

## LETTER II.

DEAR SIR,

**I**N my last I made some remarks on the preface annexed to Mr. Fuller's late publication. I shall now take the liberty of entering on the first part of his book, wherein he represents the importance of the subject, and gives us his idea and definition of faith. I observe he begins with this question, "What shall I do to be saved?" and adds, this "is certainly a question of vast importance to a fallen creature." I agree with him, and a proper answer to that question, I think, is of vast importance also. Dr. Owen begins his gospel grounds, and evidences of the faith of God's elect, in the same manner, and observes, "This question being once raised in the conscience, an answer must be returned to it." Now, adds the Doctor, "the real answer which men return to themselves is according to the influence which their minds are under from one or other of the two divine covenants, that of works, or that of grace; and these two covenants taken absolutely are inconsistent, and give answers in this case that are directly contradictory to one another: so the apostle declares, Rom. 10. The one says as in ver. 5. The man that doeth the works of the law shall live by them: this is the only way whereby you may be saved: the other wholly waves this return, and puts it all on faith in Christ Jesus\*," as ver. 6, 9. The righteousness, which is of faith, speaks on this wise, Say not in thy heart, who shall ascend into heaven? that is, to bring Christ down from above; or, who shall descend into the deep? that is, to bring Christ

\* Owen's Evid. p. 7.

again from the dead. But what faith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart; that is the word of faith which we preach; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thy heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved, and this was the answer Paul and Silas gave the jailer when in the utmost distress, he put the question. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.

But now it remains to be asked, what is that faith with which salvation is connected. To describe this has puzzled the minds, and employed the pens of numbers: and after all, I suppose, it has not, and cannot be fully unfolded. The grace of faith, and the life of faith, are both mysterious; and perhaps some who have attained the greatest degrees of it, and who live the most by it are the least able to describe it. The Lord grant you and I may grow more in the grace, and live more the life of faith. I am persuaded I cannot wish either you or myself a greater blessing.

However, though this is a subject which I confess I am not able fully to unfold to your view yet some ideas may be formed of it from scripture. And having that blessed volume in my hand, with my eyes and heart directed to the Holy Spirit (to whom I would wish continually to look) for the opening of my understanding; I shall attempt to give you some account of my views of this subject, and with Mr. F. "to enquire whether this be incumbent on every creature where the gospel is preached, or whether it is not\*."

I agree with Mr. F. in p. 2. "To enjoin that on man which God hath not enjoined, is to act

\* P. 3.

“ without warrant, and would be cruelty to our  
 “ own species, as it subjects them to charge of a-  
 “ bundance of guilt, of which, God knows, they  
 “ have enough in the breach of what he has en-  
 “ joined.” Thus, I think, Mr. F. has acted  
 without warrant, and that cruelty he mentions I  
 do apprehend he has been guilty of.

But to begin with the matter of faith, for as Mr.  
 F. observes, “ in order to come at a clear and dis-  
 “ tinct view of things, it may be proper, that  
 “ what is meant by faith should be particularly  
 “ stated, defined and explained \*.” And here I  
 must own with him I do not think a believing our  
 personal interest in Christ, which is commonly  
 called assurance, is essential to true faith. No. I  
 believe with Mr. Polhill, “ all true believers  
 “ have not assurance. Scripture and experience  
 “ manifest it; there are lambs which are gathered  
 “ into the arms, and laid in the bosom of free  
 “ grace, yet know not where they are. There  
 “ are little ones, babes in Christ, which can only  
 “ hang on the breast, and are not grown up into  
 “ the reflections and joys of faith; the poor in  
 “ spirit, the mourners, the hungry and thirsty af-  
 “ ter righteousness, mentioned in the 5th chapter  
 “ of Matthew, are all of them true believers,  
 “ blessed ones, and heirs of the promises, and yet  
 “ all of them are without any glimpse of assurance;  
 “ the poor in spirit, all in rags of unworthiness  
 “ and self-nothingness, as if he had no title to the  
 “ kingdom; the mourners weeping, and desolate  
 “ like Hagar in the wilderness, with her bottle  
 “ spent, as if there were no well of comfort near  
 “ them; the hungry and thirsty, like men in a  
 “ famine, drooping and fainting away in fits of  
 “ soul emptiness, as if there were no such thing as  
 “ hidden manna for them. It is very observable

\* P. 4.

“ in

“ in the Canticles, that Christ takes notice of the  
 “ tender grape just at its first appearing: the very  
 “ first opening and budding forth of faith is wel-  
 “ come to him; if the wine be but in the cluster,  
 “ if there be but faith in desire, Christ saith, De-  
 “ stroy it not; the blessing of Abraham is in it; out  
 “ of this little grain of mustard-seed heaven will  
 “ grow; in this smoking flax there’s a divine  
 “ spark; though the smoke of doubts and tempta-  
 “ tions muffle it up in security, it will break out  
 “ at last into flames of love and joy; in infant be-  
 “ lievers assurance is not to be expected, because  
 “ of their primordial weakness; and in well grown  
 “ believers it may be suspended, because of God’s  
 “ infinite sovereignty in the dispensing thereof as  
 “ he pleaseth \*.” Excuse this long quotation.  
 I think it is a fine description of, and holds forth  
 great encouragement to a weak believer. It ap-  
 pears very evident from scripture, that many are  
 the subjects of faith who yet walk in darkness and  
 see no light, and that they may have great faith  
 too, who are far from enjoying a comfortable sense  
 of interest in the love and favour of Christ. Wit-  
 nesses the woman of Canaan and others.

