

ACTON'S  
LECTURES

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LECTURES,

ON THE  
DIGNITY, OFFICE, AND WORK  
OF OUR  
LORD JESUS CHRIST ;  
IN  
EXPLANATION AND DEFENCE  
OF  
UNITARIAN VIEWS OF THE GOSPEL.

By HENRY ACTON.

SECOND EDITION, REVISED ; WITH AN ADDITIONAL LECTURE.

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1833.

## ADVERTISEMENT

TO THE SECOND EDITION.

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IN complying with the demand for a second edition of these Lectures, the Author gladly seizes the opportunity of expressing his thankfulness for the cordial manner in which his book has been received. He has the high satisfaction of knowing, that it has in many instances greatly lessened, and in a few instances entirely removed, the objections entertained by pious Christians against Unitarian views of the Gospel. In this new edition he has endeavoured, by making such alterations as had occurred to his own mind, and by attending to the suggestions of judi-

scious friends, to render the work less unworthy of the approbation of his readers. No change has been made, however, which in the least degree affects the doctrinal views maintained in these Lectures. Some remarks, which were thought by himself or others to be obscure or liable to objection, have here been corrected. Reference is given in the margin to all the passages of Scripture from which any argument is drawn. These are probably all the alterations, except such as will be allowed to be merely verbal. An additional Lecture is given in this edition, the subject of which, it is hoped, will not be considered unsuitable to the general character and design of the publication. The Author cannot close this Advertisement without offering a word of congratulation to those who agree with him in opinion, on the cheering aspect of the present times. Scepticism on the one hand, and fanaticism on

the other, are producing their natural reaction: men of serious but unprejudiced minds, in all sects, are beginning to look more favourably on those interpretations of Christianity, which make it appear consistent with reason, and worthy of its glorious title of GLAD TIDINGS.

EXETER, *October 28th*, 1833.

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## LECTURES.

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### LECTURE I.

#### ONE GOD, THE FATHER ; AND ONE LORD, JESUS CHRIST.

1 Cor. viii. 6.

BUT TO US THERE IS BUT ONE GOD, THE FATHER, OF WHOM ARE ALL THINGS, AND WE IN HIM ; AND ONE LORD, JESUS CHRIST, BY WHOM ARE ALL THINGS, AND WE BY HIM.

WE are distinguished, my brethren, from all other sects of the Christian world, as Unitarian professors. It is my purpose to attempt, in several successive Lectures, a plain exposition and defence of the doctrines we embrace, concerning the strict unity of God, the sole deity and exclusive worship of the Father ; as also concerning the person and office of our blessed Saviour, and the nature of our redemption through his mediation. The times we live in, appear to me to call

for frequent endeavours to lay before men a full and undisguised account of our principles. We owe this as a mark of respect to the great majority of our fellow-christians, with whose creed and practice we set ourselves at variance. We owe it, still more, to the excellence and authority of divine truth, which, in the present state of the church and of the world, especially demands the open testimony of its believers.

Without further apology, therefore, I proceed to the subject of this Lecture—the personal unity and sole deity of God, even the Father. *To us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things.*

In order to feel the entire force of these words, it is necessary to remember that the apostle alludes to a doctrine which, at the time of his writing, formed one of the broadest distinctions between the few scattered churches of Christ, and the heathen world in the midst of which those churches were established. Scarcely any peculiarity of the gospel made it appear more strange to heathen people, or at first occasioned stronger dislike and opposition to its professors, than its great doctrine of THE UNITY OF GOD. Had the apostles been content with merely introducing a new divinity for the worship of mankind, their task would have been comparatively

easy, and sure of success. But we know it was in a very different strain they addressed themselves to the idolatrous nations of the earth. We have here an example of their bold and decisive language. They declared to the world that there is but ONE GOD,—even that Holy and Merciful Being of whom are all things, and who had now revealed himself to the world by Jesus Christ, under the adorable name of THE FATHER. All other gods, by whatever names they were called, the apostles proclaimed to be vanity and lies.

