

L E T T E XIII.

DEAR SIR,

I Shall now proceed to a few general reflections which are added :—And, says Mr. F. if the foregoing principles be just, then,

1st, “ The law of God, or the rule of man’s obligation, is what the scriptures affirm *exceeding broad* *.”

And I hope the principles I have advanced don’t contradict this assertion. Let them be for ever discarded if they do. I believe the law to be *exceeding broad*; that it extends to thoughts, words and actions; that it requires all moral perfection; that it condemns original as well as actual sin; that it requires universal, perpetual, and constant obedience to its precepts; and cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. But don’t let us make it broader than it is; broader than God has made it. Don’t let us make it require that which the Lord never meant it to require, which man was not able to perform in innocence; and don’t let us make it curse and condemn a poor sinner for the want of that which God never granted, and never meant to grant him; I mean special faith in Christ Jesus. This is ‘ acting without warrant, this is behaving with cruelty to our own species, as it subjects them to a charge of abundance of guilt, of which, God knows, they have enough in the breach of what he has enjoined,’ as well as it is reflecting on our wife, just

† P. 153.

and good Creator, Preserver and bountiful Benefactor.

2. “ Then the depravity of man is very great *.”

Here Mr. F. very wrongly says, “ The contrary supposition makes the inability of man to be no part of his depravity, but *altogether innocent* in its nature.” But surely if we believe as we do, that man’s inability is both moral and natural, we are far from making that inability *altogether innocent*. So far as man discovers an *aversion of heart* to all moral good, yea, so far as there is an *aversion* to Christ and divine things, so far he is criminal, for he ought not to *despise* if he can’t embrace them: that utter aversion we maintain as fully as Mr. F. and so equally believe the depravity of human nature very great; and we certainly lay man much lower than he does, who thinks, if the aversion of the heart be but removed, then man has *power* to believe, and to perform every spiritual act at once. We say, that even supposing the aversion removed, man is still utterly unable of himself to believe with a special faith in Christ, or to perform any spiritual act, without power is given him from God; and herein appears “ the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward, who believe, according to the working of his mighty power.” Here’s power required to remove the aversion of heart; power required to implant or infuse a spiritual principle, and power required to draw forth that principle into action; for as Christ says, “ without me ye can do nothing ” But alas, to lay man so very low hurts human pride, the aversion of heart to this shews as much as any thing the depravity of human nature. Man loves to hear what a noble creature he is; and I think Mr. F.’s principles tend greatly to gratify

* P. 154.

that pride with which human nature so much abounds.

3. "Then the grace of God in our salvation must be *free*, must be *great* indeed*." It certainly is, according to Mr. F.'s sentiments. But I appeal to you, Sir, I leave it to your impartial judgment, which represents the grace of God *most free* and *most great*, Those who think when the aversion of heart is removed the work is done, no more need be performed to bring a sinner to believe; or we who assert that not only the aversion of heart is removed, but a *new* principle, and *new* dispositions are given at regeneration? which most exalts the grace of God, such who imagine the believer is only restored to what he was at first, to the enjoyment of the same principles and the same life he before had; or those who think a poor sinner, when he becomes a new creature, becomes what he never was, is possessed of a principle, and enjoys a life *far superior* to what even Adam possessed in paradise? Surely, Sir, if the former be *grace*, the latter must be *grace indeed*; yea, it must shew forth in a peculiar manner what the apostle frequently calls the *exceeding riches of his grace*.

4. "Then there is free and full encouragement for any poor sinner to come off from all his self-confidence, and venture his soul upon the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation †."

But what kind of encouragement is there in saying; if you *will* you *can* believe; if you *will* you *can* possess a spiritual principle; if you *will* you *can* perform spiritual acts, &c. for the *cannot* itself consists in a *will not*, says Mr. F. || I say what kind of encouragement will this afford to a poor soul, who with the great apostle is constrained to say, "To *will* is present with me; but how to

* P. 155. F † P. 162. || P. 71

perform that which is good I *find not*," Rom. 7. 18. I think very poor encouragement indeed: nay, I think very great discouragement. It is the way to make the hearts of those sad, whom God would not have made sad,—and strange kind of encouragement, methinks, that must be, to tell poor sinners, that to believe with a special faith in Christ is their duty, a duty incumbent on them all; though it is a blessing that is peculiar to and shall only be bestowed on the elect; yet, whether they are elect or not, it is their duty, and they will be condemned for not doing it. God does not mean to give it to all, he has only designed it for some; but that makes no difference, whether he means to favour them with it or not, they *ought* to have it; and if they have it not, they shall be damned for the want of it. If this is all "the free and full encouragement to poor sinners" Mr. F. and those of his sentiments, have to hand forth to them, I think we may with propriety adopt Job's words to his friends, "*miserable comforters are ye all*."

Fifthly and lastly, "Then calls, warnings, invitations, exhortations, threatenings, and exhortations, even to the unregenerate, are perfectly consistent*."

