

LETTER VIII.

DEAR SIR,

GIVE me leave now to enter on the FOURTH PROPOSITION, which is worded thus, “*The want of faith in Christ is ascribed in the scriptures to men’s depravity, and is itself there represented as a heinous sin.**.”—This wants proof. The scriptures appear to me to ascribe the want of faith to the *sovereign will and purpose of God*, and the *natural incapacity of man*, and therefore surely man is no more chargeable with criminality in not believing, than he is in not being elected, redeemed, or regenerated.

Is it not expressly said, John 10. 26. “Ye believe not, *because* ye are not of my Sheep;” how very plain are these words. How clearly do they prove the grand reason of these persons not having faith, was, their not being predestinated and chosen to happiness. Thus speaks Mr. Henry, on the passage, “you are not designed to be my followers, you are not of those that were given me by my Father to be brought to grace and glory. You are not of the number of the elect, and your unbelief, if you persist in it, will be a certain evidence you are not.” Had they been elected, they would, they must have believed, agreeable to Acts 13. 48. “As many as were ordained to eternal life believed;” from which it appears that faith is the fruit, effect, and consequence of election, or in other words, that electing love is the grand cause, the glorious spring and source of faith, and non-election the reason of a sinner’s not believing. Therefore, as none will

* P, 65.

be condemned for not being elected, so none will be condemned for not having special faith: It is cruelty to men, it is dishonourable to, and casting the most unworthy reflection on God to suppose it.

Another reason is, man’s *natural incapacity*.—How very clearly revealed is this. Sacred writ every where abounds with passages to this purpose. That is no inconsiderable one in John 6. 44. “No man *can* come to me, except the Father which has sent me draw him.”—Does not this seem to strike you at once, that our Lord is here representing man’s natural inability? that he has no more *power* than *will* to come? Mr. F. indeed says, “the *cannot* itself consists in a *will not*,” or, “in other words, in the want of a *heart* to come to Christ, with a settled aversion to him;” and he moreover adds, “the inability of men to come to Christ is doubtless by this expression represented as being *total*, which we never deny.*;” what inconsistency is here! First, this gentleman asserts all the inability of man lies in his *will*, and then immediately says, he never denied the inability of man being *total*. Surely, Sir, every one must see who reads Mr. F.’s book, that throughout he is attempting to prove his inability is but *partial*: that it all lies in the will.—All I contend for is the *total* inability of man to believe. Mr. F. says, this is what he never denied, and yet fills up 196 pages which tend to the contrary. How he can clear up this inconsistency I am at a loss to determine. I must leave it to himself.

I cannot help quoting here a passage from Mr. Brine, which is full to the purpose: “Two things are true of us all in a natural state: one is, that we cannot come to Christ: the other is, that we will not come to him. Say some,

“ *our cannot consists in a will not*; but it is a very
 “ great mistake; they are distinct things, and not
 “ the same. We cannot, as we are destitute of a
 “ principle of life; and we will not as we are the
 “ subjects of vicious habits, which determine us
 “ against such an act. I am sorry to find any to
 “ confound things that are so manifestly distinct,
 “ with a view to give countenance to what may
 “ with far less danger be given up, than that of
 “ our natural inability to act faith on Christ;
 “ what opinion soever requires the denial of our
 “ want of power to believe, to support it, ought
 “ eternally to sink; for true it is, we are *dead*,
 “ and cannot act spiritually, no, not in the least
 “ degree †.”

