

*A VINDICATION OF THE PROTESTANT DOCTRINE CONCERNING
JUSTIFICATION, AND OF ITS PREACHERS AND PROFESSORS, FROM
THE UNJUST CHARGE OF ANTINOMIANISM.*

IN A LETTER FROM THE AUTHOR TO A MINISTER IN THE COUNTRY.

by
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ca. 1692

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*Modernized, formatted, and annotated (in blue)
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YOUR earnest desire for information about some difference among Nonconformists¹ in London, of which you hear so much by flying reports, and profess you know so little about the truth of it, is the cause of this writing.

You know that not many months ago there was fair-like appearance of unity between the two most considerable parties on that side; and their differences having been rather in practice than principle, about church-order and communion, seemed easily reconcilable where a spirit of love, and of a sound mind, was at work. But how short was the calm! For quickly arose a greater storm from another quarter; and a quarrel began upon higher points, even on no less than the doctrine of *the grace of God in Jesus Christ*, and the *justification of a sinner by faith alone*. Some think that the re-printing of Dr. Crisp's book² gave the first rise to it. But we must look further back for its true spring. It is well known, but little considered, what a great progress Arminianism had made in this nation before the beginning of the civil war.³ And surely it has lost little since it ended. What can be the reason why the very parliaments in the reign of James I. and Charles I. were so alarmed with Arminianism, as may be read in history, and is remembered by old men; and that now for a long time there has been no talk no fear of it? It is as if Arminianism were dead and buried, and no man knows where its grave is. Is not the true reason to be found in its universal prevailing in the nation?

But that which concerns our case, is that the middle way between the Arminians and the Orthodox had been espoused, and strenuously defended, and promoted by some Nonconformists of great note for piety and parts; and usually such men that are for middle ways in points of doctrine, have a greater kindness for that extreme they go half-way to, than for that which they go half-way from. And the notions of it were imbibed by a great many students, who laboured (through the iniquity of the times) under the great disadvantage of the lack of grave and sound divines to direct and assist their studies at universities; and therefore they contented

¹ Nonconformist, also called Dissenter, or Free Churchman: any English Protestant who does not conform to the doctrines or practices of the established Church of England. The word Nonconformist was first used in the penal acts following the Restoration of the monarchy (1660) and the *Act of Uniformity* (1662) to describe the conventicles (places of worship) of the congregations that had separated from the Church of England (Separatists). Nonconformists are also called *dissenters* (a word first used of the five Dissenting Brethren at the Westminster Assembly of Divines in 1643–47). Because of the movement begun in the late 19th century by which Nonconformists of different denominations joined together in the Free Church Federal Council, they are also called Free Churchmen. *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

² Tobias Crisp (1600-1643); his works (sermons) were reprinted about this time.

³ There were actually three civil wars in England, armed conflicts in 1642-46; 1648-49; and 1649-51. This was the age of Cromwell, as the Parliamentarians fought against the Royalists, to obtain a voice in their government.

themselves with studying such English authors as had gone in a path untrod, both by our predecessors, and by the Protestant universities abroad.

These notions have been preached and written against by several divines among themselves; and the different opinions have been, till of late, managed with some moderation; to which our being all borne down by persecution, somewhat contributed.

It is a sad but true observation, that no contentions are more easily kindled, more fiercely pursued, and more hardly composed, than those of divines — sometimes from their zeal for truth, and sometimes from worse principles, that may act in them, as well as in other men.

The subject of the controversy is about the justifying grace of God in Jesus Christ. It is owned by both; and both fear it will be abused: either by turning it into wantonness — hence the noise about Antinomianism; or by corrupting it with the mixture of works — hence the fears on the other side, about Arminianism. Both parties disown the name cast upon them. The one will not be called Arminians: and the other hates both the name and the thing of Antinomianism truly so-called. Both sometimes say the same thing, and profess their assent to the doctrinal articles of the Church of England, to the Confession of Faith and Catechisms composed at Westminster, and to the Harmony of the Confessions of all the reformed churches, in these doctrines of grace. And, if both are candid in this profession, it is very strange that there should be any controversy among them.

Let us therefore, first, take a view of the parties themselves, and then of their principles. As to the party suspected of Antinomianism and Libertinism in this city, it is plain that the churches in which they are concerned, are more strict and exact in testing those who offer themselves to their communion (as to their faith and holiness) before admitting them; in the engagements laid on them at their admission, as to gospel-walking; and in their oversight of them afterwards. As to their conversations,¹ they are generally of the more regular and exact frame; and the fruits of holiness in their lives, to the praise of God and honour of the gospel, cannot with modesty be denied. Is it not inexplicable to charge a people with licentiousness, when the chargers cannot deny, and some cannot well bear, the strictness of their walk? It is commonly said that it is only their *principles*, and their *tendency* to loose-walking, that they blame. But waving that at present, it does not seem fair to charge a people with licentious *doctrines*, when those who profess those doctrines are approved of for their godliness; and when they sincerely profess that their godliness began with, and is promoted by, the faith of their principles.

Let it not be mistaken, if I make a comparison between Papists and Protestants here. The latter always professed the doctrine of justification by faith alone. This was blasphemy in the Papist's ears. They still did, and do, cry out against it as a licentious doctrine, and destructive of good works. Many sufficient answers have been given to this unjust charge. But to my purpose: The wonder was that the Papists were not convinced by the splendid holiness of the old believers, and by the visible truth of their holy practice; and their professing that as long as they lived in the blindness and darkness of popery, they were profane; and that as soon as God revealed the gospel to them, and had wrought in them the faith of it, they were sanctified, and led other lives. So witnessed the noble Lord Cobham, who suffered in King Henry V.'s time, more than a hundred years before Luther. His words at his examination before the Archbishop of Canterbury and his clergy were these:

“As for that virtuous man Wickliff (for he was charged with Wickliff's doctrine), whose judgment you so highly disdain; I shall say on my part, both before God and man, that before I knew that despised doctrine of his, I never abstained from sin; but since I learned in

¹ Not speech as much as their outward conduct among others.

it to fear my Lord God, it has otherwise, I trust, been with me. I could never find so much grace in all your glorious instructions.”¹

And since I am on that excellent book, I entreat you to read Mr. Patrick Hamilton’s little treatise, to which Frith prefaces, and Fox adds some explication (vol. ii. p. 181-192), where you will find the old plain Protestant truth about Law and Gospel, delivered without any school-terms. To this add, in your reading, in the same volume (p. 497-509), “Heresies and errors falsely charged on Tindal’s writings”, where we will see the old faith of the saints in its simplicity, and the old craft and cunning of the Anti-Christian party in slandering the truth. I must, for my part, confess that these plain declarations of gospel-truth have quite another favour with me, than the dry insipid accounts of it given by pretenders to human wisdom.

But passing by these things, let us look to principles, and do that with respect to their native and regular influence on sanctification. And I am willing that *that* should determine the matter, next to the consonancy of the principles themselves to the word of God. It can be no doctrine of God, that is not according to godliness. Some think that if good works, and holiness, and repentance, are allowed no place in justification, that there is no place left for them in the world, and in the practice of believers. So hard it seems to be to some, to keep in their eye the certain fixed bounds between *justification* and *sanctification*. There is no difference between a justified man and a sanctified man; for he is always the same person that partakes of these privileges. But justification and sanctification differ *greatly*, in *many* respects — as is commonly known. But to come a little closer:

The party here suspected of Antinomianism, confidently protests before God, angels, and men, that they espouse no new doctrine about the grace of God and justification and the other coincident points, except what the reformers at home and abroad taught, and all the Protestant churches own. And that in sum is this:

“That a law-condemned sinner is freely justified by God’s grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ; that he is justified only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to him by God of his free grace, and received by faith alone as an instrument; which faith is the gift of the same grace.”

For guarding against licentiousness, they constantly teach out of God’s word,

“That without holiness no man can see God: That all who believe truly on Jesus Christ, as they are justified by the sprinkling of his blood, so are they sanctified by the effusion of his Spirit: That all who boast of their faith in Christ, and yet live after their own lusts, and the course of this world, have no true faith at all; but do, in their profession, and contradicting practice, blaspheme the name of God, and the doctrine of his grace; and continuing so, they shall perish with a double-destruction, beyond that of the openly profane who make no profession.”

And when they find any such persons in their communion (which is exceedingly rare), they cast them out as dead branches. They teach,

“That as the daily study of sanctification is a necessary exercise to all that are in Christ; so the rule of their direction in it, is the holy spotless law of God in Christ’s hand: That the Holy Ghost is the beginner and advancer of this work, and faith in Jesus Christ the great mean of it: That no man can be holy till he be in Christ, and united to him by faith; and that no man is truly in Christ, that is not thereby sanctified. They preach the law to condemn all flesh out of Christ, and to show people thereby the necessity of taking themselves to him for salvation.”

¹ Fox’s *Book of Martyrs*, vol. i. p. 640, col. 2. edit. 1664

See the savoury words of blessed Tindal,¹ called the apostle of England, in his letter to John Frith, written Jan. 1533,

“Expound the law truly, and open the veil of Moses, to condemn all flesh and prove all men sinners, and that all deeds under the law, before mercy has taken away its condemnation, is sin and damnable; and then as a faithful minister, set abroad the mercy of our Lord Jesus, and let the wounded consciences drink of the water of him. And then your preaching shall be with power, and not as the hypocrites. And the Spirit of God shall work with you; and all consciences shall bear record unto you, and feel that it is so. And all doctrine that casts a mist on these two, to shadow and hide them — I mean the law of God, and the mercy of Christ — you resist that [doctrine] with all your power.”²

And so do we. What is there in all this to be offended with? Is not this enough to vindicate our doctrine from any tendency to licentiousness? I am afraid that there are some things in which we differ more than they think fit yet to express. And I shall guess at them.

1. The first is about the imputed righteousness of Christ. This righteousness of Christ, in his active and passive obedience, has been asserted by Protestant divines to be not only the procuring and meritorious *cause* of our justification (for this the Papists own), but also the *matter*, as the imputation of it is the form of our justification — though I think our logical terms are not so adapted for such divine mysteries. But whatever propriety or impropriety there is in such school terms, the common Protestant doctrine has been that, a convinced sinner seeking justification must have his eye on nothing but this righteousness of Christ (as God proposes nothing else to him); and that God in justifying a sinner, accepts him *in this righteousness only*, when he imputes it to him.

