

SERMON 27

ANIMADVERSIONS UPON, *THE LETTERS ON THERON AND ASPASIO*, ADDRESSED TO THAT INGENIOUS AUTHOR.

1758

Christo, sive Christi Verbis credere, idem signifcet, atque, illi obedire. — Christo autem, fve ejus Verbis non credere, idem ft, atque, illi non obedire. Socin. de Jesu Christo Servatore. Pars Quarta, Cap. XI. It is Time that I should now, in my Turn, contend for ACTS OF FAITH PROPERLY SO CALLED; I mean, THOSE WORKS, which Jesus Christ in His new Commandment enjoins all who believe in Him for Righteousness, and by which He would have them known to one another, and to all Men, for his Disciples. Letters on Theron, etc. p. 406.

A Book, consisting of two Volumes, intituled, *Letters on Theron and Aspasio*, hath lately appeared in the World, which is written in a Manner very extraordinary. Such is its Obscurity, that some have said, that, upon reading the whole Performance, they were not able to collect a single Idea from it. Many *Calvinists*, it seems, though' they do not relish everything, which is advanced in this Work, yet, they greatly admire it, are much struck with many thoughts it contains, and apprehend, that this Writer favors most of their Sentiments. I confess, that my Opinion is wholly different from theirs, and that The *Arminians* have much more Right to the Honor of claiming him, as a Patron of their Cause; which I will attempt to make appear, in the following Sections.

Sect. 1. The Gospel is called a Mystery. *We speak the Wisdom of God, in a Mystery.* It bears this Name, because it was undiscoverable by Reason, and, consequently, could never have been known, without supernatural Revelation. But this is not the only Reason, why the Evangelical Scheme is so called, there is another Reason for it; which is, its Doctrines far exceed our Comprehension. And, therefore, though the Revelation of it, in all its Branches, is most clear and full, so that we cannot have any just Cause to doubt of its Truths, yet, it is Still a *Mystery*. It consists of a Set of Principles, which infinitely surpass the most extensive Ideas of any created Understanding. Hence, it is the Object of the holy Adoration of Angels and Saints, and will so be, for evermore. This Writer is much offended, with the Use of the Epithet *Incomprehensible*, in relation to Christian Doctrines. He speaks thus: *Nothing can be more foolish or absurd than to join the Epithets of incomprehensible, obscure, or unintelligible, to a Mystery after it is declared.* To say, that a Thing is hid, or secret, after it is declared, is indeed foolish and absurd; but to affirm, that a

Truth is incomprehensible, whose Nature is infinitely above a finite Capacity, is not so, how clearly so ever that Truth may be revealed.

And such is the Nature of Evangelical Truths, wherefore, they are rightly termed Mysteries, notwithstanding the dear Revelation of them. Why does this Author connect together the Epithets, incomprehensible, obscure, or unintelligible? Are they Terms synonymous? Is he so weak a Man, as to think, that they mean the *same*? I am persuaded, that he is not. I cannot but consider this as an Instance of Unfairness, and Disingenuity in him. He knows that infinite Duration is a Truth incomprehensible, but I think he cannot account it obscure, or unintelligible. It may easily be proved against any Man breathing, that without we allow some incomprehensible Truths, we can have no Religion at all; for, the Whole of Religion is founded on *Mysteries*; or Truths, whereof no Creature whatsoever can frame adequate Ideas.

Sect. 2. *The human Mind is possessed of a Capacity to discern some most important Truths, viz.* That there is a God. That He is an eternal and self-existent Being. That He is infinite in every Perfection. That all Things are, because He wills their Existence. That He is the Origin of Good and Happiness. And that all intelligent Creatures are under indispensable Obligations to honor and obey Him. This Ability is *innate*, or natural to Men, and is inseparable from our Minds. But I can by no means agree with this Author, in thinking, that we have an actual Perception of the above-mentioned Truths, or of any other, *without Reasoning* that supposes., the Truth of the Doctrine of innate Ideas, in the utmost Sense, that can be imagined, and which is mope apparently false. A Man knows the Truth of the Existence of Deity, upon a Perception of Evidence of that Truth; and, therefore, that Knowledge follows upon Reasoning. It is a Conclusion, which the Mind draws from some Premises, which it hath under its Consideration. It is certain, that the human Mind cannot but discern, that some Things are true, and others false; that some are right, and others wrong; that some are fit to be done, and others unfit, upon Examination. But this is no Proof, that it hath an actual Perception, or Knowledge of any Truth, without Reasoning, which this Author maintains, and calls *Conscience, or right Reason*. This the *Quakers* mean, by *the Light within*. This is that *Light* wherewith *every Man is lighted, that cometh into the World*. Natural it is to Men; but is greatly impaired, an Consequence of Man's Apostacy, and, is *unworthy* of the Name of right Reason, which our Author gives it. In many Things. it is wrong. Right Reason is not wrong, an any Thing, which God, the Fountain of all Reason, intended our intelligent Nature should be conversant about.

Sect. 3. *Language is the Medium whereby Men communicate their Ideas one to another.* By that God conveys to us the Knowledge of His Will. The Mean, therefore, of the Conveyance of the Knowledge of Divine Truths is natural; and, yet, the Scripture is properly called a supernatural Revelation, because the Penmen of it,

were divinely directed, in the Use of this natural Mean, of conveying the Knowledge of Truth, and, therefore, they could not err, in their Mode of speaking. Now, as this is a natural Medium of imparting Knowledge, and is not above the Capacities of Men, it is fitted to gain their Assent unto the Truth of those Doctrines, which by this Medium are proposed to their Consideration. This Assent is the Duty of all Men, who enjoy the written Word. And it is not an Act, that surpasses the natural Power of the human Mind. There is nothing supernatural in it, anymore, than there is, in yielding an Assent unto the Truth of the most self-evident Proposition. It does not include a Perception of the Nature of the Things themselves, which are expressed, and unto the Truth of which, this Assent is given. With equal Truth it may be said, that a Man's Belief, that two and three make five, is supernatural, as that a *bare, mere, and simple* Assent, to the Truth of scriptural Propositions is so. For, the latter is no more beyond the Power of Nature than the former. The Cause why Men withhold an Assent from sacred Truths, is not, because they are unable to understand the Medium, which God makes use of to convey to them His Mind and Will; but because they disapprove of what He declares. Hence it is, that so much Art and Violence are used, on scriptural Terms, Phrases, and Expressions, in order to pervert their Sense. If Men could but prevail with themselves to admit of the genuine Import of the Language of Scripture, our religious Controversies would quickly cease. But through a Dislike to those Doctrines, which must be allowed to be true, if the Language of Scripture is taken in its natural Sense, they will use marvelous Shifts and Evasions to obscure and elude it.