There is no event in the history of the human race, which to a pious and enlightened mind is attended with such deep, solemn, pleasing interest, as the wonderful triumph of this doctrine over the superstitions to which our pagan forefathers were in bondage. The contest was one on which the spiritual welfare of millions and generations of men was depending. Happily for the world, as truth and the divine will were opposed to the weakness of human error, the victory, though apparently difficult in the accomplishment, and really marvellous in the issue, was nevertheless sure from the beginning. Philosophers employed all their argument and ridicule to stay the progress of the new faith. Interested priests and craftsmen, in every place, laboured zealously to crush the leaders of the rising sect. The blind passions of the vulgar,



and the selfish policy of the great, were alike called into action, to preserve the unhallowed dominion of idolatry, against the encroachments daily made upon it by the gospel of Christ. The struggle was a desperate and vain one, on the part of polytheism. The truth was mighty, and it prevailed. The idols fell; their temples were closed; their sacrifice was extinguished. And wherever the gospel made its way, it caused the FATHER to "reign unrivalled, God alone." Would, that the clouds of error had never overshadowed that bright aspect of the church. Would, that those clouds were even yet dispersed, and that men had learnt again, as in the primitive days of our religion, to worship the Father alone in spirit and in truth. Let us wait patiently, my brethren, and labour zealously, for the accomplishment of these wishes. We live in times of reformation. Many signs are given, that the glorious work of restoring the Christian faith to its original purity is steadily advancing. The fields are white already to harvest. May the God of infinite wisdom send forth industrious, upright, and efficient labourers into his harvest!

But we must attend to our argument. In the words of the text, we have from the pen of an inspired apostle a clear statement of the doctrine of the gospel, concerning what we are to believe

of God, and of Christ. To us who are, in the strictest sense, worshipers of one God, the Father alone, this language appears to be a direct and explicit testimony to the correctness of our views. But as many of our fellow-christians think otherwise, and pronounce us to be under a grievous delusion in this respect, I shall endeavour to explain and vindicate the meaning we put upon this and similar passages of Scripture.

Writing to Gentile converts, who had so lately been worshipers of many gods, the sacred teacher says, *We know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one.\** Here, the great truth of the divine unity is asserted in words which, with our views and impressions on the subject, we might suppose to be too clear to require further explanation. But the apostle knew he was addressing men whose minds had been greatly darkened and deluded in regard to this truth. He therefore adds: *For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, as there be gods many and lords many.†* This is a just description of the vain polytheism of the heathen. They had peopled every region of the universe with imaginary deities, who completely engrossed all their religious thoughts and affections. Such learners re-

\* 1 Cor. viii. 4.

† 1 Cor. viii. 5.

quired careful teaching, before their minds could become thoroughly possessed of the new doctrine of the divine *unity*; and what their circumstances required, they received from this faithful servant of Christ. *But to us*, he continues, *there is but one God*. Who, then, was this one God? The question was all-important to those early converts. That it was not Jupiter, or Mars, or Apollo, or any one of the idols whom they had formerly worshiped, they were probably already convinced. But was it Jesus Christ? The primitive believers in the gospel from heathen nations, might easily have supposed this, if they had not been otherwise instructed. Indeed, numerous facts in the early history of Christianity render it almost certain that, but for the caution and care of the apostles, many of the Gentile believers would have confidently inferred, that Christ was the only true God whom they were henceforth to worship. The miraculous works ascribed to him would lead *them*, not unnaturally, into this error. Unlike the Jews, they had no acquaintance with the fact, that the true God had often enabled his human messengers and prophets to work miracles in His name, in proof of their divine mission. We find, accordingly, that when Paul was at Athens, the people regarded him as *a setter forth of strange gods, because he preached unto them Jesus and the resur-*

*rection*.\* They ignorantly concluded, that he who had risen from the dead, must needs be a god. The same rash and groundless inference was drawn respecting Paul himself, and his companion Barnabas, when at Lystra he miraculously healed a man that had been a cripple from his birth. The people, we are told, lifted up their hands and shouted, *The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men*.† In truth, the reasoning which argues from the miraculous works and divine office of Christ, to prove the proper deity of his person, however commonly it may be resorted to by modern Christians, is essentially heathen in its character. It is founded on low notions of the nature of God, and betrays great inattention to the usual and revealed methods of his government over mankind. It were far wiser, to embrace the doctrine and argument of the apostle Peter, that Jesus of Nazareth was *a man approved of God by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him*.‡

However, the error which the heathen were so liable to fall into, of supposing that Jesus Christ was the one true God whom they were to worship, would have been inconsistent with the whole system of the gospel, so zealously taught by this venerable apostle. It would have ren-

\* Acts xvii. 18.

† Acts xiv. 11.

‡ Acts ii. 22.

dered his preaching and their faith comparatively vain, by throwing over it all a veil of mystery and confusion. For, he had uniformly spoken of Christ as a totally distinct being from God; as one whom God had chosen and sent into the world; as one *who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.*\* He therefore expresses himself to the believers at Corinth in language which *must* have prevented their falling into such an error, and *ought* to have prevented all succeeding generations from embracing such a strange and unscriptural doctrine. *To us*, he says, *there is but one God, the Father.* This alone is decisive, if the question is to be settled by the authority of the holy Scriptures. It is past all question, that throughout the whole New Testament Jesus Christ is never once styled THE FATHER. It is impossible to form any rational conception of the scheme of the gospel, (which consists in the Father having sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world,) it is impossible to understand what we are reading about in this sacred book, unless we conceive of Jesus Christ as some other person than the Father. He prays to the Father. He ascribes his power and doctrine to the Father. He emphatically declares, *My Father is greater*

\* 1 Cor. i. 30.