Now, about the imputed righteousness of Christ some say that,

“It belongs only to the person of Christ: he was under the law, and bound to keep it for *himself*, so that he might be a fit Mediator without spot or blemish. It is a *qualification* in the Mediator, rather than a *benefit* acquired by him to be communicated to his people.”

For they will not allow “this personal righteousness of Christ to be imputed to us any other way than in the merit of it, as purchasing for us an easier law of grace;” they place all our justifying righteousness in the observation of this law of grace. Thus, what they understand by this *justifying righteousness* is, “our own personal inherent holiness, and nothing else.” They hold that,

“Christ died to merit this from the Father; namely, that we might be justified upon easier terms under the gospel, than those terms of the law of innocency. Instead of justification by *perfect obedience*, we are now to be justified by our own *evangelical righteousness*, made up of faith, repentance, and sincere obedience.”

And if we do not hold with them in this, they tell the world we are enemies to evangelical holiness, slighting the practice of all good works, and allowing our hearers to live as they are inclined. Thus they slander the preachers of free grace, because we do not place justification in our own *inherent* holiness, but in Christ’s *perfect* righteousness, *imputed* to us upon our believing in him. This faith, we teach, purifies the heart, and always inclines us to holiness of life. Nor do we hold any faith to be true and saving that does not show itself by good works, without which no man is or can be justified, either in his own conscience, or before men. But it does not follow from this that we cannot be justified in the sight of God by *faith only* — because the apostle Paul asserts the latter, and the apostle James the former, both in good agreement.

¹ William Tyndale (1490-1536).

² Book of Martyrs, vol. ii. p. 308.

2. The second is about the nature of justifying faith. There appears to be some difference, or misunderstanding of one another, about the true notion and nature of justifying faith. Divines commonly distinguish between the *direct act of faith*, and the *reflex act*. Properly speaking, the *direct act* is justifying and saving faith, by which a lost sinner comes to Christ and relies upon him for salvation. The *reflex act* is the soul looking back upon a *former* act of faith. A rational creature can reflect upon his own acts, whether they are acts of reason, faith, or unbelief.

A *direct act* of saving faith is that by which a lost sinner goes out of himself to Christ for help, relying upon him only for salvation. A *reflex act* arises from the sense that faith gives of its own inward act, upon a serious review. The truth and sincerity of this sense is further cleared up to the conscience, by the genuine fruits of an unfeigned faith, appearing to all men in our good lives and holy conversation. As plain as these things may be, yet we find we are frequently mistaken by others — and we wonder at the mistake; for we dare not ascribe to some learned and good men the principles of ignorance, or wilfulness, from which mistakes in plain cases usually proceed. When we do press sinners to come to Christ by a *direct act* of faith, consisting in a humble reliance upon Him for mercy and pardon, they will understand us, whether we would have it or not, to mean a *reflex act* of faith, by which a man knows and believes that his sins are pardoned and that Christ is his — when they might easily know that we mean no such thing. Mr. Walter Marshall, in his excellent book, recently published,¹ has largely clarified this, and the true controversy of this day, though it is eight or nine years since he died.

3. The third is about the place that faith has in justification. We seem to differ about the interest, room, and place that faith has in justification. It is so plainly a New Testament truth that we are justified by faith in Jesus Christ, that no man pretending ever so barely to the Christian name, denies it. The Papists own it; and the Socinians and Arminians; all own it. But how different are their *senses* of it! And indeed you cannot more speedily and certainly judge the spirit of a man, than by his real inward sense of this phrase, (if you could reach it): *A sinner is justified by faith in Jesus Christ*. Some say that faith in Jesus Christ justifies as a work, by the *to credere*,² as if it took the place of perfect obedience required by the law. Some say that faith justifies as it is informed and animated by *charity*. So the Papists say, who plainly confound justification and sanctification. Some say that faith justifies as it is a fulfilling of the condition of the new covenant, “If you believe, you shall be saved.”³ No, they will not stop there, but they would have this faith justify because it has a principle and fitness in it that disposes us to sincere obedience. The plain old Protestant doctrine is that the place of faith in justification is only that of a hand or instrument receiving the righteousness of Christ, for which only are we justified. So that although great scholars often confound themselves and others in their disputations about faith’s justifying a sinner, every poor plain believer has the marrow of this mystery feeding his heart; and he can readily tell you that to be justified by faith, is to be justified by Christ’s righteousness, apprehended by faith.

4. The fourth is about the Two Adams. We seem to misunderstand one another about the two Adams, and especially the latter. (See Rom. 5:12 to the end.) In that excellent scripture a comparison is instituted, which if we duly understood and agreed in, we would not readily differ in the main things of the gospel. The apostle there tell us that the first Adam stood in the place of all his natural posterity. He had their stock in his hand. While he stood, they stood in him; and when he fell, they fell with him. By his fall he derived sin and death to all those who spring from him by natural generation. This is the sad side. But he tells us in opposition to this, and

¹ Walter Marshall (1628-1680), *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification* was first published 1692.

² That is, faith operates in such a way that it *earns* or *merits* salvation.

³ Thus making salvation *conditioned* on faith, as if faith were something to conclude a transaction.

comparing with it, that Christ — the second man — is the new head of the redeemed world. He stands in their place. His obedience is theirs; and he justly communicates to his spiritual offspring the contrary to what the first sinful Adam does to his natural offspring: righteousness instead of guilt and sin, life instead of death, justification instead of condemnation, and eternal life instead of hell deserved. So that I think the 3^d, 4th, and 5th chapters of the epistle to the Romans deserve our deep study for the mystery of justification; and the 6th, 7th, and 8th chapters for the mystery of sanctification. But what do others say about Christ's being the second Adam? We find them unwilling to speak of it; and when they do, it is quite alien from the scope of the apostle in that chapter. Thus they seem to say to us that,

“As a rector, ruler, and governor, God has resolved to save men by Jesus Christ. The rule of this government is the gospel, as a new law of grace. Jesus Christ is set at the head of this rectoral government. In that state he sits in glory, ready and able, out of his purchase and merits, to give justification and eternal life to all that can bring good evidence of their having complied with the terms and conditions of the law of grace.”

Thus they antedate the Last Day, and present Christ as a Judge, rather than a Saviour. Luther was in the habit of warning people of this distinction frequently in his commentary on the epistle to the Galatians. And we find some are not willing to allow any other headship to Christ except what belongs to his kingly office. As for his suretyship, and being the second Adam, and a public person, some treat it with contempt. I have heard that Dr. Thomas Goodwin was an Arminian in his youth, or at least inclining that way; but he was by the Lord's grace brought off that by Dr. Sibbs¹ clearing up this same point to him, of Christ's being the head and representative of all his people. Now, though we maintain stedfastly this headship of Jesus Christ, yet we do not say that there is an actual partaking of his fulness of grace till we are in him by faith; though this faith is also given to us on Christ's behalf (Phil. 1:29),² and we believe that is through grace (Acts 18:27).³ And we know no grace, we can call nothing grace, we care for no grace, except what comes from this head, the Saviour of the body. But so much shall serve to point out the main things of difference and mistakes.

Is it not a little provoking that some are so captious⁴ that no minister can preach in the hearing of some, “of the freedom of God's grace; of the imputation of Christ's righteousness; of sole and single believing on him for righteousness and eternal life; of the impossibility of a natural man's doing any good work before he is in Christ; of the impossibility of mixing a man's righteousness and works, with Christ's righteousness, in the business of justification; and several other points,” without immediately being called or suspected of being an Antinomian? If we say that faith in Jesus Christ is neither a work, condition, or qualification in justification, but is a mere *instrument*, receiving (as an empty hand receives the freely given alms) the righteousness of Christ; and that, in its very act, it is a renouncing of all things but the *gift* of grace: the fire is kindled. So that it has come to what Mr. Christopher Fowler said, “that he that will not be Antichristian must be called an Antinomian.”⁵ Is there a minister in London who did not preach, some twenty, some thirty years ago, according to their standing, that same doctrine now called Antinomian by some? Do not let Dr. Crisp's book be looked upon as the standard of our doctrine. There are many good things in it, and also many expressions in it that we generally

¹ Richard Sibbes (1577-1635); Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680).

² **Phil 1:29** For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake;

³ **Acts 18:27** And when he desired to cross to Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him; and when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace;

⁴ Tending to find and call attention to faults.

⁵ Christopher Fowler (1610?–1678) was an English ejected minister.

dislike. It is true that Mr. Burgess and Mr. Rutherford¹ wrote against Antinomianism, and against some that were both Antinomians *and* Arminians. And it is no less true that they wrote against the Arminians, and hated the new scheme of divinity so much now contended for, and to which we owe all our present contentions. I am persuaded, that if these godly and sound divines were on the present stage, they would be as ready to draw their pens against two books lately printed against Dr. Crisp, as ever they were ready to write against the doctor's book. Truth is to be defended by truth; but error is often and unhappily opposed by error under truth's name.

But what shall we do in this case? What shall we do for peace with our brethren? Shall we lie still under their undeserved reproaches, and for keeping the peace, silently allow others to beat us unjustly? If it were our own personal concern, we should bear it: if it were only their charging us with ignorance, weakness, and being unstudied divines (terms they have liberally used to call all that have not learned, and dare not believe their new divinity), we might easily pass it by, or put up with it. But can we be silent when we see the pure gospel of Christ corrupted, and an Arminian gospel newly vamped and obtruded on people, to the certain peril of the souls of those who believe it? And when our ministry is reflected on, which should be dearer to us than our lives? As we have a charge from the Lord to deliver to our people what we have received from him, as he calls and enables us, we are not to give way by subjection, not for an hour, to those who creep in not only to spy out, but to destroy not so much the gospel-*liberty* as the gospel-*salvation* we have in Christ Jesus, and to bring us back under the yoke of legal bondage. And indeed, the ease in that epistle to the Galatians and ours has a great affinity.²

Is it desired that we should forbear to make a free offer of God's grace in Christ to the worst of sinners? This cannot be granted by us, for this is the gospel "faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation" (and therefore worthy of all our preaching of it), "that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, and the chief of them," (1 Tim. 1:15). This was the apostolic practice, according to their Lord's command (Mark 16:15, 16; Luke 24:47). They began at Jerusalem, where the Lord of life was wickedly slain by them; and yet life in and through his blood was offered to, and accepted and obtained by, many of them. Every believer's experience witnesses to this, that every one that believes on Jesus Christ acts that faith as the chief of sinners. Every man that sees himself rightly thinks so of himself, and does not think amiss in that. God only knows who is truly the greatest sinner, and every humbled sinner will think that he is the man.

