

## LETTER III.

DEAR SIR,

MY last concluded with a long quotation from Dr. Goodwin, wherein he considers faith as the fruit of a supernatural illumination of the spirit, which I wrote you as an answer to what I think a defective definition of faith given by Mr. F. who describes it as a "belief of the truth."—I shall now attend to what is further advanced on this subject. And here let me observe, Mr. F. as if conscious himself this definition will not do as it stands, goes about to explain what he means by this belief of the truth. Yet after all his explanation, I confess it is to me quite unsatisfactory, and at last he drops short of the thing itself. He tells us that "to avoid obscurity, he shall attempt more fully to explain the terms." And, "first, it is not supposed but there may be a cold assent to many of the general truths of Christianity; so far as that a man may obtain the character of being orthodox, and may really think himself a believer, yea, and may be able to defend those truths for which he is an advocate with clearness and energy; and yet be destitute of saving faith\*." Well then, what is it? Why, it is said, "By belief then I understand, and I think the apostle understands, a *cordial reception* of the truth as it is in Jesus †;" and speaking of truth, he says thus, "by truth I do not mean, and I think the apostle does not mean, barely such general truths of the Gospel, as that there was such a person as Jesus Christ—that he was born at Bethlehem—lived and wrought miracles in Judea—that there is an eternal election, a par-

\* P. 12.

† P. 12.

" *cordial*

" ticular redemption, &c.—But by truth I mean, (and I think the apostle means the same) to include with the aforementioned doctrines, their qualities or properties, which make a great, and even an essential part of the truth\*." And elsewhere he observes, "It appeared to me, we had taken carnal men too much upon their word, when they told us, they believed the truth. I doubted not, but that they might believe many things concerning Jesus Christ, and his salvation; but they only amount to their simple *existence*, without taking in their adhering qualities.—Now, what constitutes the gospel is *good news*; but whatever faith a wicked man may have in it as a *piece of news*; he hath none in the *goodness* of it †."

Such is the explanation of the belief of the truth, a *cordial reception of the truth*, and a believing the gospel to be *good* as well as true. This latter idea is exactly the same with the Leicester-shire farmer's account of faith; he says, "I would define the faith of the gospel thus: It is the evidence which God has given, admitted in a person's mind, that the things reported in the scripture concerning Himself and Son, are *true* and *good*." And again, "To be a believer in a full scriptural sense of the word, is to be persuaded from proper evidence, that gospel things are *true*, and that they are, as described in the gospel, *good*." You see Mr. F. has exactly adopted the idea, and almost the words of that gentleman, whoever he might be.—Now let us a little examine it; and will you give me leave to ask you, Sir, what you think of the faith of Devils? you know, they are said to believe. *James* ii. 19. For my part I freely own, that what a late writer asserts, appears to me a fact, viz.

\* P. 13. † Preface, p. 4 &amp; 5. † Gosp. Mag. for May, 1773.

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“ That the Devils are incomparably more orthodox, than nineteen in twenty of our modern “ divines \*.” That they believe the truth, I think cannot be denied. That they believe there is a God, the apostle James declares. That they believe Christ to be the Son, the holy one of God, appears evident from their own declaration, Mark i. 24. In short, that the Bible is the word of God, and that the gospel is *news*, and *good news* too of salvation for the chief of sinners, is what they are thoroughly convinced of; and that this salvation is brought home to the heart by the power of the Holy Ghost, is what they have demonstrable and mortifying evidence of in the loss of their subjects; and therefore can but believe it. Yes, they do believe the *truth*; they do not only believe the gospel as a *piece of news*, but believe the *goodness* of it for others, though not for themselves.—What think you of the faith of the departed wicked? I am apt to think, however erroneous they might be in their sentiments on earth, they believe the truth in hell. It is a query to me, whether there be an Arian, Socinian, or Arminian there.—What think you of the faith of Simon Magus, in Acts viii. 13. it is said, Simon himself believed also. Who did he believe? and what did he believe? In the preceding verse we are told that Philip preached the things concerning the kingdom of God; and I suppose he preached the *truth* as it is in Jesus. It appears then, it was Philip the Evangelist, and the truth he preached that was believed by Simon, who was yet in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.