*than I.*\* Since, therefore, to us there is but one God, and this one God is the Father, and Jesus Christ is not the Father,—are we not right, in maintaining that Jesus Christ is not God?

This surely is a plain argument. It is astonishing it should not appear to be an irresistible argument to every candid mind. The question at issue between Unitarian and Trinitarian believers, is the simplest question that can be imagined. It requires for its decision no vast stores of learning; though learning is useful to refute the false interpretations of Scripture, and false reasoning, by which error has been so long supported. It has little to do with those subtle distinctions which thousands have talked of, and none have understood, between a divine Person and a divine Being, a divine Person and a God. All such distinctions are unscriptural and unchristian; and therefore ought to be discountenanced by all who love the simplicity of revealed truth better than the confusion of human systems. But, in fact, the Trinitarian gains nothing whatever by resorting to them. For, the apostle not only declares to us, that there is but one God. He goes beyond this, in which our brethren affirm that they agree with us. He is so explicit, that we might almost suppose the future corrup-

\* John xiv. 28.

tions of the doctrine were before his mind. The person,—to use, for the sake of argument, the distinction upon which so much stress is laid,—the *person* who is the only true God is expressly pointed out to us, and declared to be the Father. Therefore, unless Trinitarians are resolved to maintain that the Son is the Father, or the Father is the Son,—unless they will boldly affirm that our Lord Jesus Christ is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,—there is no way of escaping the contradiction between their doctrine of the proper deity of Christ, and the doctrine of the Scriptures, that there is no God but the Father.

Beyond even this, however, the apostle's testimony goes. Not satisfied with declaring the Father to be the only true God, as if to prevent the possibility of misapprehension, as if to shew that he could not mean to include Jesus Christ under that title, he proceeds in the very next words to speak of *him* as an entirely distinct being from God, ascribing to him another title, another character, and a totally different relation towards mankind. *There is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things ; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things.* Christ, then, is not the one true God, for he is not the Father ; but he is the only Lord, or Master, of Christian believers, *by whom*,—through whose agency and ministry,

—we have received all the blessings of redemption which flow from the Father's grace, and by whose mediation faithful souls are brought nigh unto God. This was the apostle's doctrine: this is Unitarianism to the very letter. To me, I confess, it is matter of great wonder, that any man of serious and honest mind can look upon this passage, and not feel that the words of the inspired writer entirely exclude Jesus Christ from being regarded as the true God ; as completely so as they exclude any one of the thirty thousand deities whom the heathen worshiped. Let me not be mistaken. I say this deliberately ; but let me not be pronounced capable of wilfully saying one word inconsistent with the reverence and love undoubtedly due to the Saviour of the world. It is true, the apostle declares those idols to be *nothing in the world* ; whilst he ascribes to Jesus Christ, not only a real existence, but *a name which is above every name*,\* save that of God, an office and character of the most solemn, the most dignified and interesting nature. This we see as clearly, and feel as strongly, as any of our fellow-Christians. But as far as relates to the only living and true God, I repeat the assertion, that our Saviour is here represented as distinct from, and inferior to, that all-perfect Being ;—as plainly so

\* Philippians ii. 9.

as the heathen idols are pronounced to be vanity. *There is but one God, the Father ; and one Lord, Jesus Christ.*

I have thought it better, my brethren, to draw your attention chiefly to this direct and most unambiguous passage, than to roam over a wide field of scattered texts. It is a more likely way to cause us to see the truth, and to feel the full force of its evidence. It is by no means to be inferred, however, that this great doctrine of the strict personal unity of God, the sole deity of the Father, has no other foundation in Scripture than the words from which I am now discoursing. This truth is amply supported by other single passages, equally plain and forcible; but more especially by the general tenor of the sacred writings, which every where imply the subordination of Christ to God, and the unrivalled supremacy of the Father. The testimony of Jesus himself on this subject is, to the full, as clear and decisive as that of his faithful apostle. In praying to the Father, our Saviour styles Him THE ONLY TRUE GOD. *These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, Father, this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.\** No words could be more determinate in

\* John xvii. 1—3.

favour of our present argument. The character in which our blessed Lord here acknowledges the Father, and the character in which he speaks of himself, are perfectly identical with the doctrine delivered in my text. The Father alone is the true God. Himself, Jesus styles the messenger of eternal life sent by God.

