. If you are true Christians you will know what this means; if you are not, this direction belongs not to you. There are some times when believers are nearer to God than at other times; and always, when a man is nearest to God, his thoughts of the things of God are best:— He would be a happy Christian that could always retain the same sentiments and sense of the things of God that he some times hath. When a person is near to God, and he hath lifted up upon him the light of his countenance; when the glory of God appears before the eyes of a man, what doth the man then think of the holy law of God, of the righteousness of Christ, and of the grace of God? Oh, there is nothing else that makes any considerable appearance in the eyes of a

man at that time! I am very well persuaded that the most confident pleaders of the cause of self-righteousness, the men that plead most for being justified by the righteousness of the law, if God would but speak to them, and bring them near to himself, they would lay their hands upon their mouths and speak no more. “Behold I am vile,” saith Job, “what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken, but I will not answer; yea, twice, but I will proceed no further. I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee, therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes,” (Job 40:4,5, and 42:5, 6). — Labour I say to retain the same impressions of these great things of God that you had when you were nearest to God.

3. Labour to have such thoughts of the law of God, and the righteousness of Christ, and the grace of God, as you find exercised souls have. Labour to entertain the same thoughts of these things, as you find the generality of exercised souls have. What a learned scholar saith of these things, is not so much to the purpose; for they may mistake in many things: but what is the current, general sense of all them on whose consciences God ever wrought; in whose consciences there is any light. What is the general sense that they all have of these things? Labour for that. Was there ever any Christian under the hand of the Spirit of God, that had any difference in this point? Never one in this world: they all forsake the law, and despair of life by it: they all commend the righteousness of Christ, and betake themselves to it: they all admire the grace of God, and venture their all upon it. Whatsoever difference there may be about this or the other ordinance, or in other lesser things, yet as to those things, in which the very nature and heart of the new creature lies, there is no scruple at all about them.

4. Labour for such thoughts of these things as you know you must have, and will have when you come to die. Labour for such thoughts of the law of God, and of the righteousness of Christ, and of the grace of God, as you will have when you come to die. Dying thoughts are commonly the truest. When a man is launching into eternity; when the man hath, as it were, put one foot off from the shore of time, and is leaving this world — what a poor mean thing is this little cottage of self-righteousness? It is as nothing in the man’s eyes; but that great palace of the righteousness of Christ, and the great tenor of free grace, in bestowing it on the unworthy — what a glorious thing doth it appear to be? Dying people do not usually brag of their lives and their great attainments: “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit,” saith dying Stephen, (Acts 7:59), “I am waiting for one good turn more from Christ. Now, I am dying, Lord, take my soul.” “Although my house be not so with God,” saith dying David, “yet he hath made with me an

everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: this is all my salvation, and all my desire,” (2 Sam. 23:5).

5. Labour to have such thoughts of these things as all men will have, both good and bad, both on the right hand and on the left hand of the Judge, at that great day. The world will once be all of a mind, that is questionless: in the main things all believers are of one mind now; and in the main things all unbelievers are in one mind; and unbelievers reckon Christ crucified weakness and foolishness; and all believers reckon him the wisdom and the power of God: but when the last day comes, they will be all of one mind exactly, both good and bad; they on the right hand, and they on the left hand too. If this question were to go round to all the miserable assembly at the Judge’s left hand, What think you of the law of God? — “Oh! it is a holy, powerful, dreadful law,” would they say; “we lie under it for evermore, and feel the lashes of it.” What think you of the righteousness of Christ? “It is a safe garment, happy they that are clothed with it; we have refused it, and therefore we are destroyed.” The despised grace of God is there precious to them. We use to say, “Truth is the daughter of time:” if I may reflect upon the words, “Truth is the daughter of eternity;” and this day of eternity will bring forth truth to all men, as to these three points:— The Holiness of the law of God — The Virtue of the righteousness of Christ — and, The Dominion of the grace of God. These are points that all the damned in hell, and all the glorified in heaven, will eternally have the same sentiments of; but with wonderful difference as to their share therein. The damned hear nothing but the curse of the law: but it is the happiness of the glorified in being delivered from it: “That as sin hath reigned unto death, so grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord,” (Rom. 5:21). The words just going before are, (ver. 20), “Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.” There are two great things that have filled this world:— there were but two men in it that are worth talking of the first Adam and the second; and if you know these well, it is no great matter what you are ignorant of. The first Adam is the law; the second Adam is the gospel: to the former belongs hell, and to the latter heaven. Now, these two great men brought in two great things:— the first man brought in that woful thing we call sin; and the second man brought in that brave thing we call grace: and both these are great principles. Sin reigns, and all that it reigns over it destroys; it reigns unto death: and grace reigns, and all it reigns over it saves; “Grace reigns unto eternal life, through righteousness, by Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Christ Did Not Die in Vain

By Robert Traill

Sermon Five of Six Sermons on Galatians 2:21.

“If righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.” — Gal. 2:21.

“**I** do not frustrate the grace of God; for if righteousness come by the law, then is Christ dead in vain.” You have heard of the connection of this verse with the preceding part of the chapter; and of its relation to the scope of the apostle, and to that point of gospel doctrine that he is there proving; and that is, “That a man is not justified by the law, but by Christ, or by faith in him. And this verse contains two arguments, the first of which I have already spoken to, and finished. In the former part of the words, “I do not frustrate the grace of God,” would the apostle say, “If I seek righteousness by the works of the law, I should frustrate the grace of God;” and from this I have spoken at some length to four points of doctrine.

1st, The grace of God shines gloriously in justifying a sinner by faith in Jesus Christ.