Sect. 4. Though the human Mind hath a natural Capacity to understand the Meaning of the Language of Scripture, and is able to perceive the Truth of the Doctrines which are therein expressed, and may therefore, without the least degree of supernatural Aid, believe them, or give a firm Assent unto them, as Principles not to be doubted of: Yet, such Blindness attends it, that it is incapable, without Divine Illumination, of understanding the *real* Nature of those Doctrines, unto the Truth of which it assents. To perceive the Truth of Christian Doctrines, or of the Things of the Spirit of God, and to know the *Things themselves*, are absolutely distinct. The former, a natural, unregenerate Man is capable of: The latter, is entirely above his Power. *The natural Man receiveth not the Things of the Spirit of God, for they are Foolishness to him: Neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*

Sect. 5. The Doctrine of the Scripture relates either unto the first, or second Covenant. The former is called the *old*, and the latter, the *new* Covenant. The first or old Covenant, is the Law: The second or new Covenant, is the Gospel. The old Covenant is a System of Natural Religion, in its absolute Purity and Perfection. It consists of Precepts, Promises, and Threatening's. It requires perfect Love to God, and our Neighbor, which includes all such Acts of Reverence towards our Maker, as

His infinite Perfections require; and all Acts of Justice and Benevolence, towards our Fellow-Creatures. Promises of Life and Happiness are made unto Man, in this Covenant, upon a perfect Obedience to its Precepts. And Threatening's of Death and Misery are denounced therein, in case of Sin, or Disobedience. According to this Covenant, therefore, sinful Men can have no Ground to hope for Acceptance with God, or the Enjoyment of Him. Unto Sinners, it is no other than, a *Ministration of Death, and Condemnation*.

The second, or *new* Covenant, is a sovereign, gracious, and full Provision for the complete Salvation of the Church of God, in such a Way as establishes the first Covenant, and effectually secures unto it the highest Glory. Christ was constituted Mediator in this Covenant, and therein He became a Surety to God, in the Characters of a Lawgiver and Judge, for all those Persons, whom it respects. He undertook to do and suffer for them, all that was necessary to be done and suffered, in order to their Pardon and Salvation, consistent with the Honor of the *first* Covenant. The *new* Covenant, therefore, as it regards our Saviour, was *properly conditional*, and He could not claim the Fulfillment of any Promises made therein, to Him, in our Favor, without the Performance of what He engaged to do and suffer for us. As it respects us, it is *absolutely unconditional* Nothing is required of us, as a proper Condition, in order to a Participation of the Blessings, which are therein promised. So that, it is most fitly called, by *Divines*, a Covenant of Grace. It contains in it, Pardon, Peace, Justification, Grace for our Regeneration, Conversion, Sanctification, Preservation, in this State, and it also ensures to us eternal Life in the next.

This Author says that he has *no Concern with the Distinction betwixt these Covenants, upon which our Systems are formed* This is certainly true; for, the Doctrine which he advances agrees to neither. It is contrary to Natural and Revealed Religion: Or, it suits not with the first Covenant, which is Natural Religion in its absolute Purity; nor with the second Covenant, which, in Sum, is Revealed Religion. Like many other erroneous Persons, he disapproves of Systems, I suppose, from a Consciousness, in himself, that his Principles do not consist with any System of Divinity. However, that be, in Fact, they do not. In the Covenant, which was made with the People of *Israel*, at Mount *Sinai*, there Was a Repetition of the Covenant of Works, and ritual and political Laws were added unto that. Wherefore, the Covenant, Which was made with that People, included Laws moral, ceremonial, and political, The Observance of all which, God required of them. But not with a View, that they might, thereby, obtain spiritual and eternal Blessings: For, they were not promised therein. All Blessings of a spiritual Nature were granted in another Covenant distinct from that, and which was *confirmed of God, in Christ, four hundred and thirty Years*, before the Levitical Institution. For which Reason, among many others, I humbly conceive, that the Covenant made with the People of *Israel*, at Mount *Sinai*, was not a Dispensation of the Covenant of Grace, although the ceremonial Part of it had a

typical Relation to the spiritual Benefits, which the *better Promises* of that Covenant express.

Sect. 6. One grand Article agreed on, and settled in the Covenant of Grace, was Atonement for Sin, and the Remission of it, to the Guilty, in Consequence of that Atonement. Jesus Christ is the Party, in this Covenant, of whom making Atonement was required, and that important Work, He undertook therein. The Father's Will that He should, and His Compliance therewith, are both expressed in these Words: *Lo! I come to do thy Will, O my God.* The Father transferred Our sins from us, and placed them to the Account of Christ. *He made Him to be Sin for us, who knew no Sin.* And Christ took Our Guilt upon Himself, or freely consented to bear, it for us, that we might be legally acquitted. Upon the Imputation of our Crimes to Him, He became subject to that Curse, which they demerited, And, accordingly, in His Sufferings, He was *made a Curse for us.* The whole Penalty which we were obnoxious unto, in Consequence of Sin, He endured. For, the Law's Curse, which He was made, includes it all. The Blessed Jesus, therefore, in His Sufferings Was our Substitute; and, by reason of the infinite Dignity of His Person, His Sufferings are of infinite Value, and satisfactory, to the Law and Justice of God, for our whole Guilt. Remission of Sin, on this Foundation, is an Act of Justice, as Well as an Act of Grace: *Mercy and Truth meet together, Righteousness and Peace kiss each other.*

Sect. 7. The Doctrine of our Justification before God is of the greatest Importance. For, if we are not justified, we shall not be glorified. As we are all guilty, and imperfect in our Obedience, God cannot account us innocent; for that is contrary to Truth and Fact, which with Him is absolutely impossible. In Justification Respect is had to the Law, which is the Rule prescribed for our Conduct, and our Conformity or Inconformity to that Rule. If we are conformable to the Law, we shall be accounted innocent, or righteous; but if we are not, we must be accounted innocent, or unrighteous. Now, *as every Mouth is stopped, and all the World, i.e.* Men universally, *are become guilty before God;* no Man, whatever, can be esteemed just by the Divine Lawgiver, on the Foundation of his own Temper, and Actions. A Person of an unmixed Character is not to be found upon the Earth. All that can be said to the Advantage of the *Best* of human Race is this, that they are less guilty than others, whose Crimes are more, and whose Defects are greater: Not that they are innocent.