Shall we tell men, that unless they are holy, they must not believe on Jesus Christ? that they must not venture on Christ for salvation till they are qualified and fit to be received and welcomed by him? This would be to forbear preaching the gospel at all, or to forbid all men to believe on Christ. For never was any sinner qualified for Christ. He is well qualified for us (1 Cor. 1:30); but a sinner out of Christ has no qualification for Christ but sin and misery. Where should we have any better, but in and from Christ? No, suppose an impossibility — that a man were qualified for Christ; I boldly assert that such a man would not, nor could he ever believe on Christ, — for faith is a lost, helpless, condemned sinner's casting himself on Christ for salvation; and the qualified man is no such person.

Shall we warn people that they should not believe on Christ too soon? It is impossible that they should do it too soon. Can a man obey the great gospel-command too soon? (1 John 3:23), or do the great work of God too soon? (John 6:28, 29). A man may too soon think that he is in Christ, and that is when it is not so indeed; and this we frequently teach. But this is but an idle dream, and not faith. A man may too soon fancy that he has faith; but I hope he cannot act faith too soon. If any should say, a man may be holy too soon, how would that saying be reflected upon?

¹ Anthony Burgess, D.D. (1600-1663); Samuel Rutherford (c.1600-1661); both were commissioners to the Westminster Assembly.

² A great attraction for us.

And yet it is certain that, though no man can be holy too soon (because he cannot believe on Christ too soon, which is the only spring of true holiness), yet he may, and many do, set about the study of what he considers holiness too soon; that is, before “the tree is changed,” (Matt. 12:33, 34, 35); before he has “the new heart,” (Ezek. 36:26, 27), and the “Spirit of God dwelling in him,” which is only gotten by faith in Christ (Gal. 3:14); and therefore all this man’s studying of holiness is not only labouring in vain, but acting out of sin. And if this study, and these endeavours, are managed as they commonly are, to obtain justification before God, then they are the more wicked works still. And because this point is needful to be known, I would give you some testimonies for it. Doctrine of the Church of England, in her thirty-nine articles, Art. 13,

“Works done before the grace of Christ, and the inspiration of his Spirit, are not pleasant to God; forasmuch as they do not spring from faith in Jesus Christ; neither do they make men fit to receive grace, or (as the school-authors say) deserve grace from congruity. Indeed rather, because they are not done as God has willed and commanded them to be done, we do not doubt that they have the nature of sin.”

So the Confession of Faith reads, chap. 16, art. 7. Calvin. *Instit.* lib. 3, cap. 15, sect. 6, —

“They (says he, speaking of the Popish schoolmen) have found out that I do not know what moral good works there are, whereby men are made acceptable to God before they are ingrafted into Christ. It is as if the scripture lied when it said, ‘They are all in death who do not have the Son,’ (1 John 5:12). If they are in death, then how can they generate matter of life? It is as if it were of no force, ‘Whatever is not of faith is sin;’ or as if ‘evil trees could bring forth good fruit.’”

Read the rest of that section. On the contrary, the Council of Trent, sess. 6, canon 7, says boldly,

“Whoever says that all works done before justification, however they are done, are truly sin and deserve the hatred of God, let him be anathema.”

And to give you one more bellowing of the beast, wounded by the light of the gospel, see the same Council, sess. 6, canon 11, “*Si quis dixerit, Gratiam qua justificamur, esse tantum favorem Dei, anathema sit.*”¹ This is fearful blasphemy, says Dr. Downham, bishop of Londonderry, in his orthodox book of justification, lib. 3, cap. 1, where he says that,

“the Hebrew words which in the Old Testament ‘signify the grace of God,’ always signify ‘favour,’ and never ‘inherent grace.’ And above fifty testimonies may be brought from the New Testament, to prove that by ‘God’s grace’ his ‘favour’ is still meant.”

But what was good Church of England doctrine at and after the Reformation, cannot now go down with some Arminianizing nonconformists.²

If, then, nothing will satisfy our quarrelling brethren but either silence as to the main points of the gospel which we believe, and live by the faith of, and look to be saved in, — which we have preached for many years with some seals of the Holy Ghost in converting sinners unto God, and in building them up in holiness and comfort, by the faith and power of them, — which we also vowed to the Lord to preach to all that will hear us, as long as we live, in the day when we gave ourselves up to serve God with our spirit in the gospel of his Son: if either this silence, or the swallowing of Arminian schemes of the gospel, contrary to the New Testament, and unknown to the reformed churches in their greatest purity, are the only terms of peace with our brethren, then we must maintain our peace with God and our own consciences, in defence of the plain gospel truth, and maintain our harmony with the reformed churches, and in the comfort of

¹ If any one says that grace whereby we are justified, is only the favor of God, let him be anathema.

² That is, they cannot now swallow it, or cannot accept it.

these, bear their enmity. And though it is usual with them to vilify and contemn those who differ from them for their fewness, weakness, and lack of learning, yet they might know that the most learned and godly in the Christian world have maintained and defended the same doctrine we stand for, for some ages. The grace of God will never lack, for it can and will furnish defenders of it. England has been blessed with a Bradwardine, an Archbishop of Canterbury, against the Pelagians; a Twiss and Ames against the Arminians. And although those who contend with us would separate their cause altogether from that of these two pests of the Church of Christ, I mean Pelagius and Arminius, yet judicious observers cannot but already perceive a coincidence, and fear more, when either the force of argument drives them out of their lurking-holes, or when they think it fit to discover their secret sentiments, which we still only guess at. Then, as we shall know better what they would be at, so it is very likely that they will then find enemies in many whom they have seduced by their craft, and yet seem to be in their camp; and will meet with opposers, both at home and abroad, that they do not think of.

Our doctrine of the justification of a sinner by the free grace of God in Jesus Christ, however it is misrepresented and reflected upon, is yet undeniably recommended by four things.

1. It is a doctrine savoury and precious to all serious godly persons. Dr. Ames's observation holds good as to all the Arminian divinity, that it is *contra communem sensum fidelium*; "against the common sense of believers." And though this is an argument of little weight with those who value more the judgment of the scribes, and the wise, and disputers of this world, (1 Cor. 1:18, 19, 20, 21), than of all the godly — yet the Spirit of God by John gives us this same argument,

"They are of the world; therefore they speak of the world, and the world hears them. We are of God: he that knows God hears us; he that is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error;" (1 John 4:5, 6).

How evident is it that several who, by education or an unsound ministry — having had their natural enmity against the grace of God strengthened when the Lord by his Spirit has broken in upon their hearts, and raised a serious soul-exercise about their salvation — that their turning to God in Christ, and their turning from Arminianism, have begun together? And some of the greatest champions for the grace of God have been persons thus dealt with, as we might instance. And as it is thus with men at their conversion, so is it found afterward that as it is still well with them in their inner man, so does the doctrine of grace still appear more precious and savoury. On the other part, all the ungodly and unrenewed have a dislike and disrelish of this doctrine, and they are all for the doctrine of doing, and love to hear it; and in their sorry exercise, they are still for doing their own business in salvation — though they are nothing, and can do nothing, but sin, and destroy themselves.

2. It is that doctrine only, by which a convinced sinner can be dealt with effectually. When a man is awakened, and brought to that which all must be brought to, or to worse: "What shall I do to be saved?" we have the apostolic answer to it: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved, and your house;" (Acts 16:30, 31). This answer is so old, that with many it seems out of date. But it is still, and it will ever be, fresh, and new, and savoury; and it is the only resolution of this grand case of conscience, as long as conscience and the world lasts. No wit or art of man will ever find a crack or flaw in it, or devise another or a better answer; nor can anything but this alone rightly heal the wound of an awakened conscience. Let us set this man to seek resolution in this case, from some masters in our Israel. According to their principles, they must say to him, "Repent, and mourn for your known sins, and leave them and loathe them, and God will have mercy on you." "Alas! (says the poor man) my heart is hard, and I cannot repent rightly; indeed, I find my heart harder and more vile than when I was secure in sin." If you speak to this man of qualifications for Christ, he knows nothing of them; if you speak of sincere obedience, his answer is native and ready, "Obedience is the work of a living man, and sincerity is only in a renewed soul." Sincere obedience is therefore as impossible to a dead unrenewed sinner, as

perfect obedience is. Why should not the right answer be given, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved?”

Tell him what Christ is, what he has done and suffered to obtain eternal redemption for sinners, and that according to the will of God and his Father. Give him a plain downright narrative of the gospel-salvation wrought out by the Son of God; tell him the history and mystery of the gospel plainly. It may be that the Holy Ghost will work faith thereby, as he did in those first-fruits of the Gentiles, (Acts 10:41). If he asks what warrant he has to believe on Jesus Christ? tell him that he has an utter indispensable necessity for it; for without believing on Christ he must perish eternally; that he has God’s gracious offer of Christ and all his redemption, with a promise that upon accepting the offer by faith, Christ and salvation with him, is his; tell him that he has God’s express commandment to believe on Christ’s name (1 John 3:23); and that he should be conscientious to obey it as well as any command in the moral law. Tell him of Christ’s ability and good-will to save; that no man was ever rejected by him that cast himself upon him; that desperate cases are the glorious triumphs of his art of saving. Tell him that there is no midst between faith and unbelief; that there is no excuse for neglecting the one, and continuing in the other; that believing on the Lord Jesus for salvation is more pleasing to God than all obedience to his law; and that of all sins, unbelief is the most provoking to God, and the most damning to man.

Against the greatness of his sins, the curse of the law, and the severity of God as Judge, there is no relief to be held forth to him but the free and boundless grace of God in the merit of Christ’s satisfaction by the sacrifice of himself. If he should say, What is it to believe on Jesus Christ? As to this, I find no such question in the word; but all did in some way understand the notion of it: the Jews that did not believe on him (John 6:28, 29, 30); the chief priests and Pharisees (John 7:48); the blind man (John 9:35). When Christ asked him, “Do you believe on the Son of God?” he answered, “Who is he, Lord, that I may believe on him?” Immediately, when Christ had told him (ver. 37), he does not ask, What does it mean to believe on him? but, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshipped him; and so he both *professed* and *acted* faith in him. So did the father of the lunatic (Mark 9:23, 24); and the eunuch (Acts 8:37). They all, both Christ’s enemies and his disciples, knew that faith in him was believing that the man Jesus of Nazareth was the Sort of God, the Messiah, and Saviour of the world, so as to receive and look for salvation in his name (Acts 4:12). This was the common report published by Christ and his apostles and disciples, and known by all that heard it. If he still asks *what* he is to believe, then you tell him that he is not called to believe that he is in Christ, and that his sins are pardoned, and he a justified man, but that he is to believe God’s record concerning Christ; and “this record is, that God gives (that is, offers) to us eternal life in his Son Jesus Christ,” (1 John 5:10, 11, 12); and that all who with the heart believe this report, and rest their souls on these glad tidings, shall be saved, (Rom. 10:9, 10, 11). And thus he is to “believe, that he may be justified,” (Gal. 2:16).