But now to attend to what it is. Mr. F. thinks  
 no better definition can be given of true faith, than  
 “ the belief of the truth †.” He adds, probably  
 this will at first sight be thought a very low and  
 defective definition ‡. I own I am one of those  
 who think so, and not only at first sight, but on  
 after sight, after the most close thought, and serious  
 enquiry, and after the strictest attention to all he  
 has said on the subject.

I think a forecited author’s definition much bet-  
 ter: “ Precious faith is a grace of the Holy Spirit,  
 “ whereby the heart *supernaturally* illuminated,

\* Polhill’s Precious Faith, p. 137; 138.

† P. 10.

‡ P. 11.

“ doth so believe the testimony of God in the sacred  
 “ scriptures, as in a way of trust or dependence to  
 “ resign and yield up itself unto Jesus Christ as  
 “ mediator, and in and through him unto God,  
 “ according to his word \*.” Mr. F. represents  
 faith as man’s act and duty, without any mention  
 of *supernatural* illumination and assistance. By  
 supernatural illumination, I mean that which is  
 above nature in its best estate. I cannot express  
 my ideas better than in Mr. Polhill’s words, p. 11.  
 “ It is an illumination above nature subjectively,  
 “ and not objectively only; it is a thing above  
 “ reason, and all its improvements made upon ex-  
 “ ternal objects. God must shine into the heart,  
 “ there must be light upon light, supernatural  
 “ upon natural, or else there is no faith.”

Mr. F. thinks his definition of faith as “ the  
 “ belief of the truth” must be just, because he says  
 “ it is the definition the Holy Ghost himself has  
 “ given †,” 2 Thess. 2. 13. But remark how this  
 belief of the truth is connected with the sanctifica-  
 tion of the Spirit; only attend to the whole verse.  
 “ But we are bound to give thanks always to God  
 for you brethren, beloved of the Lord, because God  
 hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation,  
 through *sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the  
 truth.*” Now let me appeal to you, Sir, whether  
 this does not carry in it the ideas just mentioned,  
 the necessity of a supernatural and spiritual light,  
 in order for faith. What is this sanctification of  
 the spirit, but a spiritual and supernatural life com-  
 municated to the soul, a spiritual and supernatural  
 light conveyed to the understanding, a spiritual  
 and supernatural bias wrought in the will, a spi-  
 ritual and supernatural turn given to the affections.  
 in short, being created a-new in Christ Jesus by

\* Polhill’s Precious Faith, p.

† P. 10.

the powerful operations of the Holy Spirit? Then,  
 and not before, will there be true and special faith  
 in the soul. I am fully of Mr. Toplady’s mind,  
 “ that if once the feeling or inward perception of  
 “ God’s Spirit, as a convincer of sin, and of right-  
 “ eousness, and of sanctification, were to be ex-  
 “ cluded from faith, there would presently be an  
 “ end of all vital religion, and the power of god-  
 “ liness, would take its flight from that day for-  
 “ ward \*.”

“ It is,” says Dr. Goodwin, “ from the Holy  
 “ Ghost, the spirit of Christ given to us, and so  
 “ working above the power of nature, and in that  
 “ respect he is called the spirit of wisdom and re-  
 “ velation; as also elsewhere the spirit of faith,  
 “ 2 Cor. 4. 13. †.” But though the Doctor con-  
 siders faith as above the power of nature, he does  
 not consider it as destroying reason, neither do I.  
 He says, (and I wish this to be particularly observ-  
 ed) “ I will only give you a caution, that I may  
 “ not be misunderstood; for as this is a great  
 “ truth, so I would clear it from mistakes: the  
 “ light of faith doth not destroy reason, but makes  
 “ use of it, subordinates reason to itself, restoreth,  
 “ rectifies it, and then useth it; even as reason  
 “ makes use of sense, though the acts of reason, the  
 “ thoughts of a man in a rational soul are clean  
 “ differing to what he hath in the sensitive soul,  
 “ yet reason makes use of sense; and thus the  
 “ Holy Ghost makes use of all the rational dis-  
 “ courses and descriptions of Christ in the word;  
 “ makes use of the letter of the word, but by them  
 “ conveys those spiritual thoughts of Christ, which  
 “ all that letter cannot hold forth to a man: and  
 “ as I said afore, if the angels from heaven should  
 “ come and preach Jesus Christ to us, should, with

\* Toplady’s Sermon on the Creed of Devils, p. 69.  
 † Vol. 2. of his works, p. 58.

“ all their pencils, go and paint out what know-  
 “ ledge they have of Jesus Christ, they could not  
 “ beget one such sight of Christ in the heart, as the  
 “ Holy Ghost doth when he comes to work faith;  
 “ and yet the apostle tells us it comes by hearing,  
 “ and in hearing; the more rationally the preacher  
 “ discourseth out of the word, and lays open the  
 “ meaning thereof in a rational way, so much the  
 “ better, because it is suited to the minds of men;  
 “ yet where the Holy Ghost works faith, he con-  
 “ veys a light beyond all that reason, though he  
 “ makes use of that reason too: this word of God  
 “ hath an harmony of reason in it, and if a man  
 “ would open a place of scripture, he should do it  
 “ rationally, he should go and consider the words  
 “ before, and the words after; but yet still if the  
 “ Holy Ghost comes not with a further light than  
 “ all this rational opening of the word affords, a  
 “ man will never believe, for faith is a sight  
 “ beyond it; the Holy Ghost useth motives to  
 “ move you to holy duties, but then he comes  
 “ with a power joined with those motives beyond  
 “ the moral force of them; he useth signs out of  
 “ your own hearts to comfort you, but he comes  
 “ with a light over and above those signs; for if  
 “ you should stick there, you would never have  
 “ comfort; so he useth reason; he destroyeth it  
 “ not, but subordinateth it \* ”

I am, respectfully,  
 Your's.

\* Goodw. Works, vol. 4. part 2. p. 7.