And to say, that God may esteem a Man innocent and innocent, or unrighteous and righteous, on the same Ground. Is an impious Absurdity. For, that necessarily supposes, that the infinite Understanding of God, may pass a false and contradictory Judgment on human Actions. And, therefore, at is most evident, that no Man can be justified, in the Sight of God, by his own Works: Because every Man is guilty of committing Sin, in some Instances, and is not perfect, in any Act of Obedience, which he performs. In the Gospel, we have a gracious, and clear Revelation of a

Righteousness, which is absolutely perfect, and of infinite Value, *viz.* Christ's Righteousness. He condescended to come under the Obligation of the Law, or Covenant of Works, for our Sakes. Not upon His own Account, that by yielding Obedience to it, He might acquire a Right for Himself to Glory. That would have been incompatible with the Dignity of His Person, who is God, as well as Man; and, therefore, He hath a Right to Glory and Blessedness, on an infinitely higher Ground than that, which the Covenant of Works requires of us. As He came under the Law, on Our Account, to redeem us from it, He was perfectly conformable to it, in His Heart and Conduct. His Obedience is such, in Worth, as His Person is in Dignity, *viz.* immense. This Righteousness, He brought in for us; and God graciously imputes it unto us, whereby we are made righteous, and become, in Consequence thereof, *Heirs according to the Hope of eternal Life.*

This Writer affects to be thought, a strenuous Advocate for the Doctrines of Atonement by Christ's Death, and of imputed Righteousness. And, by his uncommon Manner of treating on those Points, he hath been by many, it seems, as grossly mistaken, perhaps, as ever any Author was. Not a Few have apprehended, that he thinks, that the Death of Christ is *a real* procuring Cause of the Pardon of Sin, and that His Righteousness is the *Matter* of a Sinner's Justification before God; whereas, in Truth, he no more believes either the one, or the other, than a Christian believes the *Alcoran*. It may be some of his Admirers will very highly relent this Assertion; but I have no Scruple Concerning its Proof, which I Will immediately give.

Sect. 8. He speaks thus: I am far from thinking, that any honest, or sincere Attempt to please God, ever failed of Success. Yea, I am ready to shew, that all Objections and Impediments have been, by a particular Divine Edict for that Purpose, removed and dispensed with in Favor of all, who are sincerely well disposed, whenever they shall be found. This Edict he produces, and argues upon, afterwards, I apprehend, it would be no great Difficulty to prove, that the Scripture itself will warrant any Man to hope for Acceptance with God, by his own Righteousness, who is influenced by all those good Dispositions toward the Law, which Aspasio considers as Requisites for coming to Christ. He who can say, I feel an Aversion to Sin, and prize the holy Law above all Things: The prevailing Bias of my Affections is to the Divine Law, and the habitual Breathing of my Soul after a Conformity to its Precepts, is, I think, in a fair Way to fulfill the Law, so as to live by his own Obedience, according to what is said, Ezekiel 33:14-19. If the Wicked turn from his Sin, and do that which is lawful and right — he shall surely live — he shall not die — none of his Sins that he hath committed, shall be mentioned unto him: He hath done that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live — he shall live thereby. Thus the Dispositions made necessary for our obtaining Life by Christ, are sufficient to make us live without Him, and to supersede the Necessity of any Christ, or Atonement at all. — He adds,

They (the Jews) thought, to what Purpose shall we reform, or hearken to the Prophet's Warning, to turn from our evil Way, while our former Transgressions still stand upon Record against us? Let us do ever so well for the Time to come, we must be treated as Criminals for what is past? God removes the Ground of this Complaint, He assures every Man, who shall sincerely repent, or turn from his evil Way, and do that which is lawful and right, that he shall, be happy, and no Mention made of his former Faults. All this He confirms by His Oath, that there might be no remaining Doubt, or Hesitation, in the Minds of Men, ABOUT THEIR ACCEPTANCE with Him, as soon As THEY REFORMED. — He subjoins: If nothing but Equity had appeared in the Divine Character, nothing but Misery could have been looked for by the Guilty. To Men who are dissatisfied with His Way, as unequal, God proposes to deal with them according to any Rule of Equity insisted on among them: Ye say, the Way of the Lord is not equal. O ye House of Israel, I will judge every one of you after his Ways. So likewise, it appears from the New Testament, that everyone who is found guilty at last, shall be condemned out of his own Mouth, or for walking unsuitably to his own Maxim. The Field then is left fair and open for everyone who wills, to run. Every Let or Hindrance, every Objection that the reasoning Faculty of Man can frame, is entirely removed. — Let all the well-disposed, all the Friends of Virtue, avail themselves of the free Declaration; God Himself hath set His Oath to it, that everyone who turns from Evil to do Good shall be happy. Elsewhere he says Perhaps it will be inquired, Are no Rules to be observed, no Means to be used, no Works to be exerted by the human Mind or Body, in order to Justification? The Answer is ready: Yes, very many. And they maybe thus shortly summed up: Be perfect, keep the Commandments, and thou shalt live. — The Obligation of the Law is eternal, so can never be loosed. No Man can be assured that his Sins are forgiven him, but in as far as he is freed from the Service of Sin, and led to work Righteousness. For we must still maintain that the Favor of God can only be enjoyed, in (he means by, or, for) studying to do those Things, which are well-pleasing in His sight.

