

Gospel Grounds & Evidences

Part I

By John Owen

Gospel Grounds and Evidences of the Faith of God's Elect; Showing

I. The nature of true saving faith in securing of the spiritual comfort of believers in this life, is of the highest importance.

II. The way wherein true faith does evidence itself in the souls and consciences of believers, unto their supportment and comfort, under all their conflicts with sin, in all their trials and temptations.

III. Faith will evidence itself by a diligent, constant endeavour to keep itself and all grace in due exercise, in all ordinances of divine worship, private and public.

IV. A peculiar way whereby true faith will evidence itself, by bringing the soul into a state of repentance. —*by John Owen*

"Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?"--
2 Cor.13:5

Prefatory note

This treatise, entitled *Gospel Grounds and Evidences of the Faith of God's Elect*, was given to the world in 1695. The remainder of the title is scarcely applicable as a correct designation of the leading divisions of the work. and may, perhaps, have been added by those who had the charge of publishing it. In the preface by Isaac Chauncey, the reader is assured that the treatise is the production of Dr Owen. It bears internal evidence of the fact, and that he wrote it, with a view to publication. When he waives the formal discussion of some topics connected with his subject, on the ground that he had attempted the discussion of them "in other writings," it seems a just inference that it had been his intention to publish the treatise, though no explanation has transpired why it was withheld from the press for a period of twelve years after his death. The circumstance is of some moment, as showing that the work, though posthumous, may be held to contain the deliberate and matured judgement of the author on the question of which it treats.

His object is not to illustrate the common evidences of genuine religion, or the grounds on which we may conclude a man to be sincere in his religious profession. It is an inquiry rather into the evidences on which the elect of God, in any process of self-scrutiny, may ascertain the reality of their own faith. Ascribing to faith all the importance which is due to it as the instrumental cause of justification, the author suspends the entire question of the genuineness of conversion upon the existence of a fourfold development or operation of that gracious principle in the hearts of all who may be anxious to discover whether they have been really quickened and born of God.

After stating the nature of saving faith, and after a brief exhibition of the gospel as the divine method for the salvation of sinners through the merits of Christ, he proceeds to "the trial of faith," as the main object of the treatise. In the first place, he shows that faith, if genuine, includes or denotes implicit approbation of "God's way of saving sinners," in opposition to all schemes of merely human invention for our spiritual deliverance. This approbation of the divine plan for our redemption, in which he holds that the very essence and life of faith consist, is founded on the conviction; first, That the salvation revealed in the gospel is in harmony with the perfections and majesty of the divine character; secondly, That it is suited to the views, desires, and aspirations of a soul enlightened by grace; and, thirdly, That it as effectually honours the moral law as if it had been completely fulfilled in the personal obedience of the saints.

Secondly, Faith is shown to imply an approbation of the will of God in requiring of us holiness and obedience, to the full measure of the perfection and spirituality demanded of us in the moral law. He appeals, in illustration of the obedience required, to the light of nature, and to the knowledge of good and evil which men enjoy through the law; but proves that without the light of saving faith there can be no adequate conception of the holiness required by the divine will, urging an acute distinction, which might rank as a separate contribution to the doctrine of conscience, and according to which its authority in determining the moral character of an action by no means implies the love of what is good, and the hatred of what is evil. The function of conscience he views is exclusively judicial, and shows that the motive which prompts to action must spring from other considerations. Two grounds are assigned on which faith approves of the holiness required of us:--the consistency of such a demand with the perfection of the divine nature; and its fitness, when full compliance is yielded with it, to advance us to the utmost perfection of which our own nature is capable.

Thirdly, Evidence of genuine faith is also afforded when the mind endeavours to keep itself in the due exercise of the grace of faith, in the public and private ordinances of divine worship. If faith is not cultivated in the worship of God, all devotion is corrupted into the empty forms of superstition, as in the ritual of Popery; or becomes the mere wildfire of fanaticism, or degenerates into the rationalism which ignores all worship instituted by the authority of revelation. Judicious directions follow as to the best method of preserving faith in vivid

exercise while we are engaged in the various acts of devotion.

Fourthly, The last evidence specified of true faith is the evangelical repentance which it produces. Weanedness from the world, the lively remembrance of sin, a becoming intensity of godly sorrow on account of it, and other spiritual duties, are described as essential elements in the penitential feelings and exercises of those who really believe unto salvation.