This therefore is the genuine Apostles' Creed:—this is the truth as it is in Jesus. It is ardently to be wished, that every disciple who loves the truth, and is willing to follow it, would be at the pains to compare this simple creed with the well known symbol of Trinitarian faith, periodically read in our churches. He must have a mind strangely enamoured of mystery and confusion, who can deliberately prefer the human rhapsody to the apostolic confession. Could men be persuaded to bring their minds patiently to the investigation of divine truth, not even the vain and presumptuous threat of eternal damnation, attached to the orthodox creed, would be of much avail to prevent its being universally abandoned, in favor of the rational and sublime doctrine of the Scriptures.

Such, my fellow Unitarians, is the step we have taken; and we trust, taken from upright and sufficient motives. We hold the unity of God in the most obvious sense of the words; understanding thereby, that there is but one

Being, one Person, possessed of original and absolute divine perfections, and to whom it is lawful for Christians to pay divine worship. We deny that there is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. And we maintain, notwithstanding all the bold and subtle evasions by which men strive to avoid this plain conclusion, that if it were so, there would be three Gods. Whereas, we confess with Paul, that *to us there is but one God, the Father*. We know, and we reverently confess, that the nature of God is awfully mysterious: and be it remembered it is not we, who presume to analyze and define it in creeds and confessions. We solemnly protest against the charge of exalting our feeble reason above the authority of the Scriptures. We only employ reason to discover what the Scriptures teach. But in regard to the strict unity of God, there appears to us to be no just occasion to have recourse to the plea of mystery. Still less can we receive doctrines of human invention, which are very improperly shrouded under that name,—not being mysteries in any fair and allowable sense of the word. We believe in our hearts, that the holy and ever-blessed Being whom Christ worshiped, and whom he revealed to the world under the adorable name of THE FATHER, is the only true God. We desire to be regarded by the Christian world in no other character, for

we think we can be regarded in no more honourable character, than as men who are willing to bear our serious and earnest testimony to this great doctrine, and against its corruptions.

Were I to attempt a full discussion of the important consequences, flowing from this doctrine of the Scriptures concerning the sole deity of the Father, I should only be entering upon a rich and ample field for meditation, which it would be impossible to traverse. These consequences are numerous, weighty, interesting, and practical. The doctrine of the divine unity, embraced in all the simplicity with which the Scriptures have clothed it, is not an empty speculation. It is most fruitful of holy and cheering influences. Always has it been held in connexion with rational and consolatory views of the divine character and government. Always has its corruption been followed by the spread of gloomy and unworthy sentiments, relating to the plans and purposes of divine Providence. There is a loud voice of experience, uttered by the religious history of mankind, which tells that the purest and loftiest thoughts of God and the ways of God, can abide only in minds which steadily conceive of Him as One Infinite Intelligence. If we suffer our ideas of the unity of God to be confused, we thereby darken his paternal countenance, and hide the brightness of his glory from our sight.

Nor would it be difficult, did time permit us to go at large into the subject, to shew that this result is natural and unavoidable.

There is one practical consequence of this doctrine, however, which is so direct, and of such great importance, as to call for particular attention. I allude to the subject of *worship*. Since the Father alone is God, the Father alone is to be *worshipped*, in the strictest sense of the word, with religious and supreme adoration, as the direct Object of prayer and devout thanksgiving. This inference is too plain to be reasonably disputed. Worship is the homage of intelligent creatures to their Creator; the spiritual intercourse between the rational children of God and their heavenly Father. The severest warnings of Scripture are levelled at those, who would rob Jehovah of this peculiar glory of his sole deity, to give it to another. Any argument on this point would be wearisome: the truth is so clear and so certain. The one true God is the only proper Object of worship.

But it may be well to consider, how entirely the precepts and examples of the Christian Scriptures, in this respect, are in harmony with their doctrine. It is well known, indeed, that there was formerly a degree of latitude in the meaning of our word *worship*, which may require the exercise of some discrimination in the reader of the