Sect. 9. The Author allows of no other Incapacity in us to comply with Prescriptions of Duty, than an Aversion to it; or Readiness in us to do Evil, than what arises from our Love to it. As for those who are sincerely well inclined, I have no Doubt but they will do that which is lawful and right; even as I make no Question but those who are averse to Sin, will avoid it: For I have no Notion, either from Scripture or Experience, of any Impotency in Man to do Good, but what arises from his Aversion to it; or Readiness in him to do Evil, but what arises from his Love to it. I will freely grant him, that no greater Impotency attends Man, to act in a holy Manner, than attends one who is naturally dead to actuate the several Members of the Body, or perform vital Acts. We cannot act spiritually, as we are dead, or destitute of a Principle of spiritual Life. And we will not, or are disinclined to what

is spiritual, as our Minds are depraved and corrupt. Both are equally true of unregenerate Men. No Man is sincerely well disposed until he is born again; or, *created in Christ Jesus unto good Works.*

Sect. 10. *He says: It does not signify much, by what Name we call the Mean of Escape, whether we call it the Law or the Gospel; for the great Concern we have with either of them, is to obtain a Righteousness, or Title to Life. I apprehend, that the great Difficulty is over, when a Man — has got his Aversion to Righteousness overcome, and pointed the other Way, toward Sin. — It is common to both, (the Law and the Gospel) that they convey Happiness, or afford Hope to the well-disposed. And the Exercise of the Candidates must be much the time, with respect to either; that is, to endeavor to attain a Sense of former Deficiencies, with a proper Value and Esteem for the Mean of Escape; or, in other Words, to attain to the Hatred of Sin, and the Love of righteousness. Why should we seek to repress any Man's Impetuosity to fulfill the Law, who already knows the Reason and Matter of his Duty, and is already acquainted with the Nature and Duties of the Law? Why should we retard his Course, by entangling him in a Labyrinth about the Use of Means, seeing he may die before he has learned to use them aright, and so never reach his desired End. Methinks it would be much better to direct him to study Ezekiel, Chap. 33, where he will find that all well-disposed Persons have as much Security for their Happiness, as the Oath of God can give. As for the Gospel, it was only intended to relieve those ill-disposed People, who despair of ever doing anything to render them acceptable to God, by any Assistance whatsoever. It was never intended to be an Auxiliary to those good People, who are desirous to give acceptable Obedience to the Divine Law. All such, where-ever they are, shall undoubtedly be happy, WITHOUT HAVING ANY OCCASION TO TROUBLE THEIR HEADS ABOUT THE GOSPEL. The Gospel is only a gracious Provision, made, by the supreme Royal Prerogative, for the Guilty and the Desperate. Jesus Christ came only to bring Relief to the Vicious and the Ungodly, without infringing the Privileges of the Righteous in the least. The Gospel was never intended to improve the Righteous, and elevate them to a higher Condition, but to relieve the Wretched. The Author wonders what Business Aspasio had to urge upon Theron, the imputed Righteousness, who had little or no Occasion for it. And says, Methinks he acts below the Dignity of the sacred Theme. In his Opinion, therefore, a Man, upon becoming obedient to the Law, may very well part with the Righteousness of Christ, because, then, he has little or no Occasion for it. And, that it is sinking the Dignity of the sacred Theme. to insist upon it, that the Righteousness of Christ is necessary to the Justification of a Man, Who is holy, or righteously disposed; although that Righteousness only, is commensurate to the Law, as a complete Rule of Action, and his own is far, very far short of being so. Everyone who unfeignedly esteems the Divine Law, is awakened into habitual and lively Desires after its Purity, and is willing to receive Life in the*

Way appointed therein, shall assuredly find it to be, a never-failing Spring of Consolation. The Law, then, can give Life unto a Sinner, upon his yielding Obedience to its Precepts; and he has no Occasion to concern himself about the Gospel, in order to his future Blessedness. Let that be true, or false, rightly understood, or mistaken, it is of no Importance.

Sect. 11. *Though the Author thinks, that Persons of righteous Dispositions may discard the Gospel, in the Business of Justification, or of obtaining Life; yet, it is of Use to relieve the Worthless, Wretched, and Desperate,* or such who have been profligately wicked; and, therefore, a Belief of it, or an Assent unto its Truth, is needful for them: Which Agent, in his Opinion, is that Faith, which accompanies Salvation. Because, he takes that for granted, or begs it, which will never be proved, viz. *That, no Man assents to the Truth of the Gospel, without he approves of, and loves it.* Men, as well as Devils, may believe that the Gospel is true, and yet, not like it, any more than they. Nothing in *Aspasio*, he thinks, *deserves greater Censure, than his denying, that any Manner of Advantage arises to us from a bare Persuasion of the Truth of the Gospel.* This Assent or Persuasion is no other than a natural Act: It is not above the Power of any Man, who understands common Language. He says, *we are to consider Faith as a Principle of Life and Action.* If so, it is more than a mere Assent, simple Belief, or a bare Persuasion. For, an Act is not a Principle of Life and Action. It is very great Inaccuracy to call it so. Notwithstanding, he asserts, that Faith is a *mere Assent* to, or a *bare Persuasion* of, the Truth of the Gospel, in Opposition to those, whom he is pleased to call *popular Preachers*; yet, he maintains, that Love accompanies that Assent.

Faith, therefore, must be more than a simple Belief of the Truth of the Gospel; an Approbation of it, or Love unto it, is included therein. The great Difference between him, and those whom he opposes, is this: He supposes that Love to Evangelical Truths attends a simple Belief of them, which is no other than a natural Act of the human Mind, produced by a natural Medium. And they think that a living Faith is *supernatural*, as a Principle, and in all its Acts; and that a real Approbation of spiritual Things, cannot be in a Mind destitute of such a Principle. This is that, which exasperates and enrages him unto an excessive Degree, and causes him to cast about *Fury* and *Virulence*, in a Manner, scarcely to be paralleled, in any Author, as I think. *Love*, he says, *is the Activity of that Life which a Man obtains by Faith.* If Faith is a Principle of Life and Action, how is Life obtained by it? Is not this the same, as to say, the Act of a vital Principle obtains that Principle? The proper Acts of Faith, in his Opinion, are Acts of Obedience, or the Performance of those Works which Jesus Christ enjoins on all who believe. Which are there, *Love, Repentance, Self-denial, and working of Righteousness.* Upon these Acts being put forth by a Man, he *enjoys the Holy Spirit, as the Comforter, and is filled with Consolation*, which arises from a pleasing Consciousness, of his being obedient to the Commands of Christ: Or, of

his being freed from the Service of Sin, and led to work Righteousness. For, that Is the Foundation on which, his Assurance of the Pardon of his Sins, is to be founded, and also his Hope of Blessedness, must be built on that Ground: For, on that *the Assurance of Hope rests*, as this Author teaches us.