The treatise indicates an acquaintance with the true philosophy of human nature, thorough knowledge of the world, and of man individually, as he takes the hue of his character from surrounding objects and social influences, and that depth of Christian experience in which our author has perhaps been rarely excelled. He shines in the anatomy of human motives; and while he goes deeply into the subjective workings of faith, he is always keenly alive to the objective realities of evangelical truth. The Christian reader will find this treatise an admirable manual for self-examination.--Ed.

To the Reader

As faith is the first vital act that every true Christian puts Forth, and the life which he lives is by the faith of the Son of God, so it is his next and great concern to know that he does believe, and that believing he has eternal life; that his faith is the faith of God's elect, and of the operation of God: without some distinct believing knowledge of which he cannot so comfortably assure his heart before God concerning his calling and election, so far as to carry him forth in all the ways of holiness, in doing and suffering the will of God with necessary resolution and cheerfulness; the doing of which in a right manner, according to the tenor of the gospel, is no small part of spiritual skill; whereunto two things are highly requisite: first, That he be well acquainted with the doctrine of Christ, and know how to distinguish the gospel from the law; and, secondly, That he be very conversant with his own heart, that so by comparing his faith, and the fruits thereof, with the said doctrine of Christ, he may come to see that, as he has received Christ, so he walks in him: all his reasonings concerning himself being taken up from the word of God, so that what judgment he passes upon himself may be a judgment of faith, and answer of a good conscience towards God; for all the trials of faith must at last be resolved into a judgment of faith, before which is made, the soul still labours under staggerings and uncertainties.

The design of this ensuing treatise is to resolve this great question, whether the faith we profess unto be true or no?--The resolution of which, upon an impartial inquiry, must needs be very grateful and advantageous to every one that has but tasted that the Lord is gracious. That the late reverend, learned, and pious Dr Owen was the author there needs be no doubt; not only because good assurance is given by such as were intrusted with his writings, but also in that the style and spirit running through the other of his practical writings is here very manifest; and, accordingly, with them is recommended to the serious perusal of

every diligent inquirer into the truth of his spiritual estate and condition.—Isaac Chauncey

Evidences of the faith of God's elect

The securing of the spiritual comforts of believers in this life is a matter of the highest importance unto the glory of God, and their own advantage by the gospel. For God is abundantly willing that all the heirs of promise should receive strong consolation, and he has provided ways and means for the communication of it to them; and their participation of it is their principal interest in this world, and is so esteemed by them. But their effectual refreshing enjoyment of these comforts is variously opposed by the power of the remainders of sin, in conjunction with other temptations. Hence, notwithstanding their right and title unto them by the gospel, they are oftentimes actually destitute of a gracious sense of them, and, consequently, of that relief which they are suited to afford in all their duties, trials, and afflictions. Now, the root whereon all real comforts do grow, whence they spring and arise, is true and saving faith,—the faith of God's elect. Wherefore they do ordinarily answer unto, and hold proportion with, the evidences which any have of that faith in themselves; at least, they cannot be maintained without such evidences. Wherefore, that we may be a little useful unto the establishment or recovery of that consolation which God is so abundantly willing that all the heirs of promise should enjoy, I shall inquire, What are the principal acts and operations of faith, whereby it will evidence its truth and sincerity in the midst of all temptations and storms that may befall believers in this world? And I shall insist on such alone as will bear the severest scrutiny by Scripture and experience. And,—

The principal genuine acting of saving faith in us, inseparable from it, yea, essential to such acting, consists in the: choosing, embracing, and approbation of God's way of saving sinners, by the mediation of Jesus Christ, relying thereon, with a renunciation of all other ways and means pretending unto the same end of salvation. This is that which we are to explain and prove.

Saving faith is our "believing the record that God has given us of his Son," 1 John 5:10, "And this is the record, that God has given to us eternal life; and this life is in his Son," verse 11. This is the testimony which God gives, that great and sacred truth which he himself bears witness unto,—namely, that he has freely prepared eternal life for them that believe, or provided a way of salvation for them. And what God so prepares he is said to give, because of the certainty of its communication. So grace was promised and given to the elect in Christ Jesus before the world began, 2 Tim.1:9; Tit.1:2. And that is so to be communicated unto them, in and by the mediation of his Son Jesus Christ, that it is the only way whereby God will give eternal life unto any; which is therefore wholly in him, and by him to be obtained, and from him to be received. Upon our acquiescence in this testimony, on our approbation of this way of saving sinners, or our refusal of it, our eternal safety or ruin does absolutely depend. And it is reasonable that it

should be so: for, in our receiving of this testimony of God, we "set to our seal that God is true," John 3:33; we ascribe unto him the glory of his truth, and therein of all the other holy properties of his nature,--the most eminent duty whereof we are capable in this world; and by a refusal of it, what lies in us, we make him a liar, as in this place, 1 John 5:10, which is virtually to renounce his being.