New Testament. Certain persons are there said to have approached our Saviour and *worshipped* him, whilst he stood before them in bodily presence, a being of flesh and blood, to be seen and handled. This, surely, is not to be confounded with *divine worship*, which is the spiritual adoration of that invisible Being whom *no man hath seen or can see at any time*. In these instances, nothing more is meant, than that these persons paid our Lord unusual obeisance; displayed before him such outward marks of reverence as, according to the customs of the time and country, were observed towards great and venerable characters. The distinction between this kind of homage and *religious worship*, is too plain to be mistaken, and too solemn to be disregarded. All the injunctions of the gospel, as well as the uniform practice of our Saviour and his apostles, shew that divine worship should be confined to the person of the Father. This principle is closely interwoven with the very character of the Christian dispensation. It forms a leading feature in one of our Lord's most impressive descriptions of his own spiritual kingdom. Foretelling to the woman of Samaria the speedy establishment of the gospel, he says, *The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship THE FATHER in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such*

to worship him.\* When Jesus instructed his disciples, at their especial request, how to pray, to whom did he teach them to address their prayers? When ye pray, say, *Our Father, which art in heaven!* Is Jesus Christ our Father in heaven? If so, may we humbly ask—Who was that Being to whom Jesus himself constantly addressed the devout aspirations of his own soul, as his Father in heaven? Did not our Saviour expressly exhort his followers, not to direct any petitions to him after his departure, but to confine their supplications to the Father? *In that day, that is, as the context shews, after his ascension, ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you.*† The precepts of the gospel then, and the worship it enjoins, are in strict accordance with its doctrine, that the Father is the only true God. To him alone we are permitted to offer prayer. He alone is to be served with the bended knee, and the sacrifice of the heart. Such, at least, is the firm conviction we entertain; and it constrains us, as we value the purity and sincerity of our religious services, to withdraw from Trinitarian churches, and to assemble where the Father alone is wor-

\* John iv. 23.

† John xvi. 23.

shipped, in the name of his Son Jesus Christ. Many will question the soundness of our views. None, surely, can with any reason deny the solemn and forcible nature of our motives.

Having now disposed of this, the principal part of my subject, it will not be necessary to say much, at present, on the account given in the text of our Saviour's true dignity. There is here rather less ground for dispute, and we shall have occasion to explain ourselves more fully on this point in succeeding Lectures. Something, however, must be said, in justice to the apostle's doctrine and to our own sentiments; for there is a *connexion* between the truths that are here delivered.

*One Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things.* There is this great difference in the import of the titles *God* and *Lord*, employed in the text: the former properly relates to the *nature* of the Being on whom it is bestowed, and implies his possession of divine attributes. It is a title of office only occasionally, and by a kind of figurative or borrowed application, as when it is given in Scripture to Moses and to the Judges of Israel. The latter, on the contrary, is purely a title of *office and dignity*; not referring of itself to any peculiarity of *nature* in the person to whom it is ascribed, but only to the authority and dominion with which he is invested, to the relation of ser-



vants and Master, subjects and Ruler, disciples and Teacher, existing between him and some other persons. This is evidently the sense which it bears when applied by our Saviour both to himself and to other men. *The servant is not greater than his Lord.\** The unjust steward in the parable is made to exclaim, *My Lord taketh away from me the stewardship.†* It is equally plain that such is its meaning when ascribed to Jesus by the apostles. *Let all the house of Israel know assuredly,* said the apostle Peter, *that God hath made that same Jesus whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.‡* This cannot possibly refer to nature: this must relate entirely to delegated power and authority over mankind. We conclude, therefore, that, according to every fair method of interpreting the Scriptures, Jesus Christ is our only Lord, as being the only person who has received a divine appointment to be our spiritual Lawgiver, Master, Teacher, and Exemplar. And I humbly presume, that among all the sects into which the religious community is divided, there are no people more sincerely and thoroughly persuaded of the divine mission and authority of Jesus Christ, than Unitarian Christians. We hold that Jesus of Nazareth was the long-promised Messiah of the Jews, the Saviour

\* John xiii. 16.

† Luke xvi. 3.

‡ Acts ii. 36.

of the world, the best beloved and most highly favoured Son of God. A deep conviction that he was sent from God, inspired with heavenly wisdom, endowed beyond measure with the spirit of holiness and of power, that he might become the Author of a great salvation to all that believe,—this conviction lies at the foundation of all our religious sentiments, and gives them divine stability. To this exalted dignity of Jesus, and to the gifts and character which fitted him to sustain it, we refer most of those lofty titles and descriptions which others regard as evidence of his proper deity.

There is, no doubt, a seeming difficulty, at first view, in reconciling some passages of Scripture, where the mere humanity of Christ is spoken of in the plainest terms, with other passages, where his power and greatness are set forth in the most glowing language. Trinitarians imagine the only way to solve this difficulty is to embrace their hypothesis of two natures, assuming that Christ was both God and man in the same person. But, besides that their hypothesis is entirely gratuitous, it appears to us to involve as palpable a contradiction as can be conceived; and, after all, not to answer the purpose for which it was invented. The difficulty is better solved by keeping in view the obvious and important distinction between the *nature* and the *office* of Christ. This

distinction is seen, and felt to be of the utmost importance, in a thousand relations. The mighty monarch who sits upon his earthly throne, and by virtue of his *office* and authority exercises absolute power over the lives, liberty and property of millions, is of the same frail and mortal *nature* as the meanest subject who trembles at his nod. So may Jesus Christ, though once a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and made in all respects like unto his brethren of the human race, yet, as the Christ of God, be exalted to a condition of power and glory, which renders him the very image of the Divine perfections. If this easy distinction were borne in mind, it would not be necessary to have recourse to any of those ingenious keys which are said to unlock the portals of sacred truth; but which are only wanted to extricate men from the dungeons of error, wherein they have imprisoned their own minds by mistaking the doctrine of the Scriptures.