If he still says that this believing is hard, this is a good doubt, but easily resolved. It speaks of a man deeply humbled. Any body may see his own impotence to obey the law of God fully; but few find the difficulty of believing. For his resolution, ask him what it is that he finds difficult for him to believe? Is it his unwillingness to be justified and saved? Is it his unwillingness to be so saved by Jesus Christ, to the praise of God’s grace in him, and to the voiding of all boasting in himself? This he will surely deny. Is it a distrust of the truth of the gospel-record? This he dare not admit. Is it a doubt of Christ’s ability or good-will to save? This is to contradict the testimony of God in the gospel. Is it because he doubts he has an interest in Christ and his redemption? You tell him that believing on Christ makes up the interest in him. If he says that he cannot believe on Jesus Christ, because of the difficulty of acting this faith, and that a divine power is needful to draw it forth, which he does not find, then you tell him, that believing in Jesus Christ is no work, but a resting on Jesus Christ; and this pretence is as unreasonable as if a man who is wearied by a journey, and not able to go one step further, were to argue, “I am so tired that I am

not able to lie down” — when indeed he can neither stand nor go. The poor wearied sinner can never believe on Jesus Christ till he finds he can do nothing for himself; and in his first believing he always applies himself to Christ for salvation, as a man who is hopeless and helpless in himself. And by such reasonings with him from the gospel, the Lord will (as he has often done) convey faith, and joy, and peace, by believing.

3. This doctrine of *free justification by faith alone* has this advantage: it suits all men’s spirits and frame in their serious approaches to God in worship. Men may think and talk boldly of *inherent righteousness*, and of its worth and value; of good works, and frames, and dispositions: but when men present themselves before the Lord, and have any discoveries of his glory, all things in themselves will disappear, and be looked upon as nothing. Zophar, though the hottest speaker of Job’s friends, yet spoke rightly to him, “For you have said, My doctrine is pure, and I am clean in your eyes. But, Oh that God would speak!” (Job 11:4, 5). And so Job found it, when God displayed his glory to him, and only in the works of creation and providence (chap. 38, 39). He then changed his tune (Job 40:4, 5, and 42:2-6). So it was with Isaiah (chap 6:5),¹ till pardoning grace was imparted to him.² No man can stand before this holy Lord God, with any peace and comfort, unless he has God himself to stay upon. His grace and mercy in Jesus Christ only, can preserve a man from being consumed, and the faith of it from being confounded. Hence we see the difference between men’s frame in their disputes and doctrine about these points, and their own sense and pleadings with God in prayer.

4. This doctrine of *justification by faith*, without any mixtures of man (however and by whatever names and titles they may be dignified or distinguished by), has this undoubted advantage: it is that which all who are not judicially hardened and blinded either [plead], or would or must resort to when dying. How loath would men be to plead that cause on a deathbed, which they so stoutly stand up for with tongue and pen, when they are at ease, and when that evil day is far away? They seem to be jealous, lest in the business of justification, God’s grace and Christ’s righteousness have too much place, and men’s works too little. But was there ever a sensible dying person who was exercised with this jealousy as to himself? Even bloody Stephen Gardiner,³ when dying, could answer Dr. Day, Bishop of Chichester, who offered comfort to him by this doctrine,

“What, my Lord, will you open that gap now? Then, farewell altogether. To me, and such others in my case, you may speak it; but open this window to the people, then farewell altogether.”⁴

In these words, he bewrayed⁵ a conviction of the fitness of the doctrine to dying persons, and his knowledge that it tended to the destruction of the kingdom of Antichrist. As Fox, in the same Book of Martyrs, (vol. ii. p. 46), gives this as the reason for Luther’s success against Popery, above all former attempts of preceding witnesses.

“But (he says) Luther gave the stroke, and plucked down the foundation, and all by opening one vein, long hidden before, in which lies the touchstone of all truth and doctrine, as the

¹ **Isaiah 6:5** So I said: "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I *am* a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The LORD of hosts."

² **Isa 6:6-7** Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal *which* he had taken with the tongs from the altar. ⁷ And he touched my mouth *with it*, and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; Your iniquity is taken away, And your sin purged."

³ Stephen Gardiner (c. 1483-1555) was an English Roman Catholic bishop and politician during the English Reformation period, who served as Lord Chancellor during the reign of “Bloody” Queen Mary I of England.

⁴ Book of Martyrs, vol. iii. p. 450.

⁵ Revealed unintentionally.

only principal origin of our salvation; which is our free justification, by faith only, in Christ the Son of God.”

Consider how it is with the most holy and eminent saints when dying. Did you ever see or hear any of them boasting of their works and performances? They may and do admit to the praise of his grace, what they have been *made* to be, what they have been *helped* to do or suffer for Christ’s sake. But when they draw near to the awful tribunal, what else is in their eye and heart, but only free grace, ransoming blood, and a well-ordered covenant in Christ the Surety? They cannot bear to hear any make mention to them of their holiness, their own grace and attainments. In a word, the doctrine of conditions, qualifications, and rectoral government, and the distribution of rewards and punishments according to the new law of grace, will make but an uneasy bed to a dying man’s conscience; and it will leave him in a very bad condition at present, and in dread of worse when he is feeling in his last agonies, that the wages of sin is death, if he cannot by faith add, “But the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord,” (Rom. 6:23). He is a wise and happy man that anchors his soul on that rock, at which he can ride out the storm of death.

Why should men contend for that in their life, that they know they must renounce at their death? Or why neglect that truth now, that they must resort to then? Why should a man build a house which he must leave in a storm, or be buried in its ruins? Many architects have attempted to make a sure house of their own righteousness; but it is without a foundation; and it must fall, or be thrown down sorrowfully by the foolish builder — which is the better way. It is a great test of the truth of the doctrine about the way of salvation, when it is generally approved of by sensible dying men. And it is obvious to any man what the universal sense of all such men in this case is, as to the righteousness of Christ, and their own righteousness. He was an ingenuous Balaamite, who being himself a Papist, said to a Protestant, “Our religion is best to live in; yours is best to die in.”

But notwithstanding these great advantages (and they are but a few of many) that this doctrine is attended with, there are not a few disadvantages under which it labours; though they are to its commendation rather than reproach, yet they do hinder its welcome and its reception. Such as,

1. This doctrine is a spiritual mystery, and it does not lie level to a natural understanding, (1Cor. 2:10, 14). *Working* for life, a man understands naturally; but *believing* for life, he does not understand. To mend the old man, he knows; but to put on the new man by faith, is a riddle to him. The study of holiness, and to endeavour to square his life according to God’s law, he knows a little about, though he can never do it; but to draw sanctification from Christ by faith, and to walk godly, in and through the force of the Spirit of Christ in the heart by faith, is mere canting to him. A new life he understands a little; but nothing of a new birth and regeneration, for he never saw himself stark dead. No, not only is it unknown to the natural man, but his natural state he is by an enemy to it. He neither does, nor can know it, nor approve of it (1 Cor. 2:14). “Wisdom (that is, Christ’s way of saving men revealed in the gospel) is justified by all her children,” and by them only (Matt. 11:19, Luke 7:29, 30, 35). This enmity in men toward the wisdom of God, is the cause not only of this contempt of its ministry, but is a temptation to many ministers to patch up and frame a gospel that is more suited to, and taking with, and more easily understood by such men, than the true gospel of Christ is. Paul complains of this in others, and vindicates himself from it (1 Cor. 1:17, and 2:2). He warns others against it (Col. 2:8; 2 Cor. 11:3, 4; Gal. 1:6, 7, 8, 9). And it is certain, that *doing* for life is more suited to a corrupt nature, than *believing* is.

2. Our opposers in this doctrine have many *for* them, and *against* us; as they of old boasted (John 7:48). They have no ground to glory in this, though they do; nor are we to be ashamed of the truth just because we cannot vie in numbers with them. With our opposers are all these sorts (and they make a great number); though I do not say or think that all our opposers are to be

ranked in any of these lists; for some, both godly and learned, may mistake us and the truth in this matter. 1. They have all the ignorant people who know nothing either of Law or Gospel. They serve God, they say, but most falsely; and they hope that God will be merciful to them, and save them. To all such men, both the clear explication of God's law, and the mysteries of the gospel, are strange things. Yet they love to hear of sincere obedience; for all of them think there is some sincerity in their hearts, and that they can obey somewhat. But they have no knowledge of faith in Christ; unless by faith you understand a dream of being saved by Jesus Christ, though they know nothing of him, or of his way of saving men, nor of the way of being saved by him. 2. All formalists are on their side; people that place their religion in trifles, because they are strangers to the substance of it. 3. All proud secure sinners are against us, that go about with the Jews "to establish their own righteousness" (Rom. 10:3). The secure are whole, and see no need of the physician; the proud have medicine at home, and despise that which came down from heaven. 4. All the zealous devout people in a natural religion, are utter enemies to the gospel. By a natural religion, I mean that which is the product of the remnants of God's image in fallen man, a little improved by the light of God's word. All such men cannot endure to hear that God's law must be perfectly fulfilled in every tittle of it, or no man can be saved by doing it; that they must all perish for ever, who do not have the righteousness of a man that never sinned, who is also God over all blessed for ever, to shelter and cover them from a holy God's anger, and to render them accepted by him — that his righteousness is put on by the grace of God, and a man must take himself to it, and receive it as a naked blushing sinner; that no man can do any thing that is good, till gospel-grace renews him, and makes him first a good man. This they will never receive, but still think that a man may *grow* good by *doing* good.