I shall now proceed to observe, our Lord says, men *cannot* come except the father draw them. That is sufficient for me.—And the apostle Paul is of the same mind with his divine master, 1 Cor. 2. 14. “ The natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God: for they are foolishness to him; neither *can* he know them, for they are spiritually discerned.” Now if there be any meaning in words, man’s natural incapacity is here asserted. By the natural man we are undoubtedly to understand the unregenerate man, and the wise philosopher too, the scribe, the disputer of this world, which the apostle mentions in the preceding chapter, ver. 20. the man of the brightest parts, of the highest attainments in nature, of the greatest natural abilities. The person here spoken of, says Dr. Owen, “ is one that hath all that is or can be derived from the first Adam, one endowed with a rational soul, and who hath the use and exercise of all its rational faculties *.” This man receiveth not the things

† Sermon at Ordination of Mr. John Ryland, p. 16.
 * Owen on the Spirit, p. 217.

of the Spirit of God, that is, the glorious mysteries of the everlasting gospel, the hidden wisdom, as the apostle calls it in verse 7. which God ordained before the world unto our glory. These things he receives not, that is, in the love of them. Does not give them a place in his heart: for they are foolishness unto him, they appear absurd, ridiculous, and contrary to reason: neither *can* he know them. He is but a *natural* man; these things are *spiritual*, and so are *spiritually* discerned. He wants a capacity, a principle suited to the objects revealed, which is absolutely necessary for the reception of them, and this he is destitute of, being but a *natural* man, and therefore he *cannot* as such know them. Such a view had Calvin; these are his words, “ The natural man *cannot* perceive those things that are of the spirit of God: they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually judged. Whom doth he call natural? even him that stays upon the light of nature. He, I say, comprehendeth nothing in the spiritual mysteries of God. Why so? is it because by slothfulness he neglecteth it? nay, rather although he would travel never so much, he can do nothing, because forsooth they are spiritually judged. What meaneth that? because being utterly hidden from the sight of man, they are opened by the only revelation of the Spirit: so that they are reckoned for folly where the spirit of God giveth not light †:” and of the same mind was Dr. Goodwin; after quoting these words of the apostle he thus comments on them, “ All cometh to this, that there must be a new principle put into the understanding of a man, not only a new light come in, but a new principle, if you would have this man un-

“ understand spiritual things aright; and that this
 “ is the scope I quote this place for,—that the un-
 “ derstanding must be altered, a new principle
 “ must be put into it, a new habit, as we call it;
 “ all the expressions do carry it to that sense; for,
 “ first he saith, if he be not made spiritual, he can-
 “ not receive spiritual things, that is, he wants
 “ a *capacity*. It is such a phrase as if you would
 “ speak to a deaf man, you will say, he cannot
 “ receive what you say, for he wanteth a faculty
 “ of hearing. If you bring a blind man into the
 “ sun, he cannot receive the light of it, for he
 “ wants a natural faculty so to do. He expres-
 “ seth it in a way of nature, he is not capable of
 “ it, which argueth, I say, a want of a principle
 “ whereby to do it, and not only so, but he saith
 “ in the following words, he cannot know them;
 “ he wants a *power*, for the apostle speaks suita-
 “ bly here to philosophical principles. That as
 “ we say in philosophy, nothing can work but it
 “ must have a principle of working, a man can-
 “ not see without the faculty of seeing: so this
 “ man wants a faculty of knowing spiritual things,
 “ therefore he cannot know them §.”

That human depravity, that ignorance, pride,
 dishonesty of heart, aversion to God, and the like,
 often prevent a sinner's attending to the gospel,
 which the Holy Spirit makes use of as a mean to
 convey faith into the hearts of his people, for
 faith cometh by hearing, Rom. 10. 17. and that
 these things are of a criminal nature is certain;
 but what then? Does this prove faith a duty, and
 the want of it a sin, for which man shall be dam-
 ned? by no means; so far as human depravity
 prevails man is criminal, and the things afore-
 mentioned prevailing are certain evidences of the
 person's being destitute of special faith; but to say

§ Goodwin's Works, Vol. 1. p. 323.

that these things are an “ *absolute bar to faith*,”
 as Mr. F. does, p. 67. is a great mistake, neither
 these things, nor a thousand more worse things, if
 worse can be named, shall be an “ *absolute bar*”
 to any elect soul's believing.

-Shall add no more at present, but that

I am

Ever yours.