This has been explained in regard to the title *Lord*. It is equally pertinent to various other titles and descriptions. The name *Son of God*, for instance, so often bestowed on Jesus in the Scriptures, appears to us to be likewise a designation of *character, office; and authority*; referring to the peculiar favour in which he stood with God, and to the qualities and works which he exhibited to the world. We cannot see by what

sure warrant of holy writ Trinitarians interpret this name of a divine nature in Jesus, when the very same name, (though doubtless in a more general sense, with less emphasis and solemnity,) but still the *same* name, and surely with a *similar* meaning, is given to the followers of Christ, even to *as many as are led by the Spirit of God*. \* Far less, can we understand by what warrant of reason or piety they venture to explain this title as descriptive of a *natural relation* between two divine persons, and to invent their bold theories about eternal sonship and eternal generation; as though it were possible for the Uncreated Spirit to have a son, in any other than a moral and highly figurative sense. We will not resort to the uncharitable and ungenerous charge of blasphemy, so often preferred against ourselves; but we must be allowed to declare, with unfeigned sincerity, that these doctrines shock our feelings as deeply as they confound our reason.

Notwithstanding, therefore, some little *apparent* evidence to the contrary, arising from causes which it is not now necessary to notice, we have a firm persuasion, that there are no solid grounds for throwing confusion into our ideas of the unity of God, by ascribing a divine nature to our Saviour. We see no sufficient reason for believing

\* Romans viii. 14.

that in *nature* he was more than what he always appeared to be, what he spake of himself as being, what his apostles declared him to be—A MAN. But we yield to none of our fellow-disciples in the strength and sincerity of our belief that this man, who was of the seed of David according to the flesh, was declared to be the Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness, by his resurrection from the dead. We cannot receive him as the true God: this would be contrary to his own express words, that the Father is *the only true God*. But we do gladly receive him as the true Christ, the great Deliverer whose advent had been appointed in the counsels of God from the beginning of time. It was he who had been the theme of successive prophecies, from the commencement of the patriarchal dispensation at least, if not from the moment of Adam's transgression; who was to take from the Jews the yoke of ordinances, and to recall the Gentiles to the knowledge and worship of the living God; who came to gather followers from every people, and of remotest generations, into one great spiritual community, bowing the knee in his name to the glory of God the Father; who, in short, was the Author of a new and glorious dispensation of religion, abounding, beyond all former dispensations, in truth and grace, in manifestations of divine wisdom and love, in power to

save, to instruct, to reform, to sanctify, and to bless all mankind. He is therefore justly entitled to our faith, veneration, and obedience. For myself, I declare that no language is adequate to express the reverence I entertain for the divine authority of our Lord Jesus Christ; for the spotless purity and sublime excellence of his character; for the heavenly wisdom and efficacy of his doctrine; for the love displayed in his sufferings and death; for the great power and glory to which he is now exalted, as Head over all things in that spiritual kingdom established by the gospel! Join with me, my brethren, in an humble and earnest prayer, that in this character Jesus may be heartily acknowledged by all mankind, and that the holy purposes of his mission may be increasingly acknowledged in the salvation of souls!

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LECTURE II.

THE FATHER THE FOUNTAIN OF ALL GRACE;  
JESUS THE MEDIATOR OF THE NEW CO-  
VENANT.

1 Cor. viii. 6.

BUT TO US THERE IS BUT ONE GOD, THE FATHER, OF  
WHOM ARE ALL THINGS, AND WE IN HIM; AND ONE  
LORD, JESUS CHRIST, BY WHOM ARE ALL THINGS, AND  
WE BY HIM.

I CALL your attention again to this passage, my brethren, under a persuasion that it contains a complete, though brief exposition, of that pure Christian faith once delivered to the primitive saints, but grievously corrupted in after ages. We have already examined its testimony to those great and essential truths of the gospel,—that the Father is the only true God, and his Son Jesus Christ the only Lord, the only spiritual Master and Ruler of men. You will observe, however, that the sacred writer not only assigns to these persons their proper and peculiar titles, the one implying sole unrivalled Deity, the other delegated spiritual authority; but he also teaches

us the nature of our obligations to each of these persons respectively, and explains to us in what light each is to be regarded, as it concerns the various blessings and mercies of Christian redemption. This shall be the subject of our present Lecture. In these particulars likewise, we think the apostle's doctrine is most clearly Unitarian, and widely opposed to the views which have long prevailed in the Christian world.