And the solemnity wherewith this testimony is entered is very remarkable, verse 7, "There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one." The trinity of divine persons, acting distinctly in the unity of the same divine nature, do give this testimony: and they do so by those distinct operations whereby they act in this way and work of God's saving sinners by Jesus Christ; which are at large declared in the gospel. And there is added hereunto a testimony that is immediately applicatory unto the souls of believers, of this sovereign testimony of the holy Trinity; and this is the witness of grace and all sacred ordinances: "There are three that bear witness in earth, the spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one," verse 8. They are not at essentially the same in one and the same nature, as are the Father, Word, and Holy Ghost, yet they all absolutely agree in the same testimony; and they do it by that especial efficacy which they have on the souls of believers to assure them of this truth. In this record, so solemnly, so gloriously given and proposed, life and death are set before us. The receiving and embracing of this testimony, with an approbation of the way of salvation testified unto, is that work of faith which secures us of eternal life. On these terms there is reconciliation and agreement made and established between God and men; without which men must perish for ever.

So our blessed Saviour affirms, "This is life eternal, that they may know thee" (the Father) "the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent," John 17:3. To know the Father as the only true God, to know him as he has sent Jesus Christ to be the only way and means of the salvation of sinners, and to know Jesus Christ as sent by him for that end, is that grace and duty which instates us in a right to eternal life, and initiates us in the possession of it: and this includes that choice and approbation of the way of God for the saving of sinners whereof we speak.

But these things must be more distinctly opened:--

1. The great fundamental difference in religion is concerning the way and means whereby sinners may be saved. From men's different apprehensions hereof arise all other differences about religion; and the first thing that engages men really into any concernment in religion, is an inquiry in their minds how sinners may be saved, or what they shall do themselves to be saved: "What shall we do? what shall we do to be saved?" "What is the way of acceptance with God?" is that inquiry which gives men their first initiation into religion. See Acts 2:37; 16:30; Micah 6:6-8.

This question being once raised in the conscience, an answer must be returned unto it. "I will consider," says the prophet, "what I shall answer when I am reproved," Hab.2:1. And there is all the reason in the world that men consider well of a good answer hereunto, without which they must perish for ever; for if they cannot answer themselves here, how do they hope to answer God hereafter? Wherefore, without a sufficient answer always in readiness unto this inquiry, no man can have any hopes of a blessed eternity.

Now, the real answer which men return unto themselves is according to the influence which their minds are under from one or other of the two divine covenants,--that of works or that of grace. And these two covenants, taken absolutely, are inconsistent, and give answers in this case that are directly contradictory to one another: so the apostle declares, Rom.10:5-9. The one says, "The man that does the works of the law shall live by them; this is the only way whereby you may be saved:" the other wholly waives this return, and puts it all on faith in Christ Jesus. Hence there is great difference and great variety in the answers which men return to themselves on this inquiry; for their consciences will neither hear nor speak any thing but what complies with the covenant whereunto they do belong. These things are reconciled only in the blood of Christ; and how, the apostle declared, Rom.8:3. The greatest part of convinced sinners seem to adhere to the testimony of the covenant of works; and so perish for ever. Nothing will stand us in stead in this matter, nothing will save us, "but the answer of a good conscience towards God, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ," 1 Pet.3:21.

2. The way that God has prepared for the saving of sinners is a fruit and product of infinite wisdom, and powerfully efficacious unto its end. As such it is to be received, or it is rejected. It is not enough that we admit of the notions of it as declared, unless we are sensible of divine wisdom and power in it, so as that it may be safely trusted unto. Hereon, upon the proposal of it, falls out the eternally distinguishing difference among men. Some look upon it and embrace it as the power and wisdom of God; others really reject it as a thing foolish and weak, not meet to be trusted unto. Hereof the apostle gives an account at large, 1 Cor.1:18-24. And this is mysterious in religion:--the same divine truth is by the same way and means, at the same time, proposed unto sundry persons, all in the same condition, under the same circumstances, all equally concerned in that which is proposed therein: some of them hereon do receive it, embrace it, approve of it, and trust unto it for life and salvation; others despise it, reject it, value it not, trust not unto it. To the one it is the wisdom of God, and the power of God; to the other, weakness and foolishness: as it must of necessity be the one or the other,--it is not capable of a middle state or consideration. It is not a good way unless it be the only way; it is not a safe, it is not the best way, if there be any other; for it is eternally inconsistent with any other. It is the wisdom of God, or it is downright folly. And here, after all our disputes, we must resort unto eternal sovereign grace, making a distinction among them unto whom the gospel is proposed, and the almighty power of actual grace in curing that unbelief which blinds the minds