2^{dly}, That it is a horrible sin to frustrate the grace of God.

3^{dly}, That all who seek to be justified by the law, do frustrate the grace of God.

4^{thly}, This is a sin that no godly man, no sound believer, can be guilty of; and this I observed from the apostle’s saying, “I do not frustrate the grace of God.” And this was spoken by him as he was a believer, and not as an extraordinary officer of the church.

I am now to enter upon the apostle’s second argument, in the latter part of the words, “For if righteousness *come* by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.” You may see, by the different character, that the word “come” is there added by

our translators, to make the sense more smooth. According to the running of the word in the original, it is, “If righteousness by the law, the Christ is dead in vain.” — If it be by the law, if it come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain. There are implied and contained in these words two negatives, and two positives; and I would speak a little to each. The two negatives are these:—

- I. That the righteousness that justifies a sinner comes not by the law.
- II. That Christ died not in vain.

The two positives that are contained in the words are these:—

- I. That if righteousness came by the law, then Christ died in vain.
- II. That it is a horrible sin to make Christ’s death to be in vain. And how a sinner can be guilty of it, you shall hear.

I. The first negative in the text is, That righteousness comes not by the law; and this is implied, when the apostle speaks of it, as a principle from whence so absurd a conclusion would follow: it is plainly intimated that righteousness comes not by the law, because the apostle saith, if it did do so, “Christ was dead in vain.”

I would speak a little to this — that the righteousness of a sinner for justification before God, comes not by the law. There is nothing that a man doth according to the law, there is nothing that a man suffers according to the law, that can be his righteousness before God; and there is something of both these attempted by men, but both in vain. This I would prove, that no sinner can have righteousness by the law.

1. The law uncovers sin, and that is the apostle’s argument: “Therefore by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight; for by the law is the knowledge of sin;” (Rom. 3:20). There is no sin in the law; but the knowledge of sin by the law, is the knowledge of a contrary by its contrary. The law is perfectly holy; but this strict rule reveals the crookedness that is in man’s heart. By the law is the knowledge of sin,” (Gal. 3:11). But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident, for “the just shall live by faith.” It was evident to Paul, and it is evident to believers, but it can never be evident to an unbeliever, that no man is justified by the law, or by the works of it.

2. No man can be justified by the law, because the law condemns every sin, and every sinner for every sin. The law of God is so strict, that it condemns every sin. Now, that which condemns, cannot justify: for these two are contrary, “As many as are of the works of the law, are under the curse,” (Gal. 3:10). The

apostle Paul was a bold divine; he spoke the truth of God boldly, and cared not what men thought of it. Had the apostle said, “As many as break the law, are under the curse,” we would have thought that pretty tolerable; but saith he, “As many as are of the works of the law, are under the curse.” Why so? Because their works are not perfect; for it is written, saith the apostle, “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.” The law curseth every one that cannot fulfil it; if a man could fulfil the whole law of God, and transgress but in one point, yet that one sin would be condemned by the law, and the sinner for it.

3. No man can be justified by the works of the law, because every man is a sinner: “What things soever the law saith, it saith to them that are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and that all the world may become guilty before God: therefore by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in the sight of God; for by the law is the knowledge of sin,” (Rom. 3:19, 20) The question that the apostle is there upon, is on this point, that is so great a point in the Christian religion, How shall a sinner be justified before God? It is not how a holy man may be justified;— it is not how a man that never sinned may be justified; but it is, How shall a *sinner* be justified? A man that is flesh be justified? Now, saith the apostle, there is no *flesh* justified in the sight of God.

4. The law knows no mercy. Mercy and grace belong to another court than the law: “The law came by Moses; but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ,” (John 1:17). Condemnation for sin belongs to the law, but justification from sin belongs to the gospel. The law hath nothing to do with the one, and the gospel hath nothing to do with the other. The law hath nothing to do to condemn them that the gospel absolves. But you will say, “Is not this a great fault in the law, that it cannot justify a man?” The apostle speaks some way like this in Heb. 7:18, 19; though I do believe that the apostle there rather means the Old Testament dispensation, than this law, in its more general comprehensive sense, that I am now speaking of: “For there is verily a disannulling of the commandment going before, for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof; for the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did, by the which we draw nigh to God.” This is a common thought arising in the hearts of men, “Is it not a fault in the law, that it cannot justify a man? Is it not a fault that the law can send men to hell, but not bring them to heaven?” I answer, No: It is the excellency of the law; not its fault, but its glory; for let us consider a little what the law doth about righteousness.

1st, The law discloses and reveals a perfect righteousness; there is no surer, no better rule of righteousness in this world, than the holy law of God:

therefore, when our Lord is dealing with a poor carnal legalist, a puffed-up young man, that came to him, in great haste, with great zeal, running to him like a man that would be in heaven before any body else, “Good master, what good thing shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Saith our Lord, “You know, no man can come to heaven, but he that is perfectly righteous; now the only rule of perfect righteousness is the law of God; and seeing thou art in the vein for doing,” “keep the commandments.” The poor man, not knowing his own heart, nor the breadth of God’s law, replies, “All these things have I kept from my youth up.” Saith our Lord, “I will prove thee a breaker of the law, and a gross one too;” “Go and sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor; and follow me, and thou shalt have treasures in heaven.” Not that a title to eternal life comes to any man by giving his estate to the poor; but our Lord hereby reveals the rottenness of the poor self-justified man’s heart, that the man quickly, before all the company, revealed that his estate was more valuable to him than eternal life. Our Lord would have him give an evident proof, that his heart was disengaged from the world, and then follow him, and he should be saved; but he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions, (Matt. 19:16), There is a perfect rule of righteousness in the law of God, for the most perfect creature that ever was: for sinless Adam in his state of innocency. “The law of God is perfect:” so it is often called in the word of God.

