

L E T T E R IX.

DEAR SIR,

IT is high time to come to the FIFTH PROPOSITION, which is expressed thus: “*God bids threatened and inflicted the most awful punishments on men for their not believing in the Lord Jesus Christ* *.”—The first passage brought in proof is Mar. 16. 16. “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” I think the quotation Mr. F. makes from Mr. Brine, is indeed a sufficient answer to this text, viz. “As it is not inferrable from that declaration, that the faith of believers is the procuring cause of their salvation, so it is not to be inferred from thence that the want of that special faith in unbelievers is the procuring cause of their damnation. That declaration contains in it the descriptive characters of those who are saved, and of those who are damned; but it assigns not special faith to be the procuring cause of the salvation of the former, nor the want of it to be the procuring cause of the damnation of the latter †.” Mr. F. however says in answer, “If this mode of reasoning were admitted, should not we find it very difficult to prove any thing being evil from the threatenings of God against it? Yea (saith he) it might in time be rendered doubtful whether *sin itself* is the procuring cause of men’s damnation §.” I am astonished at such a conclusion being drawn from what I think good argument.—Mr. F. here quotes a variety of passages of scripture, and then

* P. 74.

† Motives to L. and U. p. 31, 32.

§ P. 75.

applying Mr. Brine’s reasoning, he imagines he has entirely set it aside: but I think he has utterly failed. Says Mr. F. “we are told Ps. 147. 6. “The Lord lifteth up the meek, he casteth the wicked down to the ground; but it might be said, as the meekness of the former is not the procuring cause of his being lifted up, so it cannot be from hence inferred that the wickedness of the latter is the procuring cause of his being cast down.” Again in Ps. 145. 20. we read, “The Lord preserveth all that love him; but the wicked will he destroy. But it might be said, as the love of the one is not the procuring cause of his preservation, so it cannot be proved from hence that the wickedness of the other is the procuring cause of his destruction. That these declarations contain only the descriptive characters of those who are saved, and of those who perish *” To which I answer, it is a fact, that these passages only contain the descriptive characters of the saved and lost, as the first cited does; but then shall we say it is difficult to prove wickedness evil, and sin the procuring cause of damnation? No; though these scriptures do not declare it, there are others which positively do, as Ps. 107. 33, 34. “He turneth rivers into a wilderness, and the water-springs into dry ground, a fruitful land into barrenness, *for the wickedness* of them that dwell therein.” Prov. 13. 6. “Wickedness overthroweth the sinner.” Isa. 57. 17. “For the iniquity of his covatousness was I wroth and smote him;” and the apostle says plainly, Rom. 6. 23. “The wages of sin is death.” From hence it appears clear, that it is Mr. F.’s reasoning, and not Mr. Brine’s, that falls to the ground. We have no occasion to go to those passages of scripture which contain only a descriptive

* P. 75, 76.

character of those who are damned to prove sin is the cause of damnation, since there are plenty of scriptures which positively assert it; but where is the scripture which positively asserts a want of special faith to be the cause of damnation?—Where? Why Mr. F. thinks he has found it. It is John 3. 18. “He that believeth on him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, *because* he hath not believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God.” This text he seems to exult in, and with it to triumph over all his opposers. “The passage (says he) which was last considered, was thought to prove nothing; *because*, though it declared that he that believeth not should be damned, yet it did not assign the want of faith as the procuring cause of damnation; but that cannot be pleaded here. Here it is expressly said, such are condemned *because* they have not believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God*.” But this passage, like the other, contains nothing more than a descriptive character of persons who are not, and who are condemned. He that believeth on him is not condemned; but I presume his believing on him is not the cause of his not being condemned, but his union to Christ, and being interested in his obedience and death is what secures him from condemnation. And his believing is no more than an evidence of his union and interest in him: so the not believing, or continuing in unbelief, is an evidence of a person’s not being in Christ and so of his being under condemnation. Great stress indeed is laid on the word *because*, which is put in capitals, and is considered as a very strong proof that his unbelief is the cause of condemnation; but if Mr. F. has no better argument than this to support his cause, it must sink, for this will not bear it up. In John 16. 27. the same word is used, where