3. Natural reason is very fertile in its objections and cavils against the doctrine of the grace of God; and especially when this corrupt reason is polished by learning and strong natural parts. When there are many to broach such doctrine, and many so disposed to receive it, is it any wonder that the gospel-truth makes little progress in the world? No, were it not for the divine power that supports it, and the promises of its preservation, its enemies are so many and strong, and true friends so few and feeble, that we might fear its perishing from the earth. But we know it is impossible. And if the Lord has a design of mercy for these nations, and has a vein of his election to dig up among us, we have no doubt but that the glory of Christ, as a crucified Saviour, shall yet be displayed in the midst of us, to the joy of all that love his salvation, and to the shame of others (Isa. 66:5).

4. I might add the great declension of some of the reformed churches from the purity and simplicity of that doctrine they were first planted in. The new methodists about the grace of God, had too great an increase in the French churches. And, which was very strange, this declension advanced among them at the same time when Jansenism¹ was spreading among many of the church of Rome: so that a man might have seen Papists growing better in their doctrine, and Protestants growing worse.² What there is of this among us in England, I leave the reader to Mr. Jenkin's *Celeusma*, and to *the Naked Truth*, part 4. And if there is any warping toward Arminian doctrine by some on our side, in order to ingratiate themselves with that church that has the secular advantages to dispense, and to make way for some accommodation with them, I would rather wait in fear till a further discovery of it, than offer to guess at.

5. *Lastly*, It is no small disadvantage this doctrine lies under from the spirit of the day we live in. A light, frothy, trifling temper, prevails generally; doctrines of the greatest weight are talked of

¹ Cornelis Jansen (1585-1638) – This movement was primarily situated in France; it emphasized original sin, human depravity, the necessity of divine grace, and predestination; salvation is limited to those who are subject to supernatural determinism, and the rest are assigned to perdition. Jesuits coined the term "Jansenism" to identify them as having Calvinist affinities.

² See Mr. Gale's Idea of Jansenism, with Dr. Owen's preface.

and treated about, with a vain unconcerned frame of spirit—as if men contended about opinions and school-points, rather than about the oracles of God, and matters of faith. But if men’s hearts were seen by themselves; if sin were felt; if men’s consciences were enlivened; if God’s holy law were known in its exactness and severity, and the glory and majesty of the lawgiver shining before men’s eyes; if men were living as if leaving time, and launching forth into eternity, the gospel-salvation by Jesus Christ would be more regarded.

Object. 1. Is there not a great decay among professors in real practical godliness? Are we like the old Protestants, or the old Puritans? I answer, That the decay and degeneracy is great, and heavily to be bewailed. But what is the cause? And what will be its cure? Is it because the doctrine of morality, and virtue, and good works, is not preached enough? This cannot be: for there has been, for many years, a public ministry in the nation that makes these their constant themes. Yet the land has become as Sodom for all its lewdness; and the tree of profaneness has so grown, that the sword of the magistrate has not yet been able to lop off any of its branches. Is it because men have too much faith in Christ? Or too little? Or none at all? Would not faith in Christ increase holiness? Did it not always do so? And will it not still do it? Was not the holiness of the first Protestants eminent and shining? And yet they generally put assurance in the definition of their faith. We cannot say that gospel-holiness has prospered much by the correction or mitigation of that harsh-like definition. The certain spring of this prevailing wickedness in the land, is people’s ignorance and unbelief of the gospel of Christ; and that grows by many prophets who speak lies to them in the name of the Lord.

Object. 2. But do not some abuse the grace of the gospel, and turn it into wantonness? *Answer.* Yes; some do, ever did, and still will do so. But it is only the ill-understood and not believed doctrine of grace that they abuse. The grace itself, no man can abuse; for its power prevents its abuse. Let us see how Paul, that blessed herald of this grace (as he was an eminent instance of it) deals with this objection (Rom. 6:1). What does he do to prevent this abuse? Is it by extenuating what he had said in chap. 5:20, that “grace abounds much more, where sin has abounded?” Is it by mincing grace smaller, so that men may not choke upon it, or surfeit by it? Is it by mixing something of the law with it, to make it more wholesome? No: but only by plainly asserting the power and influence of this grace wherever it really is; as at length in that chapter. This grace is all treasured up in Christ Jesus, offered to all men in the gospel, poured forth by our Lord in the working of faith; and drunk in by the elect in the exercise of faith, and it becomes in them a living spring, which will and must break out and spring up in all holy conversation. He exhorts them to drink in more and more of this grace by faith. And as for those who pretend to grace, and live ungodly, the Spirit of God declares they are void of grace, which is always fruitful in good works, (2 Peter 2. and Jude’s epistle). The apostle orders the churches to cast them out (1 Cor. 5., 2 Tim. 3:5), and to declare to them as Peter did to a professor, that “they have no part nor portion in this matter, for their heart is not right in the sight of God,” (Acts 8:20, 21) — even though the doctrine is right, that they hypocritically profess.

But if our brethren will not forbear their charge of Antinomianism, we entreat them that they apply it justly. As,

1. On those who say that the sanction of the holy law of God is repealed, so that no man is now under it, either to be condemned for breaking it, or to be saved by keeping it, which to us is rank Antinomianism and Arminianism both; indeed, that the holy law of God does not now require perfect holiness. But indeed what can it require? For it is no law if its sanction is repealed.
2. Let the charge lie on those that are ungodly under the name of Christianity. And both they and we know where to find such true Antinomians in great abundance, who yet are never called by that name. And is it not somewhat strange, that men who have so much zeal against an Antinomian principle, have so much kindness for true Antinomians in practice?

3. Let him be called by this ugly name who does not judge that the holy law and word of God written in the Old and New Testament is a perfect rule of life to all believers, and does not say that all those should study conformity to it, (Rom. 12:2).¹

4. That encourages himself in sin, and hardens himself in impenitence by the doctrine of the gospel. No man that knows and believes the gospel can do so. What some hypocrites may do is nothing to us who disown all such persons and practices, and who own no principle that can really encourage the one or influence the other.

5. That thinks holiness is not necessary to all that would be saved. We maintain not only that it is necessary to be saved, but that it is a great part of salvation.

6. Whoever thinks that when a believer comes short in obeying God's law, he does not sin, and that he should not mourn because of it — as provoking to God, and hurtful to the new creation in him; and that he does not need to renew the exercise of faith and repentance for repeated washing and pardoning.

7. Lastly, on those who say that a sinner is actually justified *before* he is united to Christ by faith.

It is strange that those of us who are charged with this Antinomianism, of all men, most press on sinners to believe on Jesus Christ, and urge the damnation threatened in the gospel upon all unbelievers. It is not called into question by any among us that there is a decreed justification from eternity, particular and fixed as to all the elect, and a virtual perfect justification of all the redeemed in and by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Isaiah 53:11, Rom. 4:25, Heb. 9:26, 28, and 10:14).² Moreover, it is only craved³ that a sinner, for his actual justification, must lay hold on and plead this redemption in Christ's blood by faith.

But, on the other hand, we glory in any name of reproach (as the honourable reproach of Christ) that is cast upon us for asserting the absolute boundless freedom of the grace of God, which excludes all merit, and everything like it; the absoluteness of the covenant of grace in which all things are freely promised; and that faith that is required for sealing a man's interest in the covenant is promised in it, and wrought by the grace of it (Eph. 2:8).⁴ For the covenant of redemption was plainly and strictly a conditional one, and the noblest of all conditions was in it. The Son of God's taking on him man's nature, and offering it in sacrifice, was the strict condition of all the glory and reward promised to Christ and his seed (Isaiah 53:10, 11).⁵ That faith at first is wrought by, and acts upon, a full and absolute offer of Christ, and of all his fulness; it is an offer that has no condition in it, except that one which is native to all offers, *acceptance*. And in the very act of this acceptance, the accepter expressly disclaims all things in himself, except

¹ **Rom 12:2** And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

² **Isa 53:11** He shall see the labor of His soul, *and* be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, For He shall bear their iniquities. **Rom 4:25** who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification. **Heb 9:26, 28** He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself... ²⁸ so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation. **Heb 10:14** For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.

³ Asked for or pleaded.

⁴ **Eph 2:8** For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God;

⁵ **Isa 53:10-11** Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put *Him* to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see *His* seed, He shall prolong *His* days, And the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand. ¹¹ He shall see the labor of His soul, *and* be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, For He shall bear their iniquities.

sinfulness and misery. That faith in Jesus Christ justifies¹ only as a mere instrument, receiving that imputed righteousness of Christ for which we are justified; and that this faith, in the office of justification, is neither a condition nor a qualification, nor is it our gospel-righteousness, but in its very act it is a renouncing of all such pretences.

We proclaim the market of grace to be *free* (Isa. 55:1-3).² It is Christ's last offer, and lowest (Rev. 22:17).³ If there is any price or money spoken of, it is *no price, no money*. And where such are the terms and conditions, if we are forced to call them such, we must say that they look more like a renouncing, than a boasting of any qualifications or conditions. Surely the terms of the gospel-bargain are God's free giving, and our free taking and receiving.

We are not ashamed of teaching,

That the law and all its works are ineffectual to give life; whether that of justification, or of regeneration and sanctification, or of eternal life.

That the law of God can only damn all sinners; that it only rebukes, and thereby irritates and increases sin; and that it can never subdue sin till gospel-grace comes with power upon the heart; and then when the law is written in the heart, it is copied out in the life.

That we call men to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, in that condition which the first Adam brought them to, and left them in; in that condition that the law finds and leaves them in, guilty, filthy, condemned — and out of which condition they can only be delivered by Christ, and by believing on him.

That we tell sinners, that Jesus Christ will surely welcome all that come to him; and as he will not cast them out for their sinfulness in their nature and past life, so neither will he cast them out for their misery, in lacking those qualifications and graces that only he can give.

That we hold forth the propitiation in Christ's blood, as the only thing that is to be in the eye of a man who would believe on Christ unto justification of life; and that by this faith alone a sinner is justified, and God is justified in doing so.

That God "justifies the ungodly" (Rom. 4:5), neither by making him godly *before* he justifies him, nor by leaving him ungodly *after* he has justified him; but that the same grace that justifies him, immediately sanctifies him.

If we are called Antinomians for teaching such doctrine, then we are bold to say that there is some ignorance of, or prejudice at the known Protestant doctrine, in the hearts of the reproachers.

There are some things we complain about, such as,

1. That they load their brethren so grievously with unjust calumnies, either directly or by consequence, as when they preach holiness and its necessity, as if it were *their* proper doctrine and *disowned* by us, when they must know in their consciences that there is no difference

¹ Although, by the way, it is to be noted that it is never written in the word that faith justifies *actively*, but always *passively* — that a man is justified by faith, and that God justifies men by and through faith; yet admitting the phrase...