This crowns the whole. Now we are come to the sum of the whole matter. At length we are arrived at the grand cause, occasion and intent of this long treatise. It is to encourage general calls, invitation, and exhortations.—That sinners ought to be warned is what I don't deny; but then they should be both warned and taught, as the apostle says *in all wisdom*, Col. 1. 28.—That they should be told of their lost state and condition, warned of the wrath to come, and the danger they are in of it, is certainly incumbent on every minister of

* P. 163.

Jesus Christ, that so they may be pure from the blood of all men.—That they should be taught the only way of salvation, the importance of being found in Christ, of being washed in his blood, clothed with his righteousness, and the necessity of being born again, and of being sanctified by the Holy Spirit, is undoubtedly right, and they are highly blameworthy who do not so teach; and that sinners should be exhorted to pray, read, hear, and the like, and that constantly and seriously, is, I acknowledge, part of the ministerial work; but as to calls, invitations, and exhortations to special faith and spiritual acts, appears surely, after what has been said, to be inconsistent with scripture and common sense.

Mr. F. seems to think some have gone too far; for he says, “It is not intended to vindicate all the language that has been addressed to unconverted sinners;” and then adds, “though it be the duty of every man to be perfectly holy, yet it would be very strange for any one of us thus to address another, Be perfectly holy *now this moment* *.” But if to be perfectly and spiritually holy; if to believe with a special faith in Christ; if to perform spiritual acts, be duties incumbent on all; surely, the *sooner* they are performed the better. Why should Mr. F. object to saying, Do these duties *now*, *this moment*, I own I cannot see the propriety of such an objection. If it is right to exhort at all to these things, why not exhort to do their duty immediately? Surely, if it is not their duty *now this moment*, it is not their duty at all: or may the sinner, when thus exhorted to these duties, be justified in saying, “Go thy way for this time, when I have a convenient season I’ll do them.”

* P. 164.

Mr. F. again says, “It ought to be confessed too, that too many of those who have dealt in addresses to unregenerate sinners, have sadly neglected the very spirit and glory of the gospel. In such addresses, perhaps, it has been too common likewise to go aside from the scriptural intent of them, and to dabble in Arminianism *.” I hope Mr. F. will attend to this observation. I verily think it a just one, and truly I cannot but think Mr. F.’s present sentiments the high road to Arminianism; by his own acknowledgment here they tend that way.

Mr. F. tells us, that upon his principles, the ministers of the gospel may be said to have their work plain before them †; and speaks of *shackles* he felt himself incumbered with before the alteration of his sentiments §. And again says, “many a worthy minister, whose principles have been unfriendly to addressing sinners, has felt himself perplexed with his *shackles* in the presence of a numerous auditory ||.” What is meant by these *shackles*, I pretend not to say. But if *truth* and *consistency* be the *shackles* referred to, the Lord grant I may ever be thus *shackled*.—I am sorry to see such an unbecoming sneer at those ministers who are *cautious* and afraid of falling into inconsistencies, as well as at those people who take heed what they hear; his words are these, “at other times however the goodness of his heart has prevailed against the badness of his system: he has forgot his creed, burst his bonds, and (O unpardonable crime) addressed himself to the consciences of his carnal auditors. For this some of his critical hearers hath censured him, as legal and inconsistent, but God hath blessed it to the salvation of souls †.” Should we not take

* P. 167. † P. 166. § Pref. p. 1. || P. 167. † Ibid

heed how and what we preach, and how and what we hear? Surely such conduct is laudable, except inconsistencies are right. But it seems as if a few inconsistencies were but trifles with Mr. F. if he can but get rid of what he calls his *shackles*. But I own I prefer being *bound* with the *truth* to a being *loosed* to advance *inconsistent things*; I enjoy the greatest liberty and satisfaction in such bonds; I walk most at liberty, when I am bound by my master's precepts. The closer I attend to his word, the more I walk at large.

Mr. F. speaks of a "vast fund of *wit*, such as it is, which has been exercised in exposing to ridicule the practice of free addresses to unconverted sinners. The conduct of such ministers, (says he) has been frequently compared to that of a man that should call *to the dead to come forth* *;" and again he observes, "publications abound in representing the absurdity of calling the blind to look, the deaf to hear, and the dead to rise †." By this "vast fund of *wit*, such as it is," here spoken of, I suppose Mr. F. means to intimate it is wit without sense; for which compliment, I think, in the name of my brethren, I ought to thank him †. However, be the *wit* what it may, I confess it does appear to me

* P. 176.

† P. 173.

‡ Whether any reference is had here to Mr. John Ryland, jun. I will not say; but it is certain he ridicules these addresses in a very sarcastical manner, and ascribes them to *Arminius*. These are his words:

"Arise ye dead," *Arminius* cries,

"Arise ye dead in sin;

"Unstop your ears, unclose your eyes

"And a new life begin;

"Why will ye die, ye wretched souls?"

(Ye dead) "why will ye die?"