But perhaps, in reply to this, Mr. F. may say, what is all this to the purpose; none of these *cor-*

\* Toplady's Sermon on the Creed of Devils, p. 65.

*dially* and *heartily* received the truth; it is nothing but “ cold assent.” To this I reply, I only brought these instances to shew that the definition of faith as first given, viz. “ *a belief of the truth,*” is not sufficiently clear, there is a defect in it.— I now proceed to his amendment or addition, “ *a cordial reception of the truth:*” now let us see if this be a full description; I think not. If we look into Luke 4. 16—30. we find an account of our Lord's entering the Synagogue at Nazareth on the Sabbath day; that he opened the book of the prophet Isaiah, and read that admirable passage, “ The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor: he hath sent me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised: to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.” We are informed, the blessed Jesus, the glorious Messiah, opened these words, and said, “ This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.” What was the effect this excellent discourse had on their minds? why we are told “ the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him” with serious attention and earnest expectation, “ and all bare him witness,” were ready to set their seal to the truth of what he said, the evidence he gave being so clear; and moreover, it is added, and “ wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth.” They were amazed at the manner in which he spake, as well as the matter he delivered; they could not deny the evidence he gave of his being the Messiah; they were constrained to embrace his doctrine, yea, and *cordially* to receive his testimony, which none can deny was truth. Yet after all this, it seems they were strangers to true; special faith in Christ, as appears by their after conduct. Does not this prove Mr.

F.'s definition of faith defective? Here were a number of persons who believed the truth which Christ spake, believed it to be *good, cordially and heartily* received it, so as to be charmed with it, for they wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth, yet being weighed in the balances, they were found wanting.

It is not then a believing the truth, a cordial reception of the truth, so as to be affected with it, simply speaking, which is special faith. Such a cordial reception indeed as flows from supernatural light, life, and love being conveyed into the soul by the Holy Spirit is true faith. But it evidently appears from this instance, as well as from the stony ground hearers, who received the word with joy, Mat. 13. 20. that there may be a cordial reception of the truth without special faith. Something more than a bare cordial reception is necessary to denominate a person a true believer. It is such a reception of the truth as transforms the soul into the image of Christ, 2 Cor. 3. 18. "we all with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." It is such a belief of the truth or the divine testimony concerning Christ, that brings Christ into the soul, Eph. 3. 18. "that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith;" and to use the words of another, "It requires the agency of the Eternal Spirit, the mighty power of God, to imprint the truth upon the soul, so as to make the man possess it, and form it into a vital principle in his heart \*;" and then from this vital principle the soul acts, as one expresses it in a letter to a christian friend, "Faith is the gift of God, and it grows not in nature's garden, or in the heart of a man by nature; but is a grace created in

\* Gosp. Mag. for Aug. 17. 27.

"the soul by the Holy Spirit of God, at the time of regeneration; and believing is the act of this principle, or the soul's acting toward Christ, and God in him, according to this principle of grace wrought in the heart, to which it is enabled by the Almighty Power of God †." And Mr. Charnock, in his sermon on unbelief, which Mr. F. is so fond of, and of which he speaks so highly in p. 74. thus expresses himself, "Faith is to be considered two ways; as it is an assent to the revelation of God, or as it is a special instrument of apprehending, and laying hold on Christ for justification, &c. In the first sense, faith is a virtue we are obliged to by the light of nature. In the second it is *purely an evangelical grace* \*."