*The Father, of whom are all things, and we in him.* Or rather, perhaps, *from whom are all things, and we unto him.* In the original there is some appearance of a designed opposition in the forms of expression employed. I understand the apostle's meaning to be, that all the truth and wisdom, all the grace, holiness and compassion, displayed in the gospel, came *out from the Father*, as the Fountain and Giver of all good;—and that the object of all these blessings, is to bring sinful men *to the Father*, to reconcile them unto God, to unite them to Him in the sacred bonds of faith, love and obedience, as a meet preparation for dwelling hereafter in his glorious and everlasting presence.

And *Jesus Christ, by whom are all things and we by him, or through him.* Here there can be no question, that the apostle sets forth Jesus Christ as the person through whose agency and mediation alone all the mercies of the Christian

covenant have been bestowed upon men, and by whom alone men are to be brought nigh unto God. It is impossible any two beings, human or divine, could sustain relations towards mankind more distinct from each other, than those which are here ascribed to the Father, and to Jesus Christ. The former being is the primary source, the latter is the appointed channel,—the former is the Author and Giver, the latter is the Conveyer,—of all the spiritual benefits we enjoy as members of the gospel dispensation. To the Father, therefore, we are bound to present our bodies and souls a living and holy sacrifice, which is our reasonable service; but with faith and trust in the mediation of Christ, through him as our elder brother in heaven, and our advocate with the Father.

We will endeavour to illustrate these important principles, which in our belief are to be ranked among the plainest doctrines of scriptural Christianity.

In the first place, that all things connected with human salvation proceed originally from the free grace of the Father, is one of those clearly revealed truths which it is altogether inexcusable for men to mystify or corrupt. It shines forth to our observation in all parts of the sacred volume, casting a golden light on almost every page of holy writ. It shall be seen pre-

sently, that we have no desire to diminish the true glory of Christ, arising from his great love and compassion to sinners. But we do solemnly protest against its being believed, that to *his love and compassion* we are principally indebted for the blessings of redemption. He himself would rebuke us for such a sentiment. There is nothing in the Scriptures to countenance the supposition, that the Son,—by his sacrifice and intercession, or by any other means,—made the Father gracious and propitious to men. To the contrary import is the uniform strain of apostolic teaching. *The Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.\* God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.† God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ:—by grace ye are saved.‡* In the same epistle to the Ephesians we are instructed that we have redemption through Christ, *according to the riches of the grace of God, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself.§* No modern Unitarian can wish to contradict the popular notions of atonement by satisfaction, more fully and pointedly than they seem to be

\* 1 John iv. 14.

† Ephes. ii. 4, 5.

‡ John iii. 16.

§ Ephes. i. 7, 9.

contradicted by this language of the Scriptures. The two doctrines are utterly opposed in their general scope and spirit. The one traces all things to the merciful interference of Christ, who is thought to rescue men from the effects of divine wrath and justice. The other teaches that *all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ.\**

What a beautiful view does this latter doctrine afford of the unsolicited goodness and free grace of our heavenly Father! It is a grand and moving spectacle, which the Scripture representation on this subject sets before our minds. The whole world is to be considered as sunk in wickedness. Man had been created innocent and upright; but had fallen from this holy and happy condition into the guilt and misery of sin. God, the righteous Judge of the whole world, looked down from his throne in the heavens upon the inhabitants of the earth, and saw there was none that did good, when tried by the perfect law which, in his infinite wisdom and justice, he had appointed for their guidance. No signs of general repentance and reformation were manifested on the part of mankind. Their hearts and lives were estranged from God, and no overtures of reconciliation proceeded from them,

\* 2 Cor. v. 18.

Indeed, it belonged to God, of sovereign right, to determine the conditions on which he would pardon his sinful creatures, and restore them to his favour. The covenant of forgiveness must have been null, had He not been the Author of it, and caused the terms to be proclaimed in his name. Had it seemed fit to him, he might have made the grounds of acceptance as burdensome, grievous, and mysterious, as in fact they are plain and gracious. He might have decreed that the wound of the soul should be healed only by the tortures and lacerations of the body; and that the path to heavenly bliss should lead through earthly misery. He might have withheld the exercise of his mercy, till the claims of his justice were fully satisfied in the vicarious punishment and sufferings of an innocent substitute for the guilty. In the bosom of God it rested, either to make a gracious covenant with his unhappy creatures, or to issue some awful decree that should overwhelm their souls with terror and dismay. There was no higher appeal. They had no refuge from the determinations of his authority and omnipotence. But, happily for mankind, there was no possibility that such a proclamation of woe should issue from the courts of heaven. When divine wisdom and paternal love sat in council together, what could be the result, but a declaration of pardon and mercy to