"Quicken, and make your spirits whole,

"To life eternal fly."

me that such addresses as Mr. F. is an advocate for, does appear equally absurd, as for a man to call to the dead to come forth; for the apostle expressly says of the unregenerate, they are *dead*. In reply to this it is asked, "What is it to be dead in sin, but to be sinfully dead? What but to be utterly void of all desire after God, and heart to act for him? And is there nothing criminal in that *?" A just answer to this is given by Mr. Wayman. "It was man's sin to destroy a moral life; but it is not man's sin that he hath not a spiritual one. It is God's eternal grace that gives life †."

As to calling the *blind* to look, and the *deaf* to hear, Mr. F. says "the very language which we have so often heard and seen ridiculed as if it were the first-born of absurdities, *look ye blind*, and *hear ye deaf*, is no other than the language of God himself." Isa. 42. 18 §. Dr. Gill sufficiently answers this, "The purport of the exhortation is, that they would make use of their external hearing and sight, which they had, that they might attain to a spiritual hearing and understanding of divine things: for faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God, Rom. 10. 17. To hear the gospel preached, and

(As Baal's worshippers of old,
Begg'd, pray'd, and cry'd aloud,
Cutting their bodies, as we are told,
To move a fancied God,)

Before the idol, man, he'll fall,
And pompously declare,
Tho' slightly damag'd by the fall,
How great his powers are.

"Rise, noble creature, man, arise,
"And make yourself alive;
"Prepare yourself to mount the skies,
"For endless glory strive."

Serious Essays, p. 104.

* P. 175.

† Further Enquiry, p. 101.

§ P. 177.

“ to look into the scriptures and read the word
 “ of God, are the means of attaining light and
 “ knowledge in spiritual things; and these are
 “ within the compass of natural men, who are in-
 “ ternally deaf and blind †.”

Mr. F. seems to avail himself of the numbers he has on his side, and of their great success in conversion. “ I believe (says he) that in almost all
 “ the remarkable seasons of conversion that we
 “ have ever known or heard of, these have
 “ been the means that have been generally used.
 “ If we look at the great works which God hath
 “ wrought by Luther, Calvin, Latimer, Knox,
 “ Bunyan, Elliot, Edwards, Brainerd, Tennent,
 “ Whitefield, and numberless others of our re-
 “ formation champions, we shall find they all
 “ went forth in the use of these weapons.” But what are numbers, what has success to do in the proving the truth of a religion or doctrine? Does Luther’s success prove consubstantiation a truth? Does Calvin’s success prove infant baptism a scripture ordinance? Does Bunyan’s success prove open communion right?—But I cannot methinks better answer Mr. F. on this head, than by citing a quotation Dr. Stennet makes in a late publication, from Archbishop Tillotson. Suppose, I say with the Archbishop, “ we were by much the
 “ fewer, so hath the true church of God often been,
 “ without any the least prejudice to the truth of
 “ their religion. What think we of the church
 “ in Abraham’s time, which, for ought we know,
 “ was confined to one family, and one small king-
 “ dom, that of Melchisedec, king of Salem?
 “ What think we of it in Moses’s time, when it
 “ was confined to one people wandering in a
 “ wilderness? What of it in Elijah’s time, when

† Exposit. on Isa. 42. 18.

besides the two tribes that worshipped at Jerusalem, there were in the other ten but 7000 that had not bowed the knee to Baal? What in our Saviour’s time, when the whole Christian church consisted of twelve apostles and seventy
 “ disciples, and some few followers beside? How
 “ would Bellarmine have despised this little flock,
 “ because it wanted one of his goodliest marks of
 “ the true church, universality and splendour?
 “ and what think we of the Christian church in
 “ the height of Arianism and Pelagianism, when
 “ a great part of Christendom was over-run with
 “ errors, and the number of the orthodox was in-
 “ considerable in comparison with hereticks? But
 “ what need I urge these instances? as if the
 “ truth of a religion were to be estimated and
 “ carried by the major votes: which, as it can be
 “ an argument to none but fools, so I dare say
 “ no honest and wise man ever made use of it for
 “ a solid proof of the truth and goodness of any
 “ church or religion. If multitude be an argu-
 “ ment that men are in the right, in vain then
 “ hath scripture said, Thou shalt not follow
 “ a multitude to do evil; for if this argument be
 “ of any force, the greater number never do
 “ wrong*.”

As to the distinction between natural and moral ability, with which Mr. F. closes his treatise, I pass unnoticed, as I have already in my letters given you my sentiments plainly on that head.— I now close, expressing a wish that neither you nor I may be carried away from the truth, however popular error may be. The sentiment advanced in this piece I think a great error, as it is big with absurdity, inconsistent with the particu-

* Stennet’s answer to Addington’s Christian reasons for baptizing Infants, 2. part, p. 271.

lar and glorious doctrines of grace, tends too much to exalt human nature, leads to Arminianism, dealth out cruelty to our poor fellow sinners; is distressing to saints, and dishonouring to God, as it naturally leads men to cast the most unworthy reflections on his conduct. These things I have attempted to prove, and shall now conclude in the words of the apostle, " Now our Lord Jesus Christ
 " himself, and God even our Father which hath
 " loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort
 " your heart and *stablish* you in every *good* word
 " and work.

I remain

Yours.

F I N I S.