I consider faith, or rather the Spirit of God through faith, giving the soul possession of the truth revealed, agreeable to Heb. 11. 1. Faith is the *substance* of things hoped for, *i. e.* "it gives these things a substance or subsistence in the mind, by substantiating and realizing them to the mind, and impressing them upon the heart," so that when a person truly believes, the gospel is written in and upon the heart, engraven upon the mind, so as to become the principle of a person's actions. Mr. F. seems to hint at something of this when he says, "now truth in existence is *reality*, and if so, to believe the truth is to realize it, or to consider it as *real*, that is, to consider it *as it is*, which has a real effect upon the heart and conduct †." I own I like this better than any thing he has said about faith. But he afterwards seems to go off from his own description when he asks, "Is it the duty of every man who hears the solemn realities of religion to consider

† Gosp. Mag. for Feb. 1772. \* Charnock's Works, v. 2. p. 647.  
† P. 20.

“them as *real*, that is, to consider them as they “are, or is it not †?” Undoubtedly it is. But this is not to the point; even according to his own definition, the question should stand thus, Is it the duty of every man, so to *realize* the truth as that it shall have a real effect on his *heart* and *conduct*? or in other words, Is it an unregenerate man’s duty to impress the truth on his mind, to make it enter his heart, and to make it abide there, so that it shall powerfully influence every faculty of his soul, and every action of his life? If so, it is his duty to do what God claims as his prerogative, and promises as a special blessing to his own people; Jer. 32, 39, 40. “I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me for ever. I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me; and Heb. 8. 10. I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts; and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people.”

I agree with Mr. F. when he says, there is “a necessary connection between faith and practice §.” I think wherever true faith is, the truth believed has taken such possession, such hold of that soul, that it cannot but shew itself in the life, for “faith without works is dead,” James 2. 20. Does the scripture declare “nothing is so odious, nothing so dangerous as sin;” he who has real faith, and is under its influence, so possesses that truth that he must necessarily hate and forsake evil. Does the Bible inform us, no Saviour is so suitable, none so precious, none so excellent in every view as the Lord Jesus Christ; he who has special faith, so possesses that truth in his soul, it makes such an impression on his heart, that he cannot but find an actual outgoing of his soul towards him in a way of love, trust, and obedience.

† P. 21.

§ P. 16.

But I cannot agree with him when he draws this conclusion; “The necessary connexion there is “between faith and practice induces me to think “it *impossible* for a wicked man while such to believe the aforementioned truths\*;” and as a proof thereof, he adds, “men believe various “things in the world to be odious and others “dangerous; that arsenic will poison them or fire “burn them; and they act accordingly, they “make it their constant endeavour to shun them †;” but does not Mr. F. know that some people, though they believe arsenic will poison them, yet they take it, and for that very purpose? And does not Mr. F. know there is an unnatural practice which yet prevails in some parts of the empire of Indostan, of the Gentoo wives burning themselves on their husband’s funeral pile? And even in this Christian land, how many who believe the knife, the sword, the pistol, the water, will be their death, yet, instead of shunning, purposely make use of them for this horrid purpose. I have also heard this pertinent question asked, Do not men in general believe they shall die, yea, really, cordially and heartily believe it? But do they “act accordingly?” or does not the judgment and practice of the generality of mankind contradict each other? And did not Felix believe Paul when he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come? Yes, he believed, and he trembled; his conscience was awakened and alarmed, accused him of injustice and intemperance, and he dreaded the thought of a final judgment. What then? Did he act accordingly? though he firmly believed the truth, and had a strong conviction of the evil of his conduct, did he forsake his evil ways and thankfully adhere to Paul? No. He dismissed him, he wanted to hear no more, he was for lul-

\* P. 16.

† P. 16.

ling his conscience asleep, and making it quiet and easy; though he knew he was pursuing evil, he yet would persist in it, though our author says, "human nature cannot pursue evil as evil †." Where true special faith is given indeed, that man cannot but hate and forsake evil. The truth possesses his soul and influences his conduct; but a man may believe the truth, and yet persist in evil.

I must now conclude.

And remain

Your's.

† P. 17.

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