I know not but he may be much mistaken by some, on this Subject. Possibly, they may think, that he is not a Friend to Morality; because he inveighs vehemently against what he calls *popular Holiness*, and sneers not a little at *Heart-work*. As it consists in *Illumination, Conviction, spiritual Sorrow for Sin, and Affiance, or Trust in Christ for Salvation*. But he is not an Enemy to Morality. The Cause of his keen Resentment against those whom he calls *popular Preachers* is this, they do not allow, that Morality is Evangelical Holiness; or, that a Change for the better, in the Morals of a Man, upon a simple Belief of the Truth of the Gospel, is that Holiness which is requisite to future Blessedness. It is this, that raises his Indignation to its *prodigious Height*.

Sect. 12. The Principles of this Author are plainly these: That *the Law under which Man was, in his Creation-State, is dispensed with by the supreme royal Prerogative of God, in our Favor, as we are guilty and sinful.* — That, *another Law is enacted, or a Divine Edict is published, by obeying which Sinners may obtain Righteousness, or Life.* — That, *well-disposed, virtuous Persons, have no Occasion to concern, or trouble themselves about the Gospel Atonement, imputed Righteousness, and all other Evangelical Doctrines, with respect to them, are needlers, and were never intended for their Relief.* — That, *such who have been immoral and vicious in their Lives, upon becoming virtuous, and righteously disposed, have no farther Occasion for the Gospel: For, the Divine Edict, whereby the Law, as requiring Perfection, is dispensed with, will be a never-failing Spring of Consolation to them* — That, *Faith in Christ is not a Dependence on Him, or Trust in Him, for Salvation; but a bare Persuasion of the Truth of the Gospel, though he thinks, that Love to it attends that Persuasion.* That, *the Atonement of Christ secures not the Pardon of Sin to any Man.* — That, *on the Ground of Justice, Men may expect to be justified at the Bar of God, by their own Obedience to the sovereign Edict, which He hath condescended to publish, by His supreme royal Prerogative, for that Purpose.* Now, is it not amazing, that any Calvinist should conceive, that this Author is a Favourer of his Sentiments, since, the Principles which he advances, are diametrically opposite to them? Perhaps, some will say to me, Surely you mistake him? Does he not contend, that no Qualifications whatever, in us, are necessary, in order to our Acceptance with God, and highly commend *Aspasio* for excluding all Sorts of our own Works, in our Justification, in a most excellent Passage, which he cites from the *Dialogues*? I answer, he does; and that *golden Passage* I most heartily approve of. It is this: *Both Grace and Faith stand in direct Opposition to Works; all Works whatever. Whether they be Works of the Law, or Works of the Gospel; Exercises of the Heart, or Actions*

of the Life, done while we remain unregenerate, or when we become regenerate, they are all, and every of them, equally set aside in this great Affair. That the Bill of Exclusion is thus extensive, or rather quite unlimited, appears from the Reason assigned; lest any Man should boast That all Pretense of glorying may be cut off from fallen Creatures. That the whole Honor of obtaining Salvation may be appropriated to Him, who hid not His Face from Shame and Spitting. — And is He not worthy, unspeakably worthy, to receive this unrivalled Honor, as a Recompence for His unparalleled Humiliation? Our Author's Admirers will, it may be, infer from his applauding of this Passage, that he cannot possibly think, that our own Works are the Matter of our Justification, or the Cause of our Acceptance with God, and the Ground of our Title to Life and future Blessedness. So *Aspasio* means; but this Author is as distant from such a Meaning, as Earth is from Heaven: And his good Friends the *Arminians*, and *modern Socinians*, can help him to get clear of Self-contradiction, in denying, that any Requisites in us are necessary to Reconciliation, Acceptance with God, and Justification; and in affirming, that our Obedience is the true Cause of our *real* Pardon, Justification, and Title unto Life. You will say, how can they do this for him? I answer thus: They say, there is *first* Reconciliation; this was obtained by the Death of Christ, nothing in us is required to that; but it includes not *real* or *actual* Pardon of Sin: It is a sovereign gracious Edict, by which Men may be assured of Pardon, if they reform and become obedient to the Law, and continue to be so. *And*, there is a *first* Justification, and a *final* Justification. In the former, God is so well pleased with the Obedience of His Son, that He declares Himself ready to accept and justify Men, notwithstanding, all their former Miscarriages, upon their Reformation and future Obedience, which is a very great Act of His Grace and Favor. This is what our Author intends by a Sinner's Acceptance with God, without Works of his own. In *final* Justification, or Justification at the Bar of God hereafter, Respect will be had unto those good Works, which we now perform, as the Ground, or Cause thereof. So that, as this Author says, *Justice, as well as Grace, will appear in the last Judgment; then due Regard will be had to every Man's Works. But in the Justification of SINNERS, God has no Respect to any Man as better than another.* Divine Favor, or Grace, will appear therein, because it is by a sovereign, gracious Edict, that it is appointed, that our imperfect Works shall be accepted unto our Justification, and Right to Blessedness: Justice will also appear therein; because in justifying the Righteous, on the Foundation of their own Works, God will act agreeably to that sovereign Edict, by which it is appointed, that their Obedience shall be accepted to that great End, which the essential Righteousness of his own Nature will oblige Him to make good. *Calvinists* maintain, that *Justice, as well as Grace, will appear, in the Justification of Believers, at the Bar of God. Not on the Ground of their own Works: This they will eternally deny; but on the Foundation of the Righteousness of Christ Grace provides for them*

that Righteousness, by which they are constituted Just; and it is an Act of Justice to justify them, upon their being made the Righteousness of God in Christ, or righteous by the Imputation of His Righteousness unto them. For, *God is just in justifying of those who believe in Jesus.*

Having stated and summed up the Principles of this Writer, I will briefly attempt to refute them.