of men, that they can see nothing but folly and weakness in God's way of the saving of sinners. And this unbelief works yet in the most of them unto whom this way of God is proposed in the gospel; they receive it not as an effect of infinite wisdom, and as powerfully efficacious unto its proper end. Some are profligate in the service of their lusts, and regard it not; unto whom may be applied that [saying] of the prophet, "Hear, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish." Some are under the power of darkness and ignorance, so as that they apprehend not, they understand not the mystery of it; for "the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not." Some are blinded by Satan, as he is the god of this world, by filling their minds with prejudice, and their hearts with the love of present things, that the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, cannot shine into them. Some would mix with it their own works, ways, and duties, as they belong unto the first covenant; which are eternally irreconcilable unto this way of God, as the apostle teaches, Rom.10:3,4. Hereby does unbelief eternally ruin the souls of men. They do not, they cannot, approve of the way of God for saving sinners proposed in the gospel, as an effect of infinite wisdom and power, which they may safely trust unto, in opposition unto all other ways and means, pretending to be useful unto the same end; and this will give us light into the nature and acting of saving faith, which we inquire after.

3. The whole Scripture, and all divine institutions from the beginning, do testify, in general, that this way of God for the saving of sinners is by commutation, substitution, atonement, satisfaction, and imputation. This is the language of the first promise, and all the sacrifices of the law founded thereon; this is the language of the Scripture: "There is a way whereby sinners may be saved,--a way that God has found out and appointed." Now, it being the law wherein sinners are concerned, the rule of all things between God and them should seem to be by what they can do or suffer with respect unto that law. "No," says the Scripture, "it cannot be so; 'for by the deeds of the law no man living shall be justified in the sight of God.'" Ps.143:2; Rom.3:20; Gal.2:16. Neither shall it be by their personal answering of the penalty of the law which they have broken; for they cannot do so, but they must perish eternally: for, "If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" Ps.130:3. There must therefore be, there is another way, of a different nature and kind from these, for the saving of sinners, or there is no due revelation made of the mind of God in the Scripture. But that there is so, and what it is, is the main design of it to declare: and this is by the substitution of a mediator instead of the sinners that shall be saved, who shall both bear the penalty of the law which they had incurred and fulfill that righteousness which they could not attain unto.

This in general is God's way of saving sinners, whether men like it or no: "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh; that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us," Rom.8:3,4. See also Heb.10:5-10. "He made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him," 2 Cor.5:21.

Here unbelief has prevailed with many in this latter age to reject the glory of God herein; but we have vindicated the truth against them sufficiently elsewhere.

4. There are sundry things previously required to give us a clear view of the glory of God in this way of saving sinners: such are, a due consideration of the nature of the fall of our first parents, and of our apostasy from God thereby. I may not stay here to show the nature or aggravations of them; neither can we conceive them aright, much less express them. I only say, that unless we have due apprehensions of the dread and terror of them, of the invasion made on the glory of God, and the confusion brought on the creation by them, we can never discern the reason and glory of rejecting the way of personal righteousness, and the establishing this way of a mediator for the saving of sinners. A due sense of our present infinite distance from God, and the impossibility that there is in ourselves of making any approaches unto him, is of the same consideration; so likewise is that of our utter disability to do any thing that may answer the law, or the holiness and righteousness of God therein,--of our universal unconformity in our natures, hearts, and their acting, unto the nature, holiness, and will of God. Unless, I say, we have a sense of these things in our minds and upon our consciences, we cannot believe aright, we cannot comprehend the glory of this new way of salvation. And whereas mankind has had a general notion, though no distinct apprehension, of these things, or of some of them, many amongst them have apprehended that there is a necessity of some kind of satisfaction or atonement to be made, that sinners may be freed from the displeasure of God; but when God's way of it was proposed unto them, it was, and is, generally rejected, because "the carnal mind is enmity against God." But when these things are fixed on the soul by sharp and durable convictions, they will enlighten it with due apprehensions of the glory and beauty of God's way of saving sinners.