2d, This righteousness that the law of God reveals, it also commands by its authority; all manner of righteousness is commanded by the law of God.

3d, All sin is threatened by the law of God; yea, the lack of this righteousness which it commands, is threatened by the law.

4th, By the law, the promise of eternal life is made to the righteous; for the law of God, completely considered, hath the promise of eternal life to all the obeyers of it; but never man shall reach it, because the righteousness of the law is impracticable; it requires that righteousness that no man can perform; and, therefore, what it promises no man can attain to. This the apostle calls the impossibility of the law: so it is in the original; we read it, “What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh,” (Rom 8:3). The true reason why the law cannot give life, is because of the *flesh* of them that are under it; no man can fulfil the righteousness of the law, and therefore no man can attain to life by the law. So much for the *first* negative implied here, That no righteousness can come by the works of the law.

II. The other negative is this, That Christ died not in vain. Now, this word, in *vain*, respects two things:— 1st, That is said to be done in vain which is

needless. 2dly, That is said to be in vain, that is unprofitably done. Now, neither of these can be said of the death of Christ: there was great *need* of his dying, and great *good* came by his dying, and therefore he died not in vain.

1st, There was great *need* of Christ's dying, and that upon manifold respects; I will name a few.

1. In regard of the decree of God, there was a necessity of his dying; and this our Lord had in his eye, when he was come just upon the borders of dying: "Now is my soul troubled, What shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour;" (John 12:2-7), — where our Lord hath respect to the necessity of his dying, upon the account of the divine appointment.

2. It was necessary upon the account of the covenant between the Father and the Son: Christ promised to die, and, therefore, he must be as good as his word:— "A body thou hast prepared me; then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me, to do thy will) O God." And what was that will of God? *Dying* was his will, and the blessed *consequences* of it. (Heb. 10:5, 7).

3. It was needful upon the account of the scriptures; and this our Lord insists on frequently. The scriptures of the Old Testament foretold Christ's death: there were many predictions and prophecies of it; many types and shadows of it; therefore our Lord tells his disciples: "These are the words that I spake unto you, whilst I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled which are written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning me," (Luke 24:44). And again, (ver. 46), "Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day." There was a necessity of it for the fulfilling of the scriptures, and, therefore, our Lord rebuked Peter, when he offered to make a defence for his master: "How then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" (Matt. 26:54). "Put up thy sword, man, this is no place for that work: the scriptures are fulfilling."

4. There was a necessity of Christ's death, for the salvation of his people. Their justification and their salvation were only brought about by the death of Jesus Christ.

2dly, And that leads me to the *second* head — Christ's death was not in vain: for there was great fruit and profit by it.

1. It brought in an everlasting righteousness, which should stand accepted before God: this is what our Lord wrought out by his death, foretold by the prophet Daniel, "To bring in everlasting righteousness," (chap. 9:24).

2. There was not only a righteousness brought in, but by Christ's death there was a purchase made; a purchase of grace and glory for his people. The death of our Lord Jesus Christ purchased great things for us, even all things that we enjoy. It did not indeed purchase the covenant of grace; for the covenant of grace sent Christ; but yet it purchased all the blessings of the covenant; for the grand condition of that covenant was, that Christ must buy all the good things contained in it by the price of his own blood.

3. Christ died not in vain, for his blood confirmed and sealed the charter: "This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins, drink ye all of it," (Matt. 26:27, 28). Christ's death confirmed the covenant, and made it a testament, (Heb. 9:15, 20).

4. Christ's death was not in vain, but for great profit: for thereby a way to heaven was made plain to believers, a patent way to heaven. How blessedly doth the apostle speak of this, "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus: by a new and living way which he hath consecrated for us, through the vail, that is to say, his flesh," (Heb. 10:19, 20). The meaning is, his *flesh rent*; the consecrating of the way, was by rending the flesh of Jesus Christ. The righteousness that justifies us — the blessings that make us happy — the covenant that secures them — and the way to heaven, are all by the death of Jesus Christ: — and they are strangers to all these things, who do not know that their way to them lies through this vail of the slain Son of God. So much for the two negatives.

Secondly, I am now to speak to the two positives in the words.

1. That if righteousness come by the law, then is Christ dead in vain. I have told you that righteousness comes not by the law, and that Christ did not die in vain. Now, the apostle joins them together, and shews what a strange aspect they have one upon another. "If righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain." This is an inference that will necessarily follow, If righteousness comes by the law, then Christ died in vain, to work out righteousness; — if righteousness comes by the law, Christ's death was in vain in the main end of it, viz., to work out righteousness. My friends, I would have you consider this with yourselves, and this one thought may serve to rectify many mistakes: — Our Lord Jesus Christ did not die to make hard things easy, to make a hard way to heaven easy; but Christ died to make impossible things *certain*. He did not die to make it more easy to get to heaven than it was before; but he died to make *certain* a way to heaven, that was *impossible* before. "What the law could not do, in that it was

weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin condemned sin in the flesh,” (Rom. 8:3). And again, “If there had been a law that could have given righteousness, verily righteousness had been by the law;” (Gal. 3:21). But because there was no law that could give righteousness to man, therefore Christ came to bring about that which was altogether impossible. How unworthily do they think of Jesus Christ, and the grand concern of his death, that look upon it only as purchasing a new law, whereby men might come to heaven on easier terms than they could by the old! Christ came to purchase a new way to heaven: a way that none could make but he: a way without which none could ever have come to heaven: — and really (though I acknowledge that about things unrevealed, and about the secret things of God, men should be sober) that notion of the possibility of the salvation of the heathen, that never heard of Jesus Christ, is condemned in this text. If a Pagan that never heard of Christ, may be saved, then is Christ dead in vain. If the end that Christ died for, can be reached any other way, then certainly Christ died in vain. If the righteousness that Christ died for, could have been attained any other way; if the fulfilling of the law that Christ underwent, in order to this righteousness; if these could have been done any other way, Christ died in vain. But these things are not so.

