

LETTER V.

DEAR SIR,

I AM now come to the second part of Mr. Fuller's book, "containing arguments to prove faith in Christ the incumbent duty of men in general, under the sound of the Gospel;" and after what I have said respecting faith, as well as from considering the several parts of holy writ, and especially those portions of it, which he mentions as proofs of his hypothesis, I am obliged to deny his

FIRST PROPOSITION, which is, that "*Faith in Christ is commanded in the Scriptures to unconverted Sinners**." By faith being commanded I take for granted is meant that it is *enjoined*; it is an *injunction* or *compulsive precept*, which I confess, I think is a great mistake. That believing sometimes bears the appearance of a command is what I readily grant: but that it is always where it bears that appearance to be considered as an *injunction* is what I cannot allow.—You know, Sir; and Mr. F. must know, that every command in scripture is not to be thus understood. For instance, when the Jewish nation is affectingly represented by an infant cast out into the open field to the loathing of its person, and the Lord says, Ezek. 16. 6. When I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, *live*, yea, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, *live*. You cannot, I think, consider this as an injunction, but

* P. 37.

such a command as carries in it and conveys the blessing itself, even life. So our Lord speaking of the gospel in John 12. 50. says, "I know that his commandment is life everlasting;" now we are not from hence to consider the gospel as a law, containing precepts, (Mr. F. himself does not †.) but when it is here called a commandment which is life everlasting, I suppose it must be thus denominated, because by it the Holy Spirit speaks and commands spiritual life into the soul of a dead sinner, which life is an everlasting one.—And sometimes that which bears the appearance of a command, is nothing more than a direction or an encouragement, as Isa. 51. 17. "Awake, awake, stand up, O Jerusalem, which hast drunk at the hand of the Lord the cup of his fury." I presume this is not to be understood in the light of a *precept*, but as a precious word of consolation and a cheering direction to hope and rejoice in the Lord because he had, as in ver. 22. taken out of her hand the cup of trembling, even the dregs of the cup of his fury, and adds, thou shalt no more drink it again. So I apprehend we are to understand the words of Paul and Silas to the Jailor, "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." This does not appear by the context so much a command as a word of direction and comfort. The poor man had his eyes just opened to see his wretchedness and misery, and cries out, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Do? said the good men, you have nothing else to do, but venture your soul on Jesus: if you cast yourself on him you are safe: there is hope for you, be encouraged, both you and yours if you believe on him shall be saved.

Thus also the words of Christ to his disciples in John 14. 1. are to be understood. "Let not your

† P. 57.

" hearts

“ hearts be troubled, ye believe in God, *believ^e*
 “ *also in me* ” This I think very evidently appears
 to be a direction and encouragement, and not so
 much to carry in it an injunction and command.
 He had been telling them many discouraging
 things they should meet with, and particularly
 informing them of his departure; this greatly af-
 fected them; he saw it, and his bowels yearned
 over them, and therefore he thus addresses them,
 Let not your hearts be troubled; don't be over-
 whelmed with sorrow; ye believe in God; I know
 ye do; ye believe him to be faithful and true:
 faithful in keeping covenant, and true in accom-
 plishing all the promises he has made: Ye may
 also with equal confidence, repose in me: Yes,
 believe in me, when I tell you, though I go away,
 it is to prepare a place for you, and I will come
 again, and receive you to myself, that where I
 am there ye may be also. Cheering words, con-
 taining a kind direction and heavenly encourage-
 ment.

And let me add, that some of those scriptures,
 cited by Mr. F. relate to nothing more than to
 Christ as the promised Messiah, whom it was the
 duty of the Jews to have acknowledged, the evi-
 dence of his mission being so full and clear: and
 their refusing to acknowledge him in that capacity,
 in opposition to the most undeniable evidence, was
 practical and criminal unbelief.

It is for want of making these distinctions, I ap-
 prehend, Mr. F. and others have run into mistake,
 and misunderstood various passages of scripture.

I shall now proceed to examine those scriptures
 which are brought to support his first Proposition.
 He begins with

Psal. 2. 12. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry,
 and ye perish from the way*. I fully acquiesce
 in the declaration of this psalm's having respect
 to the Messiah, and that these words relate to the ene-
 mies of Christ, and unregenerate sinners. But
 that this “ kissing the Son denotes a spiritual act,
 “ and is of the very essence of true saving faith,”
 as Mr. F. asserts †, is what I can by no means al-
 low. Kissing denotes sometimes nothing more than
 civil homage and subjection, as in 1 Sam 10. 1.
 where we are told Samuel anointed Saul and kissed
 him, which was not, I presume, a spiritual act, but
 nothing more than a token of allegiance and loy-
 alty, and expressive of reverence and respect, because
 of the high office he was advanced unto; and “ it
 “ is the custom of the Indians to this day for the
 “ subjects to kiss their kings ||;” now this was
 certainly the duty of kings and judges, and all
 whosoever this glorious Messiah, the Son of
 God came, to reverence and respect him, to ex-
 press their firm belief of his being that great Per-
 sonage, so long prophesied of and expected, who
 gave such an undeniable evidence of his being so;
 who had divine authority stamped in very legible
 characters upon him; and if they refused to ac-
 knowledge him it should issue in their destruction.
 —Mr. F. seems to build much on the latter part
 of the verse, “ Blessed are all they that put their
 trust in him,” and says, “ now putting their trust
 “ in him, and kissing him seem nearly a-kin, both
 “ have the promise of bliss annexed §.” This seems
 to me very far from being just; kissing the son and
 trusting him are widely different. The one is an
 incumbent duty, the other a peculiar privilege
 and blessing. The easy and natural sense of the

* P. 37. † P. 38. || Dr. Gill's Exposit. on Psal. 2. 12. § P. 39.

words seems to be this, Kiss the Son, reverence him, respect and worship him; this is your duty, for he is my Son, he is the great Messiah; the glorious king I have long promised: I have sealed him, this you may easily perceive, and if ye refuse to acknowledge him, ye shall perish in your sinful ways. Then after the duty of men in general is pointed out, as a matter very distinct comes in the next words, as words of great encouragement to those whose peculiar privilege it is to venture their souls on him; who not only acknowledge and reverence him as the Messiah, but also believe in him for pardon, peace, righteousness and eternal life, as the only saviour of sinners, these are blessed, yea, "Blessed are all they that put their trust in him."