5. This is the gospel, this is the work of it,--namely, a divine declaration of the way of God for the saving of sinners, through the person, mediation, blood, righteousness, and intercession of Christ. This is that which it reveals, declares, proposes, and tenders unto sinners,-- there is a way for their salvation. As this is contained in the first promise, so the truth of every word in the Scripture depends on the supposition of it. Without this, there could be no more intercourse between God and us than is between him and devils. Again, it declares that this way is not by the law or its works,--by the first covenant, or its conditions,--by our own doing or suffering; but it is a new way, found out in and proceeding from infinite wisdom, love, grace, and goodness,--namely, by the incarnation of the eternal Son of God, his susception of the office of a mediator, doing and suffering in the discharge of it whatever was needful for the justification and salvation of sinners, unto his own eternal glory. See Rom.3:24-27; 8:3,4; 2 Cor.5:19-21, etc.

Moreover, the gospel adds, that the only way of obtaining an interest in this blessed contrivance of saving sinners by the substitution of Christ, as the surety of the covenant, and thereon the imputation of our sins to him, and of his

righteousness unto us, is by faith in him.

Here comes in that trial of faith which we inquire after. This way of saving sinners being proposed, offered, and tendered unto us in the gospel, true and saving faith receives it, approves of it, rests in it, renounces all other hopes and expectations, reposing its whole confidence therein.

For it is not proposed unto us merely as a notion of truth, to be assented to or denied, in which sense all believe the gospel that are called Christians,--they do not esteem it a fable; but it is proposed unto us as that which we ought practically to close withal, for ourselves to trust alone unto it for life and salvation. And I shall speak briefly unto two things:--I. How does saving faith approve of this way? on what accounts, and unto what ends? II. How it does evidence and manifest itself hereby unto the comfort of believers.

I. How does saving faith approve of this way? on what accounts, and unto what ends?

First, It approves of it, as that which every way becomes God to find out, to grant, and propose: so speaks the apostle, Heb.2:10, "It became him, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." That becomes God, is worthy of him, is to be owned concerning him, which answers unto his infinite wisdom, goodness, grace, holiness, and righteousness, and nothing else. This faith discerns, judges, and determines concerning this way,--namely, that it is every way worthy of God, and answers all the holy properties of his nature. This is called "The light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," 2 Cor.4:6.

This discovery of the glory of God in this way is made unto faith alone, and by it alone it is embraced. The not discerning of it, and thereon the want of an acquiescence in it, is that unbelief which ruins the souls of men. The reason why men do not embrace the way of salvation tendered in the gospel, is because they do not see nor understand how full it is of divine glory, how it becomes God, is worthy of him, and answers all the perfections of his nature. Their minds are blinded, that the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, does not shine unto them, 2 Cor.4:4. And so they deal with this way of God as if it were weakness and folly. Herein consists the essence and life of faith:--It sees, discerns, and determines, that the way of salvation of sinners by Jesus Christ proposed in the gospel, is such as becomes God and all his divine excellencies to find out, appoint, and propose unto us. And herein does it properly give glory to God, which is its peculiar work and excellency, Rom.4:20; herein it rests and refreshes itself.

In particular, faith herein rejoices in the manifestation of the infinite wisdom of God. A view of the wisdom of God acting itself by his power in the works of creation (for in wisdom he made them all), is the sole reason of ascribing glory

unto him in all natural worship, whereby we glorify him as God; and a due apprehension of the infinite wisdom of God in the new creation, in the way of saving sinners by Jesus Christ, is the foundation of all spiritual, evangelical ascription of glory to God.

It was the design of God, in a peculiar way, to manifest and glorify his wisdom in this work. Christ crucified is the "power of God, and the wisdom of God," 1 Cor.1:24; and "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hid in him," Col.2:3. All the treasures of divine wisdom are laid up in Christ, and laid out about him, as to be manifested unto faith in and by the gospels He designed herein to make known his "manifold wisdom," Eph.3:9,10.

Wherefore, according to our apprehension and admiration of the wisdom of God in the constitution of this way of salvation is our faith, and no otherwise; where that does not appear unto us, where our minds are not affected with it, there is no faith at all.