Sect. 13. He grants, that Man, upon his Apostasy, could not work out a justifying Righteousness, according to the Law under which he was, in his State of Integrity; but insists upon it, that, *that Law is dispensed with in our Favor, as we are guilty and sinful, by a particular Divine Edict for that Purpose.* Most evident it is, that, that Law requires us to love God *with all our Heart, with all our Soul, and with all our Strength.* That Love to our Maker comprises, or consists in an Adoration of His infinite Perfections; a Delight in Him, as He is a Being of immense Goodness; a Reverence of Him, as He is infinitely holy, and powerful; and an entire, absolute Subjection to His Will and Authority in all Things. The Reason and Ground whereon this Love is required of the intelligent Creature Man, is the *Nature* of God, or His infinitely glorious Attributes, unless, therefore, a Change takes place in the *Nature* of God, the Reason of His requiring perfect, supreme Love to Himself will eternally remain; and, if that Reason continues, He cannot dispense with that Requirement, without acting contrary to His own infinite Understanding, which, with Him, is absolutely impossible. Hence it is clear, that it is an *impious Absurdity* to imagine, that God hath dispensed With His Command given to Man, wherein He requires perfect and supreme Love to Himself, and those Acts of holy Adoration, Delight, Reverence, and Subjection to His Will, as such Love includes. Farther, if Divine Precepts are now less extensive, than they once were, let us be plainly told, how far the Abatement is carried. What Degrees of Imperfection, in our Love to God, and Obedience to His Will, are allowed of, in our Favor, as Creatures depraved and sinful. As the Law requires perfect Love to our Creator, so it requires perfect Love to our Neighbor; which Love is a friendly, benevolent Disposition. *It works no Ill* to its Object; but is kind, good, sympathetic, and compassionate in all its Acts. The Reason of requiring such Love to our Neighbor, is the infinite Goodness of the Nature of God, which can never dispense with that Requirement. The Law, therefore, as requiring perfect Love to God, and perfect Love to our Fellow-Creatures, remains, and will everlastingly remain in full Force, without the least Abatement.

The Law, as a Ground of the Divine Procedure, in the Justification, or Condemnation of Man, is a Covenant wherein Life is promised to perfect Obedience, and Death is threatened in Care of Disobedience. Believers are not under it, as such; but as it is a Law *simply*, or a *binding* Rule of Action *only*. And, therefore, they are not under its Curse, being redeemed therefrom by the Death of Christ: Yet, their Sins are not less *displeasing to God, than those of other Men:* Nor do they *less demerit the Curse of*

the Divine Law, and the Wrath to come. Neither does the *popular Doctrine*, as this Author calls it, suppose the one, or the other. He either understands it not, or willfully abuses that Doctrine. But it is a precious Truth, that Saints suffer only *fatherly Chastisements*, and not the Law's Curse, and Divine Vengeance, for their Miscarriages. Christ having endured in their Stead, the whole Penalty, which their Sins deserve, and thereby made complete Atonement for them.

Sect. 14. *That sovereign Edict, by which the Law, as requiring Perfection, is dispensed with, is contained in Ezekiel, Chap. 18, and 33, as this Author asserts.* By a very brief Consideration of these Chapters, it will appear, that no such Edict is therein contained.

1. The Complaint made concerning the Divine Procedure, in the Infliction of Punishment for Sin, is not the Complaint of some Individuals only; but it is the Complaint of the Body of the *Jewish People*: It is a public national one.

2. The Matter of this Complaint, was what they suffered, as a Nation, or Body politic, that is to say, *national* Judgments for *national* Sins.

3. No Respect is had, in this Complaint, unto the *Judgment to come*, and a *future* State; it only regards the present Dispensations of God, in His Providence towards them, as a Nation. They had not the least View to God's Treatment of them hereafter; their View was limited to the present State: Or, it was not carried one Jot farther. And, therefore,

4. The Death which they complained of suffering, was not *the second*, or eternal Death, unto which impenitent Sinners will be adjudged hereafter; but a *civil* Death, which they now suffered for *public* Guilt, according to that Covenant, which God made with them, as a *Body politic*. Consequently,

5. That Life, which they desired, and which God promised, upon their Reformation, was not eternal Life; but the Opposite of that *civil* Death, whereof they made Complaint, *viz.* a quiet and peaceable Enjoyment of that fruitful Land, which was given to them, and of those temporal Privileges, which were granted unto them therein. I dare be bold to affirm, that this Author will never be able to prove, that the *Jews*, in their Complaint, had Respect to a future State, or that God, in answering that Complaint, had any Regard unto Futurity. He must produce some other Proof, of the Publication of a sovereign Divine Edict, by which the Law, as requiring perfection, is dispensed with, in Favour of sinful Men; for no such Edict is there to be found.

Sect. 15. *Our Author's Opinion is, that all well-disposed virtuous Persons have no Occasion to concern, or trouble themselves about the Gospel.* 1. There well-disposed Persons are not sinless, or free from Imperfection, either in Heart, or Life. 2. I suppose, it will be thought proper for them to consult that sovereign Divine Edict, by which the Law, as requiring Perfection, is with. How else can they be assured, that their imperfect Obedience will entitle them to future Blessedness? 3. If it is not

necessary to concern, or trouble themselves about the Gospel, then that Edict is not the Gospel. This, I think, the Author must be obliged to grant: And indeed, the Gospel it is not, nor is it the Holy Law of God. That is no Law of His, which does not require supreme, perfect Love to Himself, and perfect Love to our Neighbor. This Edict is neither the Religion of Jesus, nor the Religion of Nature; but it is a dreadful Corruption of the latter. And nothing *more unworthy* of God can be devised, than the Publication of such an Edict is. For, the Supposition of it, reflects Dishonor on His infinite Perfections. And, therefore, that Supposition ought to be eternally abhorred. For my Part, I detest it with all my Soul. 4. Permit me to ask, why these well-disposed Persons need not concern themselves about the Gospel? Is it because they are secure of Happiness by this Edict in their Favor? It will be said, they are. And, what then? I imagine our Author will answer, that is enough for them. Having as much Security for their Happiness, as they can reasonably desire, why should they not rest satisfied with that? What is the Gospel to them? That was only intended for the Relief of the *Wretched, Worthless, and Desperate* among Mankind. It was never designed to be an Auxiliary to them; they may, therefore, well spare themselves the Labor of making any Inquiries into it. Let those *worthless Wretches* employ themselves in the Study of the Gospel, who want it; as for those well-disposed People, they need it not.