² **Isaiah 55:1** "Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk Without money and without price. ² Why do you spend money for *what is* not bread, And your wages for *what* does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat *what is* good, And let your soul delight itself in abundance. ³ Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live; And I will make an everlasting covenant with you-- The sure mercies of David.

³ **Rev 22:17** And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.

between them and us about the nature and necessity of holiness, but only about its spring¹ and its place in salvation. We derive it from Jesus Christ and faith in him, and we know assuredly that it can spring from nothing else. We place it between justification and glory, and that is its scripture-place, and no where else can it be found or stand, let them try as much and as long as they will.

2. That they seem very zealous against Antinomianism, and forget the other extreme of Arminianism, which is far more common, and as dangerous, and far more natural to all men. For though there have been, and may be this day, some true Antinomians, either through ignorance or weakness, reeling to that extreme, or by the heat of contention with and hatred of Arminianism (as it is certain some very good and learned men have inclined to Arminianism through their hatred of Antinomianism, and have declared as much); and some may and do corrupt the doctrine of the gospel through the unrenewedness of their hearts — yet however destructive this abuse may be to the souls of the seduced, such an appearance of Antinomianism is but a meteor or comet that will soon blaze out, and its folly will be quickly hissed off the stage. But the *principles* of Arminianism are the natural dictates of a carnal mind — which is enmity both to the law of God, and to the gospel of Christ — and next to the dead sea of Popery (into which all this stream runs), since Pelagius to this day, these [principles and natural dictates] have been the greatest plague of the church of Christ; and it is likely that they will be till his second coming.

3. We also justly complain that in their opposing true Antinomian errors, and particularly the alleged tenets of Dr. Crisp, they hint that there is a party of ministers and professors that defend these errors; whereas we defy them to name one minister, in London at least, that does so.

4. That expressions capable of a good sense are strenuously perverted, contrary to the scope of the writer or speaker.² But this and similar things are the usual methods of unfair contenders. Were such methods used on the other side, how many Popish, Arminian, yes and Socinian expressions, might be published? If any gospel-truth is preached or published that reflects on the idol of self-righteousness, and thereby justification, it is soon quarrelled with. But reproaches that are cast on the free grace of God, and the imputed righteousness of Christ, if not approved by them, are still but venial,³ well-meant mistakes. Let men's stated principles be known, and their expressions explained accordingly, or else such mistakes and contentions will be endless.

5. We also complain that love for peace has made many grave and sound divines forbear to speak their minds freely in public on these points: whereby the adverse party is emboldened; and those ministers who dare not purchase peace by silence when such great truths are undermined, are exposed as a mark. But we do not doubt that these worthy brethren, when they see the points of controversy accurately stated (as they may shortly), will openly appear on truth's side, as we know their hearts are for it.

6. *Lastly*, We complain, that the scheme of the gospel contended for by our opposers, is clouded, veiled, and darkened by school terms — new, uncouth,⁴ and unscriptural phrases — whereby they think to guard themselves against opposition, so they increase the concerns of their brethren, and keep their principles from the knowledge of ordinary people, who are as much concerned in those points as any scholar or divine.

¹ Its impetus, source, or cause.

² In other words, what they have said has been twisted and taken out of context.

³ Easily excused or forgiven.

⁴ Unfamiliar, strange, foreign.

This controversy looks like a very bad omen. We thought we might have healed our old breaches in smaller things; and behold, a new one is threatened in the greatest matters. We did hope that the good old Protestant doctrine had been rooted and riveted in the hearts of all the ministers on our side; but now we find the contrary, and we find that the sour leaven of Arminianism works strongly. Their advocates do not yet own the name; but the younger sort are more bold and free — and with them, no books or authors are held in esteem and used, but only those which are for the new *rational* method of divinity.¹ But for Luther, Calvin, Zanchy, Twisse, Ames, Perkins, and divines of their spirit and stamp, they are generally neglected and despised.

We were in hope that, after the Lord had so signally appeared for his truth and people — in preserving both, under the rage of that Anti-Christian spirit of persecution, and apostasy to gross Popery, which worked so mightily under the two last reigns — and when he had given us the long-desired mercy of a legal establishment of our gospel-liberty in this, that all hearts and hands would have been unanimously employed in advancing the work of Christ. But we find that as we have for a long time lost, in great measure, the *power* of the gospel, we are now in no small danger also of losing the *purity* of the gospel. And without them, what signifies liberty?

It is undoubted that the devil intends the obstructing of the course of the gospel; and in this he has often had the service of the tongues and pens of good men, as well as of bad men. Yet we are not without hope that the Lord, in his wisdom and mercy, will defeat him; and that these contentions may yet have good fruit and a good issue.

For furthering this good end, let me request a few things of my brethren.

1. Let us not receive reports suddenly of one another. In times of contention, many false reports are raised, and rashly believed. This is both the fruit and the fuel of contention. For all the noise of Antinomianism, I must declare that I do not know (and I have both opportunity and inclination to inquire) any one Antinomian minister or Christian in London, who is really such as their reproachers paint them out to be, or such as Luther and Calvin wrote against.

2. Let us make Christ crucified our great study, as *Christians*; and preaching him our main work, as *ministers*. Paul determined to know nothing else (1 Cor. 2:2). But many manage the ministry as if they had taken up a *contrary* determination to know any thing save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. We are amazed to see so many who are ashamed of the cross of Christ, and behave as if they accounted the tidings of salvation by the slain Son of God, an old antiquated story, and unfit to be preached daily. And what comes in its place is not unknown, nor is it worth mentioning. For all things that come in Christ's place, and jumble him out, either of hearts or pulpits, are alike abominable to a Christian. How many sermons may a man hear, and read when printed, yes, and how many books are written, about the way to heaven, in which is hardly found the name of Jesus Christ! And if he is named, it is the name of as a Judge and Lawgiver, rather than Christ as a Saviour. And Christ has as little room in many men's prayers, unless it is in the conclusion. When we cannot avoid observing those sad things, let it be a sharp spur to us to preach Christ more, to pray more in his name, and to live more to his praise. Let us not be deceived with that pretence that Christ may be preached when he is not named. The *preaching* of the gospel is the *naming* of Christ, and it is so-called in Rom. 15:20.² And Paul was to "bear Christ's name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel" (Acts 9:15).

¹ *Rational* is a more fitting commendation for a philosopher than for a divine: and yet it is somewhat better applied to a *divine*, than to *divinity*; for true divinity has a higher and nobler origin than man's reason; namely, divine revelation; and it can never be rightly learned by those who have no higher principle in them than reason; namely, the teaching of the Holy Ghost.

² **Rom 15:20** And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was **named**, lest I should build on another man's foundation;

3. Let us study hard, and pray much, to know the truth and to cling to it. It is an old observation, *Ante Pelagium securius loquebantur patres*: “Before Pelagius even the fathers spoke more carelessly;” meaning they spoke well, fearing no mistakes in their hearers. Now that this is not so, the more careful we should be in our doctrine. Let us search our own consciences, and see how we ourselves are justified before God. So Paul argued, Gal. 2:15-16.¹ And let us bring forth that doctrine to our people, that we find in our Bibles, and have felt the power of upon our own hearts.

4. Let us not run into extremes on the right or left hand through the heat of contention; but carefully keep the good old way of the Protestant doctrine, in which so many thousands of saints and martyrs of Jesus have lived godly, and died happily, who never heard of our new schemes and notions.

And, for this end, let us take and cling to the test of the Assembly’s Confession of Faith and Catechisms. The more we do not own ourselves, the more we do not crave of our brethren; and because we deal fairly and openly, I shall set it down *verbatim*. (Confession, Chap. XI. *Of Justification*).

Art. 1. “Those whom God effectually calls, he also freely justifies: not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous: not for any thing wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ’s sake alone: not by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience, to them as their righteousness; but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on him and his righteousness by faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God.”

Art. 2. “Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification; yet is it not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but works by love.”

Art. 3. “Christ, by his obedience and faith, did fully discharge the debt of all those that are thus justified, and did make a proper, real, and full satisfaction to his Father’s justice in their behalf. Yet, in as much as he was given by the Father for them, and his obedience and satisfaction accepted in their stead, and both freely, not for any thing in them, their justification is only of free grace; that both the exact justice and rich grace of God might be glorified in the justification of sinners.”

Art. 4. “God did, from all eternity, decree to justify all the elect; and Christ did, in the fulness of time, die for their sins, and rise again for their justification: nevertheless they are not justified, until the Holy Spirit does in due time actually apply Christ unto them.”

Art. 5. “God does continue to forgive the sins of those that are justified. And although they can never fall from the state of justification; yet they may, by their sins, fall under God’s fatherly displeasure, and not have the light of his countenance restored unto them, until they humble themselves, confess their sins, beg pardon, and renew their faith and repentance.”

Art. 6. “The justification of believers under the Old Testament was, in all these respects, one and the same with the justification of believers under the New Testament.”

This is the whole chapter exactly.

¹ Gal 2:15-16 "We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, ¹⁶ "knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.

Larger Catechism. —

“Q. How does faith justify a sinner in the sight of God?”

Ans. Faith justifies a sinner in the sight of God, not because of those other graces which do always accompany it, or of good works, that are the fruits of it, — nor as if the grace of faith, or any act of it, were imputed to him for his justification, — but only as it is an instrument by which he receives and applies Christ and his righteousness.”

Let these weighty words be but heartily assented to in their plain and native sense, and we are *one* in this great point of justification. But can any considering man think that the new scheme — of a real change, repentance, and sincere obedience, as necessary to be found in a person before he may lawfully come to Christ for justification; of faith justifying a man only as it is the spring of sincere obedience; of a man’s being justified by and upon his meeting the terms of the new *law of grace* (a new word, but of an old and evil meaning) — can any man think that *this* scheme and the sound words of the Reverend Assembly agree? Surely, if such a scheme had been offered to that grave, learned, and orthodox synod, it would have had a more severe censure passed upon it than I am willing to name.

Do not we find, in our particular dealings with souls, the same principles that I am now opposing?