I cannot stay here to reckon up the especial instances of divine wisdom herein. Somewhat I have attempted towards it in other writings; and I shall only say at present, that the foundation of this whole work and way, in the incarnation of the eternal Son of God, is so glorious an effect of infinite wisdom, as the whole blessed creation will admire to eternity. This of itself bespeaks this way and work divine. Herein the glory of God shines in the face of Jesus Christ. This is of God alone; this is that which becomes him; that which nothing but infinite wisdom could extend unto. Whilst faith lives in a due apprehension of the wisdom of God in this, and the whole superstruction of this way, on this foundation it is safe.

Goodness, love, grace, and mercy, are other properties of the divine nature, wherein it is gloriously amiable. "God is love;" there is none God but he. Grace and mercy are among the principal titles which he everywhere assumes to himself; and it was his design to manifest them all to the utmost in this work and way of saving sinners by Christ, as is everywhere declared in the Scripture. And all these lie open to the eye of faith herein: it sees infinite goodness, love, and grace, in this way, such as becomes God, such as can reside in none but him; which it therefore rests and rejoices in, 1 Pet.1:8. In adherence unto, and approbation of, this way of salvation, as expressive of these perfections of the divine nature, does faith act itself continually.

Where unbelief prevails, the mind has no view of the glory that is in this way of salvation, in that it is so becoming of God and all his holy properties, as the apostle declares, 2 Cor.4:4. And where it is so, whatever is pretended, men cannot cordially receive it and embrace it; for they know not the reason for which it ought to be so embraced: they see no form nor comeliness in Christ, who is the life and centre of this way, "no beauty for which he should be desired," Isa.53:2. Hence, in the first preaching of it, it was "unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness;" for by reason of their unbelief they could not see it

to be, what it is, "the power of God, and the wisdom of God;" and so it must be esteemed, or be accounted folly.

Yea, from the same unbelief it is that at this day the very notion of the truth herein is rejected by many, even all those who are called Socinians, and all that adhere unto them in the disbelief of supernatural mysteries. They cannot see a suitableness in this way of salvation unto the glory of God,--as no unbeliever can; and therefore those of them who do not oppose directly the doctrine of it, yet do make no use of it unto its proper end. Very few of them, comparatively, who profess the truth of the gospel, have an experience of the power of it unto their own salvation.

But here true faith stands invincibly,--hereby it will evidence its truth and sincerity in the midst of all temptations, and the most dismal conflicts it has with them; yea, against the perplexing power and charge of sin thence arising. From this stronghold it will not be driven; whilst the soul can exercise faith herein,--namely, in steadily choosing, embracing, and approving of God's way of saving sinners by Jesus Christ, as that wherein he will be eternally glorified, because it is suited unto, and answers all the perfections of, his nature, is that which every way becomes him,--it will have wherewith to relieve itself in all its trials. For this is faith, this is saving faith, which will not fail us. That faith which works in the soul a gracious persuasion of the excellency of this way, by a sight of the glory of the wisdom, power, grace, love, and goodness of God in it, so as to be satisfied with it, as the best, the only way of coming unto God, with a renunciation of all other ways and means unto that end, will at all times evidence its nature and sincerity.

And this is that which gives the soul rest and satisfaction, as unto its entrance into glory, upon its departure out of this world. It is a great thing, to apprehend in a due manner that a poor soul that has been guilty of many sins, leaving the body, it may be, under great pain, distress, and anguish, it may be by outward violence, should be immediately admitted and received into the glorious presence of God, with all the holy attendants of his throne, there to enjoy rest and blessedness for evermore. But here also faith discerns and approves of this great, of this ineffable, divine operation, as that which becomes the infinite greatness of that wisdom and grace which first designed it, the glorious efficacy of the mediation of Christ, and the excellency of the sanctification of the Holy Spirit, without any expectation from any thing in itself, as a cause meritorious of an admission into this glory. Neither did ever any man know what it is, or desire it in a due manner, who looked for any desert of it in himself, or conceived any proportion between it and what he is or has done in this world. Hence some of those who have not this faith have invented another state, after men are gone out of this world, to make them meet for heaven, which they call purgatory; for on what grounds a man should expect an entrance into glory, on his departure out of this world, they understand not.

Let them who are exercised with temptations and dejections bring their faith unto

this trial; and this is the case, in various degrees, of us all:--First, then, examine strictly by the word whether this be a true description of the nature and acting of saving faith. Sundry things are supposed or asserted in it; as,--1. That the way of saving sinners by

(continued in part 2...)

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