

LETTER IV.

DEAR SIR,

I Cannot help noticing what is said in p. 27. speaking of the distinction between believing Christ, and believing *in*-Christ. Mr. F. says "It seems to suppose that a person may really believe Christ, and yet not believe *in* Christ, or, which is the same thing, not *trust in him* for salvation. This appears to me impossible*." I am surprised at this. Surely there is a great difference between the one and the other. The one is the duty of all, the other the peculiar privilege of some, even of God's elect. And the very scriptures cited to prove there is no difference, seem to me clearly to point out there is. John 3. 36. He that believeth *on* the Son, hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him. The former part of the verse describes the true believer. He who through the supernatural illumination of the spirit doth so believe the testimony of God concerning his Son, as in a way of truth and dependence to resign himself up to, and rely upon him for life and salvation, he has everlasting life: he really possesses it. Now this is the peculiar privilege of a child of God.—The other part of the verse describes the criminal unbeliever. For, observe, I have no doubt but there is an unbelief which is criminal, and that is, where there is a want of due reverence and attention to the words of Christ, and a positive act of rejecting him as the

* P. 27.

Messiah

Messiah and Saviour, in direct opposition to the full evidence he gave of his mission. Observe, it is not said, he that believeth not *on* the Son, &c. No, it is not for want of special faith he is condemned, but because he believes not what he says, though he gives the most undeniable evidence of his being sent of God, and that what he says is truth. Certainly, if a man will not believe what Christ the Son of God says is true; if he treats the gospel as an idle tale which hath such "evident and indelible characters of its divine original," he is worthy of condemnation, and shall be condemned, as Mr. Charnock expresses it. "A gospel that hath been propagated with a glorious success, confirmed by a train of miracles, acknowledged in the writings of heathens that lived in the primitive times, witnessed by the blood of martyrs, and those of the wiser and learned sort, who could not all surely be a parcel of melancholy fools! Shall this have no better a reception than if it were a mere romance, and an impertinent fable*?" Certainly those who give it no better a reception, shall be severely punished. To believe what God has declared in his word, to believe this glorious revelation which God has given, is undoubtedly the duty of all where the gospel comes: the evidence of its being God's word is so strong, so clear and plain; and to reject it, is base and wicked. To believe what the Lord Jesus Christ says, who is the Son of God, and truth itself, and whose discourses bear such a stamp of divine authority, is unquestionably incumbent on all, and to reject and despise him and his words, deserving of God's hot displeasure and his fearful indignation. This is what natural light and reason dictates. But what has this to do with believing *on* Christ, or special faith in him, which is su-

* Charn. Works, vol. 2. p. 657.

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pernatural and the special gift of God, according to Mr. F.'s own words, "peculiar to the elect*."

Mr. F. quotes another scripture of the same import with the former, 1 John 5. 20. "He that believeth *on* the Son of God, hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God, hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son." You see the same distinction is here made as in the former passage between believing *on* Christ and believing Christ and God, though Mr. F. cannot see this distinction. You may here observe, who it is that hath made God a liar. It is not said he who believes not *on* the Son, but he who believes not the *record* God hath given of his Son. That is, as one expresses it, "practically to slight, contemn, despise, reject" or wilfully neglect the word of God, and the record therein contained. But for a soul not to enjoy what God has not given, or not to be what God has not made him, does not make God a liar; and the dispute is not, whether that unbelief which is condemned in the scripture, be the work of men, and a wicked work? but whether a person not having a blessing, which never was given him, nor ever was in his power to obtain, be the wicked work intended †."

Let me now invite your attention to what is said in p. 28. "This view of faith seems to be plain and easy, and does not *embarrass our minds with a number of words without ideas.*" A handsome compliment to those who do not think Mr. F.'s account of faith so plain and easy as he does! Give me leave just to quote a few definitions others have given, and then to ask your opinion whether his reflection of "embarrassing the mind with a

* P. 1. † Johnson's Faith of God's Elect, p. 171.

number

number of words without ideas" be just. Shall I call to your mind Mr. Polhill's description of it, which I mentioned in my second letter; "precious faith is a grace of the Holy Spirit, whereby the heart supernaturally illuminated, 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*" Does he embarrass the mind with a number of words without ideas? Again, let me cite Perkins; "faith is a gift, whereby we apprehend Christ and his benefits †." Does this good man embarrass our minds with a number of words without ideas?—Shall here also give you an extract from a confession of faith drawn up and signed by three Protestant bishops, and seven eminent clergymen, who were imprisoned in London for the gospel, shortly after the coronation of Mary. They say thus, "Faith is not only an opinion, but a certain persuasion wrought by the Holy Ghost, which doth illuminate the mind, and supple the heart, to submit itself unfeignedly to God." This was signed by Coverdale, bishop of Exeter, Farrar, bishop of St. David's, Hooper, bishop of Worcester and Gloucester, with Taylor, Philpot, Bradford, Crome, Sanders, Rogers, and Lawrence †. Do these excellent men embarrass our minds with a number of words without ideas?—Dr. Gill, speaking of faith, says, "special and spiritual faith, to which salvation is annexed, is not of a man's self, it does not owe its original to the creature—it is not of the law of works; for as the law is not of faith, so neither is faith of the law;—it is a blessing of the covenant of grace; the operation of the spirit of God; he produces it by his