Christ addressing his disciples says, “The Father himself loveth you, *because* ye have loved me.” Now, as has been observed by a late writer, “this cannot be understood of their love being any foundation, or moving cause of the Father’s love, to which the words of the apostle John had been a direct contradiction, 1 John 4. 10. Not that we loved God, but he love us. But through their love to Christ; or, because they loved Christ, it appeared the Father had loved, and drawn them to his Son, by the cords of his everlasting love, we loved him *because* he first loved us*.” Now then as in the one place the love of the disciples (though the word *because* is before it) is nothing more than an evidence of interest in the Father’s love; so in the other, the want of special faith (though the word *because* is before it) is nothing more than an evidence of being under condemnation. And in the next verse our Lord informs us of the cause of condemnation; “and this is the condemnation,”—that is the cause of it (not that they had not special faith) but that though light was come into the world, even the glorious Messiah, the sum and substance of the types, shadows, and prophecies, yet they loved darkness rather than light, that is, the greater part of them, as Dr. Gill expresses it, “preferred the darkness of the ceremonial law, and the Mosaic dispensation, and even the traditions of the elders, before the gospel revelation made by Jesus Christ †.” They persisted in opposing and rejecting the Messiah, and all his sayings, because their deeds were evil; all which is indeed cause enough for condemnation, without adding thereto the want of special faith, which it had not pleased God to bestow upon them.

As to the next scripture, Luke 19. 27. “But those mine enemies, that would not that I should

* Johnson’s Faith of God’s elect. p. 167. 164.

reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me," it is nothing to the purpose. Our Lord is there evidently speaking of himself as the king Messiah, whom I have all along supposed the Jews ought to have received, having sufficient testimony of his being sent of God; and their rejecting of him was a very sufficient reason for their being slain before him.

The last text quoted to support this fifth proposition is 2 Theff. 2. 10, 11, 12, where the coming of antichrist is said to be "with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusions, that they should believe a lie, that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." Now, says Mr. F. "This plainly intimates, that their not receiving the love of the truth, or, which is the same thing, not believing with such a faith as that to which salvation is promised, is here assigned as the cause of their being given up of God, and carried away with all deceivableness of unrighteousness, —of God's sending them strong delusions that they should believe a lie, and be damned*." I have here to observe that what Mr. F. asserts to be plainly-intimated, doth not appear altogether so plain to me. The sense of the text seems to be this: That antichrist should come, as is expressed, with all deceivableness of unrighteousness; but then his deceptions should only have place in them that perish, or those and those only should be finally deceived by him. He would deceive, if possible, the very elect; but that is impossible. They are only the non-elect, the reprobates, that shall be totally seduced, here spoken of as those that perish;

* P. 79.

but then it might be asked, who are these? how shall they be known? by what shall they be made manifest? whence shall it appear there are such persons who shall eternally perish? Why, says the apostle, because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved. This is the grand evidence of interest in salvation; and those who have it not are evidently of that number who perish. And for this cause, viz. their being in a perishing state, already in a state of condemnation as sinners, God shall send them strong delusion that they should believe a lie; that is, God shall (according to his sovereign will) give them up to judicial blindness and hardness of heart, leaving them to their own hearts lusts, whereby they would become the willing followers of antichrist, embracing his absurd doctrines and wicked practices, that they all might be damned who give evidence of their lost condition in that they believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. Viewing the words thus, what can you perceive in them to prove "God has threatened and inflicted the most awful punishments on men for their not believing in the Lord Jesus Christ."—Leaving what I have written on this fifth proposition to your candid perusal—

I remain

most cordially
Yours.

L E T.