They may be happy without it. 5. I desire to be informed, for what Reason the holy Angels, who are not the Subjects of Salvation by Jesus Christ, which the Gospel is a Revelation of, are so intent upon the Study of Evangelical Truths? With *a most intense* Desire they look into, and humbly adore those sacred Truths, because of that illustrious Display, which there is of the Sovereignty, Wisdom, Kindness, Grace, Mercy, Truth, Holiness, and Power of God, in the Constitution of the Person of Christ, and in the glorious Designs, which are by Him accomplished. But there are Things, it seems, which well-disposed and virtuous Persons have no Occasion to trouble their Heads about. I cannot refrain from expressing great Astonishment, that any Man, who professes to be a Lover of the Gospel, should entertain a favorable Opinion of a Performance, wherein such Slight is cast upon that most precious, and adorable Scheme, which is the only Foundation of our present Hope as Sinners, and will eternally be the Matter of our delightful Contemplation in Heaven, if there we come.

Sect. 16. The Author thinks, that those who have been immoral and vicious in their Lives, upon becoming virtuous, and righteously disposed, have no farther Occasion for the Gospel; because the Divine Edict, whereby the Law, as requiring Perfection, is dispensed with, will be a never-failing Spring of Consolation to them. He maintains that *the Gospel was not intended to improve the Righteous, and elevate them to a higher Condition.* There Persons, therefore, now being such, though they were formerly of a very different Character, they have no Need of the Gospel. For,

now having that Holiness, which is necessary to Happiness, they may, without any Danger, be turned over from the Gospel to the Law, as it allows of Imperfection, and obtain Life by it: Or obey it, so as to live by that. But,

1. No such Edict is extant in the sacred Records, however, not the least Proof thereof is yet given by our Author; it is not to be found in those Places, unto which he refers us for it.

2. Such an Edict cannot consist with the infinite Perfections of God. The Reason of His requiring supreme, perfect Love to Himself, is the infinite Excellency of His own Nature; and, therefore, it is no less absurd to suppose, that He may cease to require such Love of His Creatures, than it is to imagine, that He may cease to be God.

3. No *Law was given, which could give Life*, in the Time of the Apostle *Paul* And, I think, that it will never be proved, that such a Law hath been given since. Therefore,

4. The Law cannot be a never-failing Spring of Consolation to any of the Sons of Men. The Gospel only is such a Spring, wherein *the Righteousness of God is revealed from Faith to Faith*. Which Righteousness is *everlasting*; and with that Righteousness, everlasting Salvation is inseparably connected, and *Divine Grace will reign through it unto eternal Life*.

Sect. 17. He insists upon it, that Faith is not a Dependence on Christ, or Truth in Him for Salvation; but a bare Persuasion of the Truth of the Gospel; though he thinks, that *Love to it attends that Persuasion*. On this Subject he expatiates largely, and charges those, whom he calls *popular Preachers*, with many and great Inconsistencies upon this Point; especially, as Assurance is thought to be essential to Faith. My Opinion being different, I shall not undertake to defend it: Nor, do I think myself at all obliged to vindicate any Writers, who through Inadvertency may have, in some Instances, expressed themselves in an inconsistent Manner. It is Truth only, which I shall contend for.

1. A mere Assent, a simple Belief, or bare Persuasion of the Truth of the Gospel, as I before observed, is a *mere natural* Act of the human Mind, produced by a *natural Mean*, viz. common Language, whereby Divine Truths are expressed. God speaks to us in His Word, and He requires us to believe the Truth of those Doctrines, which He delivers therein. Now, I would ask, whether He speaks intelligibly, or not? If He speaks so as to be understood; or, if His Language is not above the natural Capacity of Man, it is a Medium sufficient to produce in Men, an Assent to the Truths expressed, without the least supernatural Assistance, This Assent, therefore, cannot be that precious *Faith*, which the Apostle says *is obtained by Lot*, (τοῖ λαχοῦσι) which this Author would persuade us it is. He might as well say, it is by Lot, that Men obtain a Belief, that two and two make four, as assert, that Men obtain by Lot, a simple Belief of the Truth of the Gospel, if God speaks to us intelligibly in the

Scripture. And I suppose none will say, that he speaks *unintelligibly*; because that would be the same, as saying, no End can be answered by His speaking.

2. Love to the Gospel does not, nor can attend a *bare* Persuasion of its Truth. The Author's Supposition, that it may, is absolutely groundless. Love to Evangelical Truths arises from an Acquaintance with their true Nature, or real Excellency, which a natural Man hath not, nor can have. *They are Foolishness to him, neither can he know them; because they are spiritually discerned.*

3. No Acts of spiritual Obedience can spring from a mere Assent to the Truths of the Gospel; because, that is no other than a natural Act: It is not a spiritual Principle of Operation. The Mind, notwithstanding, that Assent, is still *carnal*, and *Enmity against God, it is not subject to His Law, neither indeed can be.*

4. Those Acts of holy Obedience, which the subjects of supernatural Faith yield unto God, are Fruits of that Faith, and accompany it; but they are not that Faith itself: Or, that Faith does not consist in Acts of Obedience, though Acts of Obedience flow from that excellent Grace. But the proper Acts of Faith, in his Account, are no other than *Socinian Obedience*, which may be yielded to the Divine Law, without the Infusion of a holy Principle into the Mind.

5. Faith, considered as an Act, is a Trust in, or Dependence on Christ alone for Salvation, upon a Conviction of our miserable and helpless Condition in ourselves, and a Perception of the Wisdom, Fitness, and Glory of the Method of laving Sinners by Him. Without such a Conviction, no Man will ever believe *to the saving of the Soul*. It is produced by a View of the vast Extent of the Law, a Prospect of our Guilt, an Apprehension of its just Demerit, a Sense of the *Plague of our Hearts*, and a Discernment of the infinite Holiness of God, as appearing in His Law. Thus, *thro' the Law we become dead to the Law, that we may live unto God*, upon another Foundation, which is absolutely distinct from that, *viz.* the Covenant of Grace. Our Author calls this, *the idle Process of a Law-Work*. But, if he is an entire Stranger unto a Work of this Kind upon his Mind, he is destitute of that Faith, which is of *the Operation of God*, and under the Power of Unbelief. Let him think of that Matter, as he pleases. No Man will ever receive Christ, or believe in Him, without such a Conviction. In Virtue of that Light, by which we come to know our Misery, and Helplessness, we see the Necessity of such a Saviour as Christ is, and the Glory which arises to God, in saving us, through the Blood, Righteousness, and Grace of the Blessed Jesus: This makes Him precious to us, and keeps us fixed in a Dependence on Him, for Pardon, Peace, Acceptance with God, Wisdom, Holiness, and spiritual Strength, in all Times of Temptation, and Distress. So that, Faith is a cordial Reception of Christ, as the Way of Salvation appointed by God, and an immoveable Adherence unto Him, as our ALL IN ALL.