* Precious Faith, p. 6. † Perkins's Works, vol. 2. p. 243.
‡ Toplady's Hist. Proof, v. 1. p. 328. and v. 2. p. 384.

“ mighty power in the soul ; he enlightens the
 “ mind, reveals the object, brings near Christ,
 “ his righteousness and salvation, and enables the
 “ sensible sinner to look to him, lay hold on him,
 “ and receive him as his saviour and redeemer *.”
 Does the Doctor here embarrass our minds with a
 number of words without ideas ? I think these
 definitions are short and full, they are not, it is
 true, quite so concise as Mr. F.’s, which contains
 but five words, “ *the belief of the truth* ;” but then
 they are more *full*, and in my opinion much easier
 comprehended. Indeed this gentleman himself is
 obliged to employ several pages to explain his
 meaning, being sensible, I presume, such a defini-
 tion could not be readily understood, and that
 people in common were very likely to remain in the
 dark about it. The foregoing accounts are self-
 evident, they at once, without “ embarrassing our
 minds with a number of words,” convey to us true
 and beautiful ideas, and, it appears to me, give us
 such ideas, that clearly demonstrate it cannot be
 the *duty* of unregenerate men to believe with a spe-
 cial faith in Christ. If the mind must be super-
 naturally illuminated—if it is a new covenant bless-
 ing—a special gift of God peculiar to the elect—
 wrought by the power of the Holy Ghost in the
 heart—consists in an apprehension and reception of
 Christ, and such an apprehension and reception as
 transform the soul into his image and likeness,
 and make him closely adhere to him for ever, and
 issue in everlasting life—surely it is absurd to the
 last degree to say it is the duty of all men to have
 it.

But respecting their duty in this matter, I shall
 be led more particularly to treat of in my next,
 when I propose giving you my sentiments of the
 the second part of Mr. F.’s book. I shall now only in

* Gill’s Sermon and Tracts, v. 1. p. 75, 76.

the general say, that if this faith be the duty of
 man, and required by the law, it is then un-
 doubtedly a *work* ; and when the apostle says, Eph.
 2. 8. By grace ye are saved, through faith, we
 must consider him as joining grace and works to-
 gether, contrary to the general tenor of his epis-
 tles, which is to set forth the freeness and the
 riches of grace in the salvation of sinners ; as
 in Rom 4. 16. he says, “ It is of faith that it
 might be by grace :” but if faith is a duty (and so
 a work) the apostle should rather have said, It is
 of faith that it might be by works ; but since faith
 is a blessing of the covenant of grace, a fruit of
 electing grace, and the operation of the spirit of
 grace, there is a propriety and beauty in the a-
 postles words.

I shall now conclude this epistle with the just
 observation of a late writer, “ That the religion
 “ of Jesus Christ stands eminently distinguished,
 “ and essentially differenced, from every other
 “ religion that was ever proposed to human re-
 “ ception, by this remarkable peculiarity : that,
 “ look abroad in the world, and you will find
 “ that every religion, except *one*, puts you upon
 “ doing something in order to recommend your-
 “ self to God. A *Mahometan* expects to be saved
 “ by his works. A *Papist* looks to be justified
 “ by his works. A *Free-willer* hopes for salva-
 “ tion by his works, compliances, endeavours
 “ and perseverance. A *Pagan*, if he believes that
 “ there is a future state, expects to be happy
 “ hereafter, by virtue of the supposed good he
 “ does, and of the evil he leaves undone. A
 “ *Mystic* has the same hope, and stands on the
 “ same sad foundation. It is only the religion of
 “ Christ which runs counter to all the rest, by
 “ affirming that we are saved, and called with an

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“ holy calling, *not* according to our works, but
“ according to the Father’s own purpose and
“ grace, which was (not sold to us on certain
“ conditions to be fulfilled by ourselves, but
“ was) *given* us in Christ before the world be-
“ gan *.”

The Lord grant this religion may be more and
more precious to both you and me.

I am

Yours.

* Toplady’s Serm. on James 2. 19. p. 49, 50