When we deal with carnal, secure, and careless sinners (and they are a vast multitude), and we ask them to give a reason for that hope of heaven which they pretend to, is the following not their common answer? “I live inoffensively. I keep God’s law as well as I can; and I repent of what I fail in, and beg God’s mercy for Christ’s sake. My heart is sincere, though my knowledge and attainments are short of others.” If we go on to inquire further, as to what acquaintance they have with Jesus Christ — what application their souls have made to him; what are their workings of faith on him; what use they have made of his righteousness for justification, and his Spirit for sanctification; what they know of living by faith in Jesus Christ — we are *barbarians* to them. And many thousands in England live in this sad state, and die, and perish eternally. Yet so thick is the darkness of the age, that many of them live here, and go from here, with the reputation of good Christians. And some of them may have their funeral sermon and praises preached by an ignorant, flattering minister, though it may be the poor creatures never did, in the whole course of their life, nor at their death, employ Jesus Christ so much for an entry to heaven — purchased by his blood, and only accessible by faith in him — as a poor Turk does Mahomet, for a room in his beastly paradise. How common and fearful a thing this is in this land, and in this city!

When we come to deal with a poor awakened sinner, who sees his lost state, and that he is condemned by the law of God, we find the same principles working in him; for they are natural, and therefore universal in all men, and hardly rooted out of any. We find him sick and wounded; we tell him where his help lies, in Jesus Christ; what his proper work is, to apply to him by faith. What is his answer? “Alas !” says the man, “I have been and I am so vile a sinner, my heart is so bad, and so full of plagues and corruptions, that I cannot think of believing on Christ. But if I had but repentance, and some holiness in heart and life, and such and such gracious qualifications, I would then believe,” — when indeed his answer is as full of nonsense, ignorance, and pride as words can contain or express. They imply, 1. “If I were pretty well recovered, I would employ the Physician, Christ. 2. That there is some hope to work out these good things by myself, without Christ. 3. And when I come to Christ with a price in my hand, I shall be welcome. 4. That I can come to Christ when I will.” People are naturally thus ignorant of faith in Jesus Christ; and no words, repeated warnings, or plainest instructions can beat into men’s heads and hearts that the first coming to Christ by faith, or believing on him, is not *believing*

that we shall be saved by him, but believing on *him*, that we may be saved *by him*. It is less to be wondered at that ignorant people do not understand it, when so many learned men will not.

When we deal with a proud, self-righteous hypocrite, we find the same principles of enmity against the grace of the gospel. A profane person is not so enraged at the rebukes of sin from the law, as these Pharisees are at the discovery of their ruin by unbelief. They cannot endure to have their idol of self-righteousness touched, either by the spirituality of God's law that condemns all men, and all their works, while they are out of Christ; nor by the gospel, which reveals another righteousness than their own, by which they must be saved. They would rather have God's ark of the covenant stand as a captive in the temple of their Dagon of self-righteousness, until the vengeance of God's despised covenant overthrows the temple, and the idol, and its worshippers.

There is not a minister that deals seriously with the souls of men, that does not find an Arminian scheme of justification in every unrenewed heart. And is it not sadly to be bewailed that divines should plead that same cause that we daily find the devil pleading in the hearts of all natural men? And bewailed that instead of "casting down" (2 Cor. 10:4-5),¹ they would be making defences for those "strongholds" which must either be levelled with the dust, or the rebel that holds them out must eternally perish?

It is not a bad way to study the gospel, and attain more light into it, which may be used in dealing particularly with the consciences of all sorts of men, as we have occasion. More may be learned this way than out of many large books. If ministers would deal more with their own consciences, and the consciences of others, in and about these points that are most properly cases of conscience, we would find an increase of gospel-light, and a growing fitness to preach aright, as Paul did: "By manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God" (2 Cor. 4:2).

Let us keep up in our hearts and doctrine, a reverent regard for the holy law of God, and not allow a reflecting, disparaging word or thought about it. The great salvation is contrived with regard to it; and the satisfaction given to the law by the obedience and death of Christ our surety, has made it glorious and honourable — more than all the holiness of mints on earth, or of the glorified in heaven; and more than all the torments of the damned in hell, though they also magnify the law and make it honourable. But if men teach that obedience to the law, whether perfect or sincere, is that righteousness in which we must be found and stand in our pleading for justification, then they "neither understand what they say, nor of what they affirm" (1 Tim. 1:7). They "become debtors to it," and "Christ profits them nothing" (Gal. 2:21, and 5:2, 5). And we know what will become of that man that has his debts to the law to pay, and has no interest in the surety's payment. Yet many offer their own silver — which, whatever coin of man is upon it, is reprobate, and rejected both by Law and Gospel.

Let us carefully keep the bounds clear between the Law and Gospel, which "whoever does this, is a right perfect divine," says blessed Luther in his *Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* — a book that has more plain sound gospel than many volumes of some other divines. Let us keep the law as far from the business of justification as we would keep condemnation, its contrary; for the law and condemnation are inseparable, except by the intervention of Jesus Christ, our surety (Gal. 3:10-14). But in the practice of holiness, the *fulfilled* law, given by Jesus Christ to believers as a *rule*, is of great and good use to them, as has been declared.

Lastly, Be exact in your communion and church-administrations. If any walk otherwise than as becomes the gospel — if any abuse the doctrine of grace to licentiousness — draw the rod of

¹ **2Co 10:4-5** For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ;

discipline against them all the more severely; for you know that so many wait for your waivering, and are ready to speak evil of the ways and truths of God.

The wisdom of God sometimes orders the different opinions of men about his truth, for the clarification and confirming of it, while each side watches the extremes that others may be in hazard of running into. And if controversy is fairly and meekly managed this way, we may differ, and plead our opinions, and both love and edify those we oppose, and may be loved and edified by them in their opposition.

I know no fear possesses our side but that of Arminianism. Let us be fairly secured from that, and as we ever hated true Antinomianism, so we are ready to oppose it with all our might. But having such grounds of jealousy as I have named (and it is well known that I have not named all), men will allow us to fear that this noise of Antinomianism is raised, and any advantage they have by the rashness and imprudence of some ignorant men, is improved to a severe height by some, on purpose to shelter Arminianism in its growth, and to advance it further among us, which we pray and hope the Lord will prevent.

Yours,

ROB. TRAILL.

POSTSCRIPT.

THIS paper presented to you, was in its first design intended as a private letter to a particular brother, as the title bears. How it comes to be published, I shall not trouble the world with an account of it. I think that Dr. Owen's excellent book about *Justification*, and Mr. Marshall's book about the *Mystery of Sanctification by Faith in Jesus Christ*, are such vindications and confirmations of the Protestant doctrine, that I fear no effectual opposition against them. Dr. Owen's name is so savoury and famous, his soundness in the faith, and his ability in learning for its defence so justly reputed, that no sober man will attempt it. Mr. Marshall was a holy retired person, and is known only to most of us by his book published lately. The book is a deep, practical, well-jointed discourse, and requires a more than ordinary attention in reading it with profit; and if it is singly used, I look upon it as one of the most useful books the world has seen for many years. Its excellence is that it leads the serious reader directly to Jesus Christ, and cuts the sinews and overturns the foundation of the new divinity, by the same argument of gospel-holiness by which many attempt to overturn the old; and as it already has the seal of high approbation by many judicious ministers and Christians that have read it, I fear not but it will stand firm as a rock against all opposition, and will prove good seed, and food, and light, and life, to many hereafter.

All my design in publishing this is plainly and briefly to give some information to ordinary plain people, who either lack time or judgment to peruse large and learned tracts about this point of justification, in which every one is equally concerned.

The theme of justification has suffered greatly by this, that many have employed their heads and pens, who never had their hearts and consciences exercised about it; and they must be frigid and dreaming speculations that all such men are taken up with, whose consciences are not enlivened with their personal concern in it.

These things are undoubted:

1. That as it is a point of highest concern to every man, so it is to the whole doctrine of Christianity. All the great fundamentals of Christian truth centre in this truth of justification. The Trinity of persons in the Godhead; the incarnation of the only-begotten of the Father; the

satisfaction paid to the law and justice of God for the sins of the world by his obedience and sacrifice of himself in that flesh which he assumed; and the divine authority of the scriptures, which reveal all this, are all straight lines of truth that centre in this doctrine of the justification of a sinner by the imputation and application of that satisfaction. No justification [is possible] without a righteousness; no righteousness can exist except what answers fully and perfectly the holy law of God; no such righteousness can be performed except by a divine person; no benefit can accrue to a sinner by it unless it is in some way his, and applied to him; and no application can be made of this, but by faith in Jesus Christ.

And as the connection with, and dependence of this truth on the other great mysteries of divine truth is evident in the plain proposal of it, so the same has been sadly manifest in this: that forsaking the doctrine of justification by faith in Christ's righteousness has been the first step of apostasy in many who have not stopped till they have revolted from Christianity itself. Hence so many Arminians, and their chief leaders too, turned Socinians. From denying justification by Christ's righteousness, they proceeded to denying his satisfaction; from the denial of his proper satisfaction, they went on to denying the divinity of his person; and that man's charity is excessive that would allow the name of *Christians* [to be used by] such blasphemers of the Son of God. Do not let, then, the zeal of any so fundamental a point of truth as the justification of a sinner by faith in Christ, be charged with folly. It is good to always be zealously affected in a good thing, and this is the best of things.

2. It is undoubted that there is a mystery in this matter of justification. As it is God's act, it is an act of free grace and deep wisdom. Herein justice and mercy kiss one another in saving the sinner. Here appears God-man with the righteousness of God, and this applied and imputed to sinful men. Here man's sin and misery are the field in which the riches of God's grace in Christ are displayed. Here the sinner is made righteous by the righteousness of another, and he obtains justification through this righteousness, though he pays and gives nothing for it. God declares him righteous, or justifies him freely; and yet he is well-paid for it by the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Rom. 3:24, 25, 26). It is an act of both justice and mercy, when God justifies a believer on Jesus Christ. And must there not then be a great mystery in it? Is not every believer daily admiring the depth of this way of God? This mystery is usually darkened, rather than illustrated, by logical terms used in handling it. The only defence that good and learned men have for using them (and it has great weight), is that the craft of adversaries constrains them to use such terms, to find them out or to hedge them in. It is certain that this mystery is as plainly revealed in the word, as the Holy Ghost thought fit to do in teaching the heirs of this grace; and it would be well if men contained themselves within these bounds.

3. It is certain that this doctrine of justification proposed in the word, has been very differently understood and expressed by men who profess that God's word is the only rule of their thoughts and words about the things of the Spirit of God. It has been, and will still be a stone of stumbling, as our Lord Jesus Christ himself was and is (Rom. 9:32, 33; 1Pet. 2:7, 8).