Sect. 18. This Writer's Opinion is, that the Atonement of Christ secures not the Pardon of Sin to any Man. For, That it cannot do, if our Acceptance with God, and

Justification before Him hereafter, depends upon, and is to be secured by our Obedience to that Edict, whereby the Law, as requiring Perfection, is dispensed with; which he strenuously maintains. Notwithstanding, therefore, all that he hath said on the Doctrine of Atonement, by the Death of Christ, he does not think, that Sin is *really* expiated by His atoning Sacrifice, nor that Sinners are *actually* redeemed from the Law's Curse, by what He suffered, nor *really* secured from enduring the vindictive Displeasure of God, by all those agonizing Tortures, which He endured for them. Real Atonement consists in these Things, *viz*; a Removal of Guilt — Redemption from the Law's Curse — and, Security from suffering Divine Penalty; or, an *actual* Right to Impunity, unto which the Sinner was obnoxious, on Account of his Offences. And, for my Part, I will never contend with any Man, for Atonement by the Death of the Son of God, if these Things are not allowed to be included therein. Adored be Divine Favor for it! Christ hath *put away Sin by the Sacrifice of Himself*. — He hath *redeemed us from the Curse of the Law, being made a Curse for us*. — And, *Peace is made by the Blood of His Cross*. When, therefore, we *were Enemies, we were reconciled to God, by the Death of His Son*. Hence it is clear, that our Right to Impunity, springs not from our Acts of Obedience; but results absolutely, and alone, from the infinitely meritorious Sufferings of the Blessed Jesus.

Sect. 19. He imagines, that on the Ground of Justice, Men may expect to be justified, at the Bar of God, by their own Obedience to the sovereign Edict, which He hath condescended to publish, by His supreme, royal Prerogative, for that Purpose.

1. If so, then justification hereafter, will not be through the Righteousness of Christ; but by their own Works. In Judgment, a Righteousness will not be imputed to them, for their Justification that is *without Works*; but their own personal Obedience: Or, their own Works will be the Cause and Ground of their future Acceptance with God. And, therefore, 2. Boasting will not be excluded in the next World, if it be in this. The Proof of which, will be attended with no small Difficulty. 3. It is not yet proved, that God hath published such an Edict, and I think it never will be. For, 4. The Reason of God's requiring supreme, perfect Love to Himself, is the infinite Excellency of His Nature, which Reason will eternally continue; and, therefore, His Law, which is founded on that Reason, will forever remain in full Force, without the least Alteration, or Abatement. 5. It is not possible with God, to esteem a Creature innocent, on the Foundation of his own Temper and Actions, who is not perfectly conformable to His Law, which requires supreme, perfect Love to Himself; because, that would be passing a Judgment, which is contrary to Truth and Fact. Now, as it is confessedly true, that there is not any Man, in the present State, who perfectly loves God, no Man can be justified, at the Divine Tribunal, by his own Obedience.

Perfect Obedience can never Spring from imperfect Love. 6. That Obedience, which arises only from a *natural* Faith, hath not any Thing of true Holiness in it, and,

therefore, it cannot be acceptable to God. A *mere* Assent to, a *simple* Belief, or *bare* Persuasion of the Truth of the Gospel, is no other than a *natural Faith*, Which is produced, in the human Mind, by a *natural Medium*; and, therefore, no Acts springing from it, are really holy, and spiritual, nor can be pleasing to God. How should they then be the Ground of our future Justification before Him?

Sect. 20. *According to the Principles of this Author, the sincere and humble Christian, when upon the Verge of Eternity, may solace himself thus:* Though it is true, that I have sinned against my Maker, and have always been unable to come up to that Perfection, which His original Law required of Man, He has graciously dispensed with that Law, by a sovereign Edict, in order for my Relief, as a Creature guilty and imperfect; in that Edict, He gave me the strongest Assurance, by His Oath, that if I repented of my past Miscarriages, or turned from my evil Ways, and did that *which is lawful and right*, I should, in so doing, be justified, and *live thereby*. Being deeply struck with this His merciful Condescension, I resolved to forsake Sin, and work Righteousness. This Resolution I have performed, and, therefore, I have now a Claim upon Him, on the Foundation of my own Obedience, for Acceptance with Him, and the Enjoyment of Blessedness from Him. O my Soul be not then afraid to appear at His Tribunal; for He must justify, He cannot condemn thee, without a Violation of that Oath, which He gave thee, for thy Security. According to the Principles of most whom he calls *popular Preachers*, one whom he esteems a *hypocritical*, and *boasting* Christian, must, at the Hour of Death, comfort himself thus, and no otherwise: Though it is true, that my Sins are many, great, and highly aggravated, there is Virtue sufficient in the Blood of Christ to atone for them all. My own Righteousness is very imperfect, and, therefore, it cannot justify me before God. But the Righteousness of Christ is absolutely perfect, and of infinite Value. In that Garment of Salvation, I humbly hope, my Soul is clothed, and constituted righteous; thereon alone I depend for Acceptance with my Supreme Judge, and as my Title to future Blessedness, without any of my own Works, either in Connection with, or in Subordination to that Righteousness. My Nature, I know, is depraved and vile; and is, therefore, unmeet for, and incapable of the Enjoyment of God; but I hope, that, by His Spirit and Grace, He hath been graciously pleased, without any Concurrence of mine, to implant a Principle of Holiness in me, according to which, I delight in, and serve His Law. And all the Acting's of that Principle, in holy Obedience, have been produced by His gracious, and benign Influence. For, as to Holiness, I AM NOTHING. BY THE GRACE OF GOD I AM WHAT I AM: And I shall behold the Top-stone laid, of the amazing Structure of my Salvation, with Joy, at present inconceivable to me; and, I am sure, that I shall eternally cry, GRACE, GRACE UNTO IT.

The *Sneer*, *Scorn*, *Contempt*, and *Virulence*, which run through this Performance, I imagine, will as certainly sink, as a Talent of Lead, will immerge in the Deep, with

its own Weight; and, therefore, I think myself excusable, in leaving what he presents his Readers with, of such Sort, to fall without any farther Notice.