The next scripture mentioned is Jer. vi. 16. "Thus saith the Lord, stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls; but they said, we will not walk therein *." That the persons here addressed are wicked, unregenerate sinners is granted that the ways they are to stand in and see, and the old paths they are to ask for, may mean the ordinances and commandments of God, I think is probable: and that the good way may have reference to Christ, I will not deny: But what is all this to the purpose? why Mr. F. seems to lay a stress upon the exhortation "walk in that good way," which he says "can be nothing short of true faith in him, seeing it is promised that had they so done, they should have found rest for their souls §." But suppose this walking in the good way does mean true faith in Christ, yet do you not perceive this way

* P. 39.

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must be discovered to them first? They were to stand and see, look out and enquire: that is, diligently attend the means, and when it was the good pleasure of God to shew them the good way; when the Holy Spirit should enlighten their dark understandings, and discover to them their wretched state, and shew to them the good and only way of salvation, it was their duty to walk therein.—It was their duty to enquire for it, but I should suppose not their duty to walk in it till they had found it. And I suppose also they could not find it to purpose, till it was discovered to them. Then they would walk in it, and ought to walk in it, and to seek no other. This sense of the passage (and I hope it is not a forced one) sets aside the sentiment of faith being the duty of the unregenerate. All the duty of the unregenerate here pointed out, is their diligently waiting on publick ordinances. I say *diligently*, in opposition to what Mr. F. intimates respecting those who differ from him, "Here (says he) they were enjoined to *stand and see*, not barely to *attend* publick ordinances, and *lie in the way*, as some express themselves ||." We don't say, Sir, they are *barely to attend* in a careless and indifferent manner, and *lie in the way* in an indolent posture, indulging themselves in sloth and sleep, as he insinuates, though he knows better. We say it is the duty of sinners to attend the means *constantly* and *diligently*, with a who can tell but the blessing of the Lord may be conveyed through these channels. And when the blessing comes, when the Holy Ghost opens the eyes of sinners to see their sin and danger, and shews them the good way Christ, then it becomes their duty

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to walk in him; and this their duty they will readily attend to, under the influences of the same Spirit.

Mr F. having produced these two scriptures from the old testament, now proceeds to the new; and here expresses himself very positively, thus, "In the new testament we find true saving faith enjoined upon unregenerate sinners, as plain as words can possibly express it ||." The first words which are to him so very plain are in

John xii. 36. "While ye have the light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light." But I think a little examination into the context, will shew these are not to the purpose, and demonstrate that Mr. F.'s misunderstanding and misapplication of these words, is owing to his not observing the distinct modes of speech made use of in holy writ. These are evidently words of direction to enquiring people. Our Lord is here speaking not as a lawgiver, but in a ministerial way. He had just entered Jerusalem: many attended him both Jews and Greeks: they made enquiries respecting his doctrine, and person. He had been speaking of his death: they were stumbled at it, and they said, v. 34. "we have heard out of the law that "Christ abideth for ever," referring, I suppose, to such passages that speak of the perpetuity of his priesthood, and the eternal duration of his kingdom; and so they ask; how sayest thou, the son of man must be lifted up? this seems inconsistent with scripture, and they further ask, "Who is "this son of man?" In reply to this last question, he tells them, this son of man was the light of the world; and then goes on to shew them the importance of believing and walking in him. This

light (says he) is for a little while with you, and this is what I have to say, and wish you to notice it, who are thus inquisitive for knowledge: that if ye would wish to be children of light, and to give evidence ye are so, it is absolutely necessary that ye believe in the light, and walk while ye have the light, otherwise darkness will certainly come upon you. Or if we consider it as an address to the audience in general, then viewing him as speaking in a ministerial way, his words were (as one expresses it) "persuasive, by way of admonition; to move his audience to make the best improvement in their power, of the opportunity they were favoured with. For they did enjoy his presence with them, who is the true light; and had the light of the gospel published amongst them. And then the admonition was, to receive Christ and his gospel, according to that light in which he had revealed himself to them: And not to believe in a light which God had not afforded them: or to receive Christ internally, while he had only been revealed externally. It was to believe in that light which they actually had; and had the Jewish nation taken that advice, they had (in a national way) continued to be the children of light. For God did not root them out of their habitation, because they were not blessed with saving faith; but because they rejected the Messiah, and despised the record which God gave of his Son*." If we take the words in the former sense, they appear to contain a ministerial admonition, and not a compulsive precept; a direction to enquiring persons, and not a command to the multitude in general; an information of what is essentially necessary to evidence them children of light, and

* Johnson's Faith of God's Elect, p. 145.

not a command to make themselves so. If we take them in the latter sense, they only contain an exhortation to act agreeable to the light they had. View them in either way, they will not prove what Mr. F. wishes them to prove, the duty of all to believe with a special faith.—At present shall only add

I remain
Yours.