

## L E T T E R XII.

DEAR SIR,

I Shall now proceed to another objection which Mr. F. attempts to answer, arising from the DIVINE DECREES. He thus states it: "Since it is allowed on all hands that the blessings of grace, and faith among the rest; are all sovereign and free gifts through Christ—are what he dispenses according to his own purpose and grace, given to his elect in Christ Jesus before the world began—Since it is allowed that God never determined to bestow special grace upon the non-elect, it has, from these considerations, been thought a very great absurdity, and what imputes mockery to the Holy One, and has been represented as a thing impossible that God should require men to believe in Christ. It has been suggested that this makes it men's sin, and the ground of their punishment that they have not that which God never designed to give them—that they might be equally blamed for not being elected or redeemed, as for not having faith in Christ, since the latter is equally a spiritual blessing as the former \*."

Mr. F. acknowledges that "at first sight this will seem to be very formidable;"—and notwithstanding what he has said, it appears formidable still. It is said, "If it prove any thing, it will prove too much; for instance, it will prove, that it is not the duty of the non-elect at all to seek after the salvation of their souls, or once

"to care, or even be concerned about it." But that's a mistake, it proves no such thing: for in as much as we know not who are and who are not the elect, it is the duty of every one wheresoever the gospel of salvation comes, to be concerned to seek, enquire, and ask, what hope, what evidence have I of being interested in this salvation? Besides, there are express commands to all to be concerned, as *Luke* 13. 24. Strive to enter in at the strait gate; that is, use all means, search the scriptures, attend on the preaching of the word constantly and diligently; pray for a blessing on it, examine whether ye have entered in or not.

Mr. F. further says, "The destruction of Pharaoh was determined of God to be at the time, place, and manner in which it actually came to pass; and yet, who will say that he ought not to have taken the counsel of Moses, and let the people go \*?" But Pharaoh had an *express command* to let them go; therefore he was undoubtedly criminal in not doing it. So it may be said of the rest of the instances produced; and therefore these are nothing to the purpose.

I believe with Mr. F. "the decrees of God were never designed for, nor can they be made any rule of human action. The commands of God are the sole rule of this †." But though God's decree is not the rule of our conduct to him, it is the rule of his conduct to us; and can it be supposed he has decreed to leave some destitute of faith, and yet decreed and determined to condemn them for the want of it? Such conduct cannot, I think, be imputed to the Divine Being, without charging him with a cruelty that must shock every human feeling. No: God has decreed only to punish for sin, for the breach of his commands;

and as there is no command for special faith, as we have endeavoured to prove, therefore no one shall be condemned for the want of it.

It is observed, “ that God’s not giving that holiness to fallen man which his law requires, and which they have lost, be that what it may, is not their sin; but yet all must allow it is their sin that they have it not \*.” But why is it so? Because they once had it in Adam. Not so faith, or any spiritual disposition, as I have already observed, therefore there is no argument in this. As several other things under this head have already been spoken to in one or other of my letters, I shall leave it, and proceed to a third objection raised, and endeavoured to be set aside; which is,

#### Concerning PARTICULAR REDEMPTION.

“ It has been thought (says Mr. F.) a great absurdity to suppose that God can have made it the duty of any man to believe in Christ for the salvation of his soul, or that he can have promised salvation to him on his so believing, when all the while his salvation was not the end for which he died †.”

Suppose a minister when he ascended the pulpit was to address his audience thus: Men, brethren and fathers, I am commissioned from my Divine Master to inform you all, ye are fallen creatures; ye have all sinned and come short of the glory of God; the whole world is become guilty before God; but I have also, by his authority, to tell you, there is an eternal redemption obtained by the blood of Christ: that redemption is *particular*, Christ died only for a certain number, even for as many as are ordained to eternal life. Faith in Christ is absolutely necessary to salvation; that

\* P. 131.

† P. 132.

faith is a special blessing peculiar to the elect; none *shall* or *can* have it but those for whom Christ shed his precious blood. Nevertheless this faith with which salvation is connected is required of you all, whether Christ died for your salvation or not; therefore *believe, get this faith*, or you will be damned for the want of it. Should you not think such an address strange, inconsistent and absurd to the last degree? I confess I should. Mr. F. says, “ it is allowed, that if it were essential to true saving faith to claim personal interest in Christ’s death, this objection would be unanswerable;”—but he who has faith, has a personal interest, whether he can claim it or not; therefore the objection is equally unanswerable on this ground; for it is making it the duty of all to have that which is an undoubted evidence of personal interest, whether they have that interest or not, which appears to me very absurd and ridiculous.

It is further said, “ It is certain that trust is in many cases warrantable and incumbent on a *bare possibility*.” But Mr. F. makes faith warrantable and incumbent where there is an *impossibility*. If Christ had died for every one, if redemption was universal, and so all mankind put in a possible state of salvation, the case would be different; but the truth is, that it is *impossible* for all mankind to be saved; it is *impossible* that any besides those for whom Christ died should be saved: therefore to make faith incumbent on all, is to make it incumbent not on a *bare possibility*, but on an *impossibility*; the propriety of which I cannot see.

The several authors quoted on this article I venerate; but though I esteem them as great and

good, I do not consider them infallible. It has been often with truth said, the best of men are but men. As they are dead and gone to heaven, I shall not animadvert on the quotations made. I have to do with none but Mr. F. and shall therefore immediately proceed to a fourth objection stated and replied to; namely,

“ CONCERNING MEN’S BEING UNDER THE COVENANT OF WORKS\*.”