2. The second positive is, That making Christ’s death to be in vain, is a horrible sin. The apostle is here arguing from absurdities; and he argues from two of the greatest that can enter into the minds of men. “If you seek righteousness by the law, you frustrate the grace of God, and what a wretched creature is that! If you seek righteousness by the law, you make Christ’s death in vain; and can you do anything worse, than to kick against the grace of God, and to make the death of Christ in vain?” These sins are very great. But you will say, Can any man make Christ’s death in vain? No. No man, nor any devil neither, nor all the devils together, can frustrate the virtue of Christ’s death; it is above the reach of hell and earth. The devil, and the wicked world, thought to make Christ’s life in vain, by putting him to death; to put an end to his doctrine, and life, and disciples, by killing him; and to put an end to all, by keeping him in the grave: but to make Christ’s death in vain is utterly impossible; it is so certain, so reverend a transaction of divine Providence, contrived in so much wisdom, that its end must necessarily be reached. But, though no man can make Christ’s death to be in vain really — yet,

1st, A man may make it in vain to *himself*; he may reduce himself into the same case as if Christ had never died. “Behold, I Paul, say unto you, that if you be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing,” (Gal. 5:2). A strange word! “Christ shall profit you nothing!” Was the apostle Paul a man that preached an

unprofitable Christ? No; but you render him vain, if you seek righteousness by the law. (Vet. 4), “Christ is become of no effect to you; whosoever is justified by the law, is fallen from grace.” A justified man by the law, there never was in this world; but the apostle speaks of it here as supposing the best; supposing they had got all that they could have devised, for their justification by the law, supposing that they had obeyed the law more perfectly than any sinner ever had done, saith the apostle, “This is all the benefit you would reap by it, Christ’s righteousness would be of no effect to you.” A man makes Christ’s death to be in vain to himself, when he doth not lay hold of its power and virtue by faith.

2d, A man makes Christ’s death to be in vain, by doing all that *he* can to make it so; though he doth not do so in fact. And you will find this the rule of God’s dealing; he measures men’s wickedness, and judges of their actions, by the native design of them, though they never reach it. In all acts of dishonouring God, and rebellion against him, God deals with men according to their sinful *intentions* in these sins, though they fall far short of taking effect. A sinner, by his self-righteousness, cannot make Christ’s death to be in vain; but he doth all that he can to make it so: and this is what the apostle means here when he saith, “If righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.” “You do all that you can to make Christ’s death in vain,” I should now come to speak something of the greatness of this sin, of making Christ’s death in vain; of entertaining any principles or practices that have a tendency that way. But I cannot enter upon this now.

Christ's Righteousness the Believer's Comfort

By Robert Traill

The Last of Six Sermons on Galatians 2:21.

“If righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.” — Gal. 2:21.

The most sacred things revealed to us in the word of God are these two — the grace of God, and the death of Christ; and they are joined close together. They are two things that all who have a mind to be saved must constantly have in their eye — the grace of God, and the death of Christ; and yet there are not a few that despise both — that frustrate the one, and make the other in vain; and this charge the apostle lays upon an error that he is reproofing the Galatian churches for, and that was, their seeking righteousness by the law, and the works of it. I have spoken unto these words, as containing two strong arguments against seeking of righteousness by the works of the law.

1st, That thereby the grace of God is frustrated.

2dly, That thereby Christ's death is made to be in vain; as far as the wickedness of man can do the one or the other.

Upon this second argument I was the last time, and spoke something to four notes that I drew from it; two of them negatives, and two of them positives.

1st, That there is no righteousness, for the justifying a sinner, that can come by the law. Never man got to heaven by the law: never a man got to heaven by his own good doings. All go to hell for their own evil doings; but no man, since sin came into the world, ever went to heaven by his own good doings. That I proved.

2dly, The other negative contained here is, That Christ hath not died in vain: for the apostle doth certainly imply that he did not die in vain, when he brings a charge against the sin of seeking righteousness by the law, as inferring so horrible an absurdity; for he is pointing forth the heinousness of this sin in very dreadful colours, on purpose to make it hated.

The two positive truths contained here are these: —

1. If there was any righteousness that could come by the law, Christ's death would be in vain. Christ had died in vain, if any man could have stood accepted before God without the virtue of his death. The virtue of Christ's death was of efficacy for the rendering men accepted before God, even before he came into the world. The fathers, that died before Christ came, were saved by the same faith that believers on Christ were saved by, after he came. So saith the apostle, "But we believe, that through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, we shall be saved, even as they," (Acts 15:11); comparing the Old Testament and the New Testament dispensation together.

2. The second positive was this, That making Christ's death to be in vain was a great and horrible sin. I told you it was impossible to make it vain *really*, or to hinder any of its excellent fruits. As no man could hinder the solid causes of it, so no man can hinder the strong fruit of it: the fruit of the death of Christ is quite out of the reach of men or devils. When our Lord was in his humbled state, the devil could, upon permission, carry his body up to the pinnacle of the temple; but he had no power to hurt him. When he was in this world, one wicked disciple betrayed him, and the rest cowardly forsook him; his enemies prevailed against him in the hour and power of darkness, and took away his life; but for the fruit and virtue of his death, that is lodged higher than man can reach: yet men may make Christ's death to be in vain,

1st, To *themselves*. A poor creature that hath not faith in Christ, gets no more good of him than if Christ had never died, or if Christ's death had been in vain; than if he had never died, or had died to no purpose.

2dly, God will always reckon with men according to their design in sinning. All sin is a breaking of God's law; but yet God's law will not be broken, but will break all the breakers of it. Sin is counted and charged as a dishonouring of God; and yet the Lord's honour is advanced in the ruin of the sinner.

I proceed now to shew you the dreadfulness of this sin, of doing any thing that hath a tendency to the making Christ's death to be in vain. I would, *1st*, bring

a charge against this sin in its just measures; and, 2dly, come to the application, and shew how common a sin this is. It is a great sin to make Christ's death in vain, in the way wherein it is practicable, and in that sense that the apostle here means.

1st, Let us consider God. Whensoever we are to take the just measure of any sin, we are to take it with respect to God. This is the grand accusation against all sin, that it is against God. When David is confessing, with deep remorse, his vile sins of adultery and murder, which were sins against his neighbour, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned," saith he, "and done this evil in thy sight," (Psalm 51:4). Now, let us consider what this sin doth with respect to God: and here we must take up some account of God, according to the gospel revelation of him; for as Jesus Christ is not revealed by the law, so neither is the sin of rendering his death to be in vain, brought up on charges by the law as it is by the revealing of God's nature in the gospel. It is a sin against God the Father, and against God the Son, and against God the Holy Ghost.

To make this sin appear in its greatness, first, it is against God the Father wofully. The greatest contrivance that ever the infinitely wise God had, for the glory of his name, was the working out of eternal redemption, by the death of his own Son, for a company of lost sinners. This is the chief of the ways of God: all things revealed of him, and of his counsel, and of his purpose, and of his actions, are all but low in regard of this; all others are subservient to this act of Divine Providence: this is the chief of the ways of God. Let us see what treasures of his glory are concerned therein.

1. There is infinite wisdom in contriving a way that the understanding of angels and men could not find out, and when it is revealed it cannot be fully known. It is said concerning the angels, that they "desire to pry into those things:" into those things that the Spirit reveals, "concerning the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow," (1 Pet. 1:11,12). Now, if the glorified angels in heaven be students of Jesus Christ, and of the glory of his sufferings, and of the glory that was the fruit thereof, how much more should men do so! There is a "manifold wisdom of God" that shines therein, and is perceived by and made known to them, "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places, might be made known, by the church, the manifold wisdom of God, according to his eternal purpose, which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord;" (Eph. 3:10). Now, where the wisdom of God is so much concerned, judge you what a provocation it must needs be, when foolish man does all that may be to defeat this wisdom. "Christ as crucified," is called "the wisdom of God and power

of God;” but unto poor ignorant man he is foolishness and weakness, (1 Cor. 1:23, 24).

2. In this way of saving us by the death of Christ, there is the great grace and mercy of God that he would magnify. Now, what a great sin must it be to count all this in vain? “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but should have everlasting life,” (John 3:16). “God commendeth his love to us, in that whilst we were yet sinners, Christ died for us,” (Rom. 5:8). And shall this love be so far despised, as that a man shall endeavour to make it be in vain?

3. This is a contrivance, also, for the magnifying the holy law of God. The Lord is so zealous for his law, that he will part with it for no man’s sake. He will not reduce an hair’s breath of the rigour of his law for the saving of the world; but he hath found out a way to give the law all its due, and yet to give the poor sinner all that he needs. This is astonishing: the law gets all the righteousness it demands, and the sinner gets all the justification he needs: the law shall be honoured, and justice shall be satisfied, and the sinner shall be saved, and not destroyed: “God is just, and, the justifier of him that believes in Jesus Christ,” (Rom. 3:26).

2dly, This sin is also magnified, as it is against God the Son. Let us consider what Christ’s death was: it was the greatest concernment of a divine person. It was a great deal better to say, all the martyrs died in vain: it were a far less sin to say, as the ungodly world doth, “That they threw away their lives, with their folly and rigidity, when they might have saved them with a word, or a bow, or a cringe, to the idols of the nations.” It were a great sin to say so. You know how the apostle increases the gravity of this as a great absurdity, as to the doctrine of the resurrection: “Then they also that are fallen asleep in Christ are perished,” (1 Cor. 15:18). But that was a small matter, in regard of making Christ’s death to be in vain, which was a special concern of a divine person. The blood shed was the “blood of God,” (Acts 20:28). And can God’s Mood be shed in vain? It was the lowest step, and the crowning act of Christ’s sufferings: all that went before would not serve. The low estate he was born in, and the manifold afflictions he lived in; his being seized on in the night with soldiers, and lanterns, as a thief; his being bound, his being scourged, his being nailed to the cross in torment — this will not be in vain. The crowning and saving act of our Lord Jesus Christ was his dying. It was also the grand pledge of our Lord’s love, the great display, the great proof of his love to his people. “He loved his church, and gave himself for it,” (Eph. 5:25) “He loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood,” (Rev. 1:5). “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his

friend,” that is, “A greater testimony of love than this can no man give, than to part with his life for them that he loves,” (John 15:13). Now, judge you what a great sin it must needs be for a man to lay an imputation of vanity, and unprofitableness, on this great pledge of the love of our Lord Jesus Christ, to say he died in vain?

3dly, This sin of charging Christ’s death to be in vain, is a sin against the Holy Ghost; it is sinning against the Holy Ghost. We find concerning the Holy Ghost, that he prepared that body that our Lord lived in, and died in; he was conceived of the Holy Ghost, (Matt. 1:20). Next, Christ was anointed by the Spirit without measure, which was our Lord’s text at Nazareth: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor,” (Luke 4:18): “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.” The Holy Ghost did assist him, and witness to him, in his death and at his resurrection. And therefore, when Stephen was preaching Christ to Christ’s murderers, he increases the gravity their sin by this, “Ye stiff-necked, and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.” Especially, this sin is greatest when the Holy Ghost is convicting men, by the law, of their vileness; and convincing men, by the gospel, of the relief that is offered by Christ Jesus; and a great many struggle against the Spirit of God in both these cases. It is a long while before the sinner yields to the conviction of the Spirit, that all things are faulty within, and that there is nothing right in them; and it is as long, many times, before they yield to the Holy Ghost, in venturing their souls on Christ as a sufficient Saviour. — And thus you see how this sin is increased, as being against God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. But to come a little lower.

This sin of making Christ’s death to be in vain, is a dreadful sin against *others* also. It is a sin against sinners, and against believers also. It is so far a sin against others, that every unbeliever, every stubborn refuser of life and salvation by Christ’s death, doth, in a manner, teach all others to run on in the same way of destruction that he takes: — He that saith Christ died in vain, doth in a manner cut the throats of the whole world; for all that are saved, must be saved by the virtue of his death. It is also a great sin against believers. The apostle add weight to this in the case of scandal; and the scandal that the apostle there speaks of, was in the un-tender use of Christian liberty. You sin against Christ, and then you also “cause your weak brother to perish, for whom Christ died,” (1 Cor. 8:11, 12). The word *perish* there, might well have been rendered in another English word that is less offensive: “Through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish,” or rather, ‘stumble and fall,’ for whom Christ died, for when you sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.” Now, the thing that I

am driving at is this; if the apostle thus brings charges against the indiscriminate use of Christian liberty, without a due regard to the weakness of other Christians, that may be overthrown and hurt thereby, how much more must this sin be indicted, of endeavouring to make Christ's death to be in vain? For,

1. This strikes at the foundation of the Christian's faith; for if a man hath any faith at all, it must be built on Christ's death; that you will make no question of: that faith which is not built on a dying Christ, is but a perilous dream: God awaken all from it that are in it! When the apostle is placing the foundation of his confidence, in that song of triumph, (Rom 8:33,34), the very first word of it is, "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? it is Christ that died."

2. This sin strikes against the foundation of all the Christian's peace and comfort. Not only is the believer's state secured by his faith in Jesus Christ; but his quiet, and the calm of his conscience, are maintained also the same way. If the virtue of the death of Christ be taken away, all the joy of believers goes with it; for it stands only in this. The death of Christ is of eternal virtue and value, and, therefore, the believer's joy springs up perpetually,

3. This sin strikes against all the praises of the saints on earth, and of the glorified in heaven. To make Christ's death in vain, would drown all the music both of heaven and earth. No believer here could give any praise; and there would be no praises there. The song of Moses and the Lamb rises from this — the Lamb was slain; "Worthy is the Lamb, that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing," (Rev. 5:12). They sing that praise eternally, because they eternally feel the virtue of his blood.

APPLICATION. — I come now to make some profitable use of this point. If it be so dreadful a sin to make the death of Christ to be in vain, how fearful a thing is it, that yet this sin is so common? I know multitudes think themselves as free from it, as the Galatians, to whom Paul wrote, thought them, selves free from the error he charges them with: but men's imaginations are no proof of their innocency. It is here charged upon them that they *were* guilty of it; otherwise they would not thus have been charged, by the Holy Ghost, with the sin of making Christ's death to be in vain, as much as man *can* do, and as to *themselves*. I will instance in a few things, as proofs of this:

1st, To begin with that instance in the text, of "seeking righteousness" by the law: — Whosoever they be that seek righteousness by the law, these men make Christ's death to be in vain. If they do so," Christ is become of no effect to

them; Christ profits them nothing,” (Gal. 5:2, 4). “But who are these,” say you, “that seek righteousness by the law?” I might answer this question with another, Who doth not? Every body doth, in one measure or another. Seeking righteousness by the law, is when a poor sinner thinks he can be able, some time or another, to do that which God will be gracious to him for: whether it be a work of the law, or a work of the gospel, it is all one for that; when a man thinks to do that for which God will accept him as a righteous man, and account him no more a sinner —this is one that makes Christ’s death to be in vain: for if it were possible that any man could be righteous before God, by any thing that he could do, saith the apostle, “Christ is dead in vain.”