4. That whatever variety and differences there are in men's notions and opinions (and there are a great deal) about justification, they are all certainly reducible to two; one of which is every man's opinion. And they are, that the justification of a sinner before God is either on the account of a righteousness in and of ourselves, or on the account of a righteousness in another, even Jesus Christ who is "Jehovah our righteousness." Law and Gospel, faith and works, Christ's righteousness and our own, grace and debt, equally divide all in this matter. Crafty men may endeavour to blend and mix these things together in justification, but it is a vain attempt. It is not only most expressly rejected in the gospel, which peremptorily determines the contrariety, inconsistency, and incompatibility between these two; but the nature of the things in themselves, and the sense and conscience of every serious person, witness to the same: that our own righteousness, and Christ's righteousness, comprehend all the pleas of men to justification

(every man in the world stands on one or the other of them); and in justification, they are inconsistent with and destructive one of another. If a man trusts to his own righteousness, he rejects Christ's; if he trusts to Christ's righteousness, he rejects his own. If he will not reject his own righteousness, as too good to be renounced, if he will not venture on Christ's righteousness as not sufficient alone to bear him out, and save him at God's bar, he is a convicted unbeliever in both. And if he endeavours to patch up a righteousness before God made up of both, he is still under the law, and a despiser of gospel-grace, (Gal. 2:21). The righteousness that justifies a sinner consists in *aliquo indivisibili*;¹ and every man finds this when the case is his own, and he is serious about it.

5. These different sentiments about justification, have been at all times managed with a special acrimony. Those that are for the righteousness of God by faith in Jesus Christ, look upon it as the only foundation of all their hopes for eternity, and therefore can only be zealous for it. And the contrary side are just as hot for their own righteousness, the most admired and adored Diana of proud mankind, as if it were an image fallen down from Jupiter; when it is indeed the idol that was cast out of heaven with the devil, and which he has ever since been so diligent to set up before sinful men to be worshipped, that he might bring them into the same condemnation with himself; for by true sin and false righteousness he has "deceived the whole world," (Rev. 12:9).

6. The Holy Ghost speaking in the Scriptures is the supreme and infallible judge and determiner of all truth. So where he particularly and on purpose delivers any truth, *there* we are specially to attend and learn. And though in most points of truth he usually teaches us by a bare authoritative narration, yet in some points, which his infinite wisdom foresaw special opposition to, he not only declares but debates and determines the truth. And the instances are two especially. One is about *the divinity of Christ's person*, and the dignity of his priesthood; it is reasoned, argued, and determined in the epistle to the Hebrews. The other is about *justification by faith*, exactly handled in the epistles to the Romans and to the Galatians. In the former of these two, the doctrine of free justification is taught to us most formally and accurately. And though we find no charge against that church in Paul's time, or in his epistle, for their departing from the truth in this point, yet the wisdom of the Holy Ghost is remarkable in this: that this doctrine should be so plainly asserted and strongly proved in an epistle to that church of which the pretended successors have apostatized from that faith, and have proved to be the main assertors of that damnable error of justification by works. That epistle to the Galatians is plainly written to begin a cure, and to obviate a full apostasy from the purity of the gospel in the point of justification by *faith*, apart from the works of the law. And from these two epistles, if we are wise, we must learn the truth of this doctrine, and expound all other scriptures in harmony with what is so setly determined there, as *in foro contradictorio*.²

7. *Lastly*, It is not to be denied or concealed that on each side, some have run into extremes, which the majority do not own, but are usually loaded with. The Papists run high for justification by works; yet even some of them in the Council of Trent discoursed very favourably about justification by faith. The Arminians have qualified a little the grossness of the Popish doctrine in this article, and some since have essayed³ to qualify that of the Arminians, and to plead the same cause more finely. Again, some have run to the other extreme, as appeared in Germany a little after the Reformation; and there have always been some such, in all places where the gospel has shined, and these were called Antinomians. But it is the design of this paper to reveal that this hateful name is *unjustly* charged upon the orthodox preachers, and

¹ That is, *something indivisible*.

² In a contradictory forum.

³ Made an effort to accomplish something.

sincere believers, of the Protestant doctrine of justification by faith only — those who keep the gospel midway between these two rocks. What we plead for is, in sum, that Jesus Christ our Saviour is “the fountain opened in the house of David for sin and for uncleanness,” in which only, men can be washed in justification and sanctification; and that there is no other fountain of man’s devising, nor of God’s declaring, for washing a sinner first, so as to make him fit and meet to come to this fountain to wash, and to be clean.

As for *inherent holiness*, is it not sufficiently secured by the Spirit of Christ, received by faith, the certain spring and *cause* of it; by the word of God, the plain and perfect *rule* of it; by the declared necessity of it to all those who look to be saved; and to justify the sincerity of a man’s faith? [It is,] unless we bring inherent holiness into justification, and thereby make our own pitiful holiness sit on the throne of judgment, along with the precious blood of the Lamb of God.

Though I expect that a more able hand will undertake an examination of the new divinity, yet to fill up a little space, I would speak somewhat to their Achillean argument that is so much boasted about, and so frequently insisted on by them as their shield and spear. Their argument is that Christ’s righteousness is our *legal* righteousness, but our righteousness is our *evangelical* righteousness; that is, when a sinner is charged with sin against the holy law of God, he may oppose Christ’s righteousness as his legal defence; but against the charge of the gospel, especially for unbelief, he must produce his *faith* as his defence or righteousness against that charge.

With great deference to those worthy divines who have looked at this as an argument of weight, I will in a few words, essay to manifest that this is either saying in other odd words, the same thing that is commonly taught by us, or else it is a *sophism*,¹ or a departure from the Protestant doctrine about justification.

1. This argument does not at all concern the justification of a sinner before God. For this end, no more is needful than to consider what this charge is, against whom it is given, and by whom. The charge is said to be given by God, as a charge of unbelief, or of disobeying the gospel. But against whom? Is it against a believer, or unbeliever? And these two divide all mankind. If it is against a believer, then it is a false charge, and it can never be given by the God of truth. For the believer is already justified by faith, and he is innocent as to this charge. And innocence is defence enough for a man falsely charged, before a righteous judge. Is this charge given against an unbeliever? We allow it is a righteous charge. Yes, but they say, “Will Christ’s righteousness justify a man from this charge of gospel-unbelief?” The answer is plain. No, it will not, nor yet from any other charge whatever, either from Law or Gospel — for he has nothing to do with Christ’s righteousness while he is an unbeliever.

What then does this arguing reprove?

Is it that no man’s faith in Christ’s righteousness can be justified in its sincerity before men, and in a man’s own conscience, but in and by the fruits of a true lively faith? In this they have no opposers that I know of.

Or is it that a man may have Christ’s righteousness for his legal righteousness, and yet be a rebel to the gospel, and a stranger to true holiness? Who ever affirmed it?

Or is it that this gospel-holiness is that which a man must not only have (for *that* we grant), but that he may also venture to stand in it, and to be found in it before God, and to venture into judgment with God upon it, in his claim to eternal life? Then we must oppose those who think so, as we know their own consciences will, when in any lively exercise.

¹ A deliberately invalid argument displaying ingenuity in reasoning in the hope of deceiving someone.

These plain principles of gospel-truth, while they remain (and remain they will on their own foundation, when we are all in our graves and our foolish contentions are buried), overthrow this pretended charge:

1. That Christ's righteousness is the only plea and answer of a sinner arraigned at God's bar for life and death.
2. This righteousness is imputed to no man but a believer.
3. When it is imputed by grace, and applied by faith, it immediately and eternally becomes the man's righteousness before God, angels, men, and devils, (Rom. 8:33, 35, 38, 39). It is a righteousness that is never lost, never taken away, and never ineffectual; it answers all charges, and is attended with all graces.

2. I would ask, what is that righteousness that justifies a man from the sin of unbelief? We have rejected the imaginary charge; let us now consider the real sin. Unbelief is the greatest sin against both Law and Gospel — more remotely against the Law, which binds all men to believe God speaking, say what he will; and more directly against the Gospel, which tells us what we should believe, and commands us to believe. Let us put this case (and it is pity the case is so rare, when the sin is so common) that a poor soul is troubled about the greatness of the sin of unbelief in "calling God a liar" (1 John 5:10), in distrusting his faithful promise, in doubting Christ's ability and good will to save him, in standing aloof for so long from Jesus Christ — as many of the elect are long in a state of unbelief till they are called; and the best of believers have unbelief in some measure in them (Mark 9:24). Abraham's faith staggered sometimes (Gen. 12. and 20). What shall we say to a conscience thus troubled? Will any man dare to tell him that Christ's righteousness is his legal righteousness against the charge of sins against the law; but for gospel-charges, he must answer them in his own name? I know our hottest opposers would abhor such an answer; and they would freely tell such a man that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from *all* sin; and that his justification from his unbelief must be only in that righteousness which he had so sinfully rejected while in unbelief, and now lays hold on by faith.

3. But some extend this argument still more dangerously. For they say that not only must men have *faith* for their righteousness against the charge of unbelief, but also repentance against the charge of impenitence; sincerity against that of hypocrisy; holiness against that of unholiness; and perseverance as their gospel-righteousness against the charge of apostasy. If they mean only that these things are justifications and fruits of true faith, and of the sincerity of the grace of God in us, then we agree to the meaning. But we highly dislike the expressions, as unscriptural and dangerous, tending to dishonour the righteousness of Christ, and tending to run men onto the rocks of pride and self-righteousness, which natural corruption drives all men upon. But if they mean that, either jointly or separately, they are our righteousness before God; or that, either separate from, or mixed with Christ's righteousness, they may be made our claim and plea for salvation, then I must say that it is a dangerous doctrine; and its native tendency is to turn Christ's imputed righteousness out of the church, to destroy all the solid peace of believers, and to exclude gospel-justification out of this world and reserve it to another — and that is with a horrible uncertainty of any particular man's partaking of it.

But these blessed truths of God, and blessings of believers, stand on firmer foundations than heaven or earth, and they will continue fixed against all the attempts of the gates of hell. Blessed be the rock, Christ, on which all is built; blessed be the New Covenant, "ordered in all things and sure;" and "blessed is he that believes; for there shall be a performance of those things which are told him from the Lord," (Luke 1:45.) *Amen.*

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