the whole world, a display of unspeakable compassion and benevolence to the whole human race? Even such was the nature of our Saviour's mission. *Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.* In the midst of their increasing wickedness and hardened rebellion, men were favoured with a Messenger of peace, a Redeemer sent by Him whose compassions never fail. They heard the glad tidings that there is pardon for all their transgressions, on the mildest terms consistent with their own eternal welfare; that not their alms and prayers, but their very guilt and wretchedness, had ascended as a memorial before God; that because they were both unwilling and unable to deliver themselves, because they were not to be justified by their own merits, nor to be saved by their own wisdom, therefore the mercy of their Creator had been moved to effect their deliverance by an act of unmerited and unpurchased grace.

This, I humbly conceive, is the doctrine of the gospel concerning the origin of our redemption. The mystery which had been hidden for ages is made manifest, the mystery of divine love, the secret of our Almighty Father's mercy and forbearance. We are now aware, that during long ages of idolatry and disobedience, when scarcely a prayer or a sigh arose to heaven from the hearts of mankind for pardon and salvation, all

this time was the grace of God watching over the world with long-suffering pity. And when at length it openly appeared, bringing salvation unto all men, it was not because the Father was moved thereto by the interference of the Son, but because the period had arrived when it appeared to Him wisest and fittest to carry these eternal purposes of his mercy into effect.

It must be allowed that this doctrine clearly sets aside all pretensions to merit in sinful men. It destroys all human boasting. It humbles the creature to the dust, and exalts the sovereign grace of the universal Father to the highest possible degree. It might have been supposed, previous to contrary experience, that every believer would have seen how completely it is at variance with all ideas of merit, satisfaction, or *procuring influence* of any kind, proceeding from a third party between sinful men and the grace of God. This is our strong ground of objection to the popular opinion. We do not deny the mediation of Christ: we rejoice in it. But we cannot so interpret the doctrine of his mediation, as to make him the primary author of our redemption; or so as to obscure the glorious truth, that *of the Father are all things* holy and good. God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is the sole Fountain of mercy. He had no equal, partner, or counsellor, in devising the gracious plan of

salvation; though Jesus is doubtless to be honoured as his chosen and sanctified minister in carrying it into execution. We cannot consent to let go this truth wholly; we cannot part with any portion of it; we cannot willingly allow it to be qualified and confused. We feel as though one of the great sources of light and warmth were about to be struck from the moral firmament, when men attempt to rob us of this persuasion. We are resolved to hold it fast, as long as we possess the volume of inspired truth, and can appeal to the testimony of evangelists and apostles.

I shall now enter upon the second branch of the subject in hand; namely, to consider the part assigned to our Saviour in this great work of saving and regenerating mankind.

*Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.* I regard it, my brethren, as a most happy and influential principle of the gospel, that Jesus Christ is the only Mediator;—not merely in a loose and figurative sense, as some appear to understand it, but strictly so, the only proper, the only authorized Mediator between God and men. By the divine will and appointment, he is the sacred agent or messenger, through whom all spiritual privileges and blessings are bestowed on mankind from the Father of mercies; and through whom, in return, all acts of



obedience and spiritual homage are to be offered to God from Christian disciples. It will be proper to shew, to what extent this doctrine is taught or countenanced in the scriptures of truth.

First, it is not to be disputed that Christ was, in a most important sense, a sense altogether peculiar to himself, the Minister of divine goodness by whom we have received all the tokens of mercy and favour conveyed to us in the revelation of the gospel. *Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.\** He is *the author and finisher of our faith,†* and not any other person, in the same degree, or in any thing approaching to an equality with him. The kingdom of heaven (so the Christian dispensation is styled in the Scriptures) was wholly established by his agency, by the personal exercise of the power, wisdom and authority which the Father had given to him over all flesh, to bring men to eternal life. The office of the apostles was very different, and vastly inferior. *God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself; but committed the word of reconciliation to the apostles.‡* It is evident, that whatever they did was done avowedly as the servants of Jesus, in complete submission to his authority, *in his name*, and for the most part in obedience to his immediate personal directions,

\* John i. 17.

† Hebrews xii. 2.

‡ 2 Corinthians v. 19.

made known to them by visible or invisible intercourse. Whatever powers they possessed of a spiritual and miraculous nature, to be employed for the furtherance of the gospel, seem not to