What is here said seems to be in answer to what Mr. Brine has advanced in his *Motives to Love and Unity among Calvinists*; who asserts, that the law which was given in the form of a covenant to Adam, does not require faith in Christ for salvation, and that, “till a man through the law is dead to the law, he hath no warrant to receive Christ as a saviour, or to hope for salvation through him; conviction of sin, a sense of misery as justly deserved, and despairing of relief from the law and works of it, in order of nature, at least, precede the first act of faith on Christ for salvation †.”—In reply to this Mr. F. says, “though none but believers *are* dead to the law, yet it is what every sinner *ought to be* ‡” If by being dead to the law is meant no more than barely not expecting salvation by it, I think every fallen creature wherever the gospel comes, ought to be so dead; because it is clearly revealed, it is positively asserted “by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight,” *Rom.* 3. 20.—But if by being dead to the law is closely connected with, and included in it, a feeling sense of wretchedness and just desert of misery, and also a living to God, as the apostle intimates it is in *Gal.* 2. 19. that is, a living a spiritual life, which life is received from Christ; a living a life of faith

\* P. 139. † *Motives to Love and Unity*, p. 39. ‡ P. 141

on the Son of God, as Paul said he did, *Gal.* 2. 20. then, I think, it is not all men’s duty, but is a special privilege and blessing bestowed only on those who are ordained to eternal life.

As to the law’s requiring faith and every spiritual disposition is what I cannot allow. Mr. Charnock very justly observes, “If the law commanded faith in relation to the object Christ crucified, it must then acquaint us with Christ crucified. It would be an unreasonable law to enjoin an act about such an object, and never discover one syllable of that object to us\*.” and another writer has very justly observed, “The law and the works of it are directly *opposite to grace and faith* in a redeemer. It makes not the least comfortable discovery to a miserable sinner; it knows nothing of pardoning mercy; it says not a word about atoning blood: being the formula of that covenant which was made with man in a state of innocence, it makes not the least abatement in point of duty; nor the least provision in a way of mercy, in case of failure. Perfect obedience is its constant demand; an obedience personal and perpetual; whatever mercy the sinner wants, whatever blessings God bestows, is provided in another covenant, are dispensed in another way †.” But as I have already considered what Mr. F. has to say respecting spiritual dispositions being required of all, in Letter 10. I shall dismiss this head, and proceed to

“ THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT §.”

Mr. F. observes under this head, that there are many people, “when we talk of faith, and other spiritual exercises being the duty of men, it seems to them as if we meant to derogate from

\* *Charn. Works*, vol. 2. p. 603.

† *Booth’s Death of Legal Hope*, p. 13.

§ P. 144.

“ the honour of the spirit’s work.” I own I am one of them that think Mr. F.’s sentiments tend to lessen, depreciate, and in some sense to render unnecessary the spirit’s work. Though I won’t say I think he means to do so, especially as he says, “ If this is indeed the tendency of our principles, let them be discarded ;” but if the inability of man be only *partial*, as Mr. F.’s sentiments certainly imply, although he is unwilling to acknowledge it, and says, “ we constantly affirm it is real and *total* † ;” but what he means by this, or how he can make it out, I confess I cannot conceive ; for if it be *simply a moral inability*, as he repeatedly declares, why, surely, it must be *partial* ; and in that view the work of the Holy Spirit is certainly lessened. More honour must redound to his name, and more glory to his grace, in bringing a sinner to believe whose inability is both moral and natural, which is what *we* affirm ; and therefore Mr. F. does us an injury when he represents us as saying, man’s inability is *simply natural*. We say no such thing. That man has an *aversion* to every thing spiritually good, and that *aversion* is criminal we maintain, and so on that account we say the work of the Holy Spirit is necessary, and it appears glorious in removing that *aversion*. So far we agree with Mr. F. and all of his sentiments ; but we say that a natural man is *utterly unable* to do any thing spiritually good ; that is, as a natural man he has a *natural inability*. He must have a *new* heart, a *new* spirit, there must be a *new creation* in his soul, of what was never there before he can perform *spiritual acts*. This natural inability is what Mr. F. denies ; and in so doing I cannot but think he lessens, depreciates, and in some sense renders unnecessary the work of the Holy Spirit.

† P. 146.

I proceed now to the sixth objection :

“ OF THE NECESSITY OF A DIVINE PRINCIPLE,  
“ IN ORDER TO BELIEVING \*.”

Thus it is stated by Mr. F. “ It has often been objected to this effect ; It is impossible to believe in Christ without having a *principle* of faith created in the heart. Now as it is God’s work to create that principle, till that work is affected, it cannot be any man’s duty to believe in Christ ; that is (says he) it cannot be the duty of any man to have or exercise a principle which he has not.” But here Mr. F. draws a wrong inference. We don’t say it cannot be the duty of any man to have or exercise a principle which he has not ; but that it cannot be the duty of any man to have or exercise a principle which he has not, and which he *never had* in any state whatever ; a principle which Adam never lost, because he never possessed it, and a principle which God never designed we should have. The objection thus stated, let Mr. F. answer if he can.—  
I shall add no more at present, but that

I am respectfully  
Yours.

\* P. 149.