2dly, All apostates from the Christian profession are chargeable with this sin of making Christ’s death to be in vain; and there are not a few of them in the age we live in. They are so dreadfully painted forth in the word of God, that, if I may so say, their very picture hath scared many an honest heart; many honest-hearted believers have been scared dreadfully with seeing the picture of these apostates. It is said, “They crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to open shame;” (Heb. 6:6). “Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite to the Spirit of grace?” (Heb. 10:29). These persons once made a profession that there was virtue in the blood of Christ; but now they are come to renounce it. I am truly afraid of this thing; it hath often come in my mind: we have a generation amongst us, that are plagues come from hell; men called DEISTS, which is nothing else but a new polite word for an Atheist: and they that are called Socinians, which is only a more civil word for a Turk; people who do not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, but only a good man that died at Jerusalem. They believe not that Christ died for any other ends than to testify the truth of his doctrine, and to set us an example to suffer patiently for the truth. My thoughts are not only about the horror of this heresy, that all should tremble at: but my real jealousy is, that there are amongst them not a few that have sinned the sin against the Holy Ghost; that have come up to blaspheming the Spirit of God, and the blood of the everlasting Covenant, shed by the Son of God. The Spirit of God hath written their doom, and let the saints wait in fear and patience, till God execute it: for execute it he will, were their social position ever so high, their number ever so great, their wisdom and power ever so strong. They are combined against the Son of God, and he will be avenged upon them; and let the faith and prayer of the saints hasten it.

3dly, All that *seek not* righteousness, and eternal life, through Jesus Christ, and his death, they are guilty of this sin, of thinking, and counting that Christ died in vain. All that do not seek eternal life by Christ, are guilty of this sin. And how many such poor creatures are there, that for as often as they have read the Bible, and for as often as they have heard the gospel preached, yet to this day they never saw any need of the death of Christ for themselves? They run away with a notion, that it was needful the Son of God should come into the world, and die for men; but they were never convinced of this, that it was simply needful for *thee*, and for *thy* salvation; that unless the Son of God had come, and laid down his life for *thee*, thou couldst not be saved. Every man must be convinced of his *personal* need of Christ's death, that ever expects to get any good thereby.

4thly, A great many poor creatures never saw any glory in the death of Christ. I do acknowledge that the cross of Christ was the greatest and thickest veil upon his glory, when he was forsaken by his followers; when he was insulted over by his enemies; when heaven and earth forsook him, and hell was enlarged against him. What was more low than the man Christ when he died? Yet, notwithstanding, to a believer, the great beaming forth of the glory of God shined in the face of Christ crucified. Herein shined the manifold wisdom and grace of God. Every lash, in a manner, that the Father laid upon the Son, proclaimed aloud the love of the Father, that put him to that suffering, and the love of the Son that underwent it. The poor Jews were sorely distressed believers (John 11:36): when they saw Christ weeping at Lazarus's grave (although I believe Christ wept not so much for Lazarus, as in contemplation of the common calamity of mankind, and it may be, this was the first grave that ever Christ was so near to in his life), "Behold," say they, "how he loved him!" Surely, then, Christ's cross should far more teach us to cry out, "Behold, how he loved his people!" than Lazarus's grave, and Christ's weeping over it, did the Jews, to say, "Behold, how he loved him!" Christ's dying for his people proclaimed his love to them indeed; but yet a great many see no glory in all this.

5thly, Many poor people have no business with Christ, about the virtue of his death; they have no engagement with him about that thing, to have the virtue of the death of Christ applied to them for their salvation. This is that the apostle was so mighty earnest for, but they have no thought, no understanding of it: "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable to his death." What was this conformity to the death of Christ that Paul was here labouring for? Was it only wishing that he was a dead man? No, no; he would have, and find the virtue of Christ's death quickening him: raising him up, and saving him more and more.

I will tell you, there are some things about the grave of Christ that should make every believer's heart to be much about it, and to make us visit it daily by faith.

1. There the law is buried, there the old husband is laid that we can never be well till we are divorced from. The apostle tells us several things concerning this "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances, that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross," (Col. 2:14,15). There were few eyes so good as to be able to see the condemnation of the law nailed to the cross of Jesus Christ; to see sin condemned by him, as the word is (Rom. 8:3), "He condemned sin in his flesh," being made a sacrifice for it. Therefore, when the apostle is, in the 7th chapter of the Romans, speaking of the difference between the law and the gospel — between a natural state and a believer's — he resembles it plainly to this, to the state of a woman that hath two husbands. The first husband was the law, and a dreadful one it was; no fruit was brought forth by that marriage but that which was unto death. Now, she must be sure that this husband be dead before she can be lawfully married to Jesus Christ. "If whilst her husband liveth she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from the law; and so she is no adulteress, although she be married to another man." (Ver. 3).

2. In the grave of Christ, by faith, believers are to see that their sin is buried. Saith the apostle, "He hath put away sin by the sacrifice of himself," (Heb. 9:26). "He put away sin:" he hath so far put it away, that it shall never rise up in judgment against any that the virtue of Christ's death is applied to: thereupon the apostle grounds his triumph on this, "It is Christ that died," therefore the believer cannot be condemned, (Rom. 8:34).

3. In Christ's death there is a charter sealed by his blood. And how should believers be exercised in looking to Christ's death on this account? There are many seals to God's covenant: seals on God's part, and seals on our part. God puts to the seal of his word, and of his oath, and of the sacraments, and of manifold repeated promises; and believers they put to their seal of faith. "He that hath received his testimony, hath set to his seal that God is true;" (John 3:33). But the best and greatest seal is Christ's death, confirming the covenant. "The covenant was confirmed before of God in Christ," saith the apostle, (Gal. 3:17).

Lastly, To bring the charge of this sin yet more close, even believers themselves are not innocent of it: not only all that seek righteousness by the law — not only all apostates from the faith of the gospel — not only they that seek not righteousness and life by the virtue of Christ's death — but even believers

themselves, are guilty of this sin. There is something in their frame that saith, “Christ hath died in vain.”

1. There is conscience of sin arises many times in believers. The apostle, speaking of the Old Testament administration, finds fault with it as defective upon this account, That it did not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience. “They could not make the comers thereunto perfect, for then would not they have ceased to be offered; because that the worshippers, once purged, should have had no more conscience of sins;” (Heb. 9:9 and 10:1,2). Pray observe the scope of the apostle in both these chapters: he is there telling us what shadows the Jews had of that grand sacrifice that was to be offered by the true High Priest, Jesus Christ, in their daily, and weekly, and monthly sacrifices; but the greatest of all was in that grand sacrifice of atonement that was offered up once a-year. “Now,” saith the apostle, “all these sacrifices do not make the comer thereunto perfect as to his conscience;” that is, “they did not remove all awareness of sin in the Israelite, but there was a secret fear still that their sin was yet in remembrance before God.” And what is the argument with which the apostle proves that these sacrifices did not make the comers thereunto perfect? Saith the apostle, “It is proved by this, Because they were so often repeated.” The daily sacrifice was repeated every day, and the weekly sacrifice every Sabbath day, and the monthly sacrifice every new moon, and the yearly sacrifice once a year, upon the seventh month. “Now,” saith the apostle, “If these things could have made the comers thereunto perfect, they would not thus have needed to have been repeated.” And from this argument he concludes the insufficiency of the legal sacrifices to quiet the conscience, and he also proves the sufficiency of Christ’s sacrifice to quiet the conscience by its once-for-all efficacy. “But this man,” saith he, “after he had offered one sacrifice for sin, for ever sat down on the right hand of God,” (ver. 12); and again, “By one offering, he hath for ever perfected them that are sanctified,” (ver. 14). The case lies plainly here: Every true believer, that hath acted faith on Jesus Christ distinctly, and hath lodged his eternal salvation, and his everlasting acceptance with God, on the virtue of Christ’s sacrifice, this man chargeth Christ’s death with being in vain, if conscience rise again, and lie hearken to it. I know sin *will be*, and conscience *will* check for sin; but remember this, Christ died not in vain: the virtue of Christ’s death remains still; it made that peace that no future transgressions shall be able to weaken or impair.

2. In the case of sanctification. Saith the poor believer, “The work of holiness and sanctification goes on slowly:” and truly so it doth; and we should see it, and bewail it greatly. Well, what then? Hath Christ died in vain? Christ’s dying is sanctification: “For their sakes I sanctify myself,” saith our Lord, “that

they also might be sanctified through the truth,” (John 17:19). “He gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works,” (Titus 2:14). It were a great blessing if believers had but skill to draw, by faith, sanctifying virtue from the death of Jesus Christ. This is what the apostle is upon, Rom. 6, throughout. “How shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?” But how are believers dead to sin? Have they not sin living in them? “We are dead to sin in Christ,” saith the apostle; “he died for sin, and he hath dominion over sin, and we reckon ourselves dead to sin, but alive to God, through Jesus Christ,” (ver. 11).

3. There is weakness of faith in believers, as to the glory to come. Not only are there many qualms of conscience, and many defects in their holiness, but when believers think of the glory to come, and the great prize of their high calling, and see it great, and high, and far above them, the more they see of the glory of it, the more they see they are unworthy of it. “May such a vile wretch as I expect this great reward of eternal life?” Yes, for Christ bought it; he hath not died in vain. It will be best known at that day what Christ died for, and for whom: when all the kings that he hath bought, and all the crowns that he hath purchased for them, and ail the kingdoms shall be seen, it will then be known Christ died not in vain. Every shaking of faith, as to any blessing that Christ’s death purchased for his people, every shaking, of that faith, hath this woful charge to be given in against it, that Christ then hath died in vain. Indeed, if the crown of life was to be enjoyed as a reward of thy works, it were a vain thing to expect it: if it were to come in as a reward for our performances, it were a dream to expect it: but, since it is the gift of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord — since Christ hath bought it — every believer should expect it: “As great as it is, as unworthy as I am; yet, notwithstanding, the confidence of faith should be maintained.” Therefore, now, for the consolation of believers, labour by faith to drink in these two things, — That righteousness comes not by the law, and that Christ hath not died in vain; and what strong consolation will they yield!

1. Righteousness comes not by the law; and there is great comfort in this. Righteousness comes not by the law, to any man *out of* Christ; and there is no condemnation comes by the law, to any man *in* Christ. If so be that men will give glory to God, and renounce their own righteousness, and all their expectations of relief that way, and betake themselves to God’s device of salvation by Jesus Christ, and believe on him, as they can expect no good by the law, so they should fear no hurt by it; for, as sin hath made it impossible that, the law of God should justify us, so the grace of God in Christ hath made it impossible that the law should condemn a believer in him. Therefore, saith the apostle, “There is now no

condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.” Why so? “The law of the Spirit of life, in Christ Jesus, hath made me free from the law of sin and death: for what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, that God hath done by Jesus Christ, that so the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us,” (Rom. 8:1,2,3,4).

2. Feed also upon this by faith, That Christ died not in vain. There is nothing you can desire, nothing that you can pray for, nothing that you can ask for in time, nor enjoy to eternity, but it is contained in this, “Christ died not in vain:” for Christ died to all those blessed purposes that are needful to make them happy for ever that are sharers therein. Whensoever you come to have any dealings in earnest with God about salvation, and your justification, and eternal life, always remember these two things, —

The grace of God, and Christ’s death. The law hath nothing to do in this case; it cannot *help* you whilst you are under it, but condemn you: and if you be believers, the law cannot *hurt* you, for you shall be absolved; for this is a righteousness without the law, “But witnessed to be the law and the prophets,” (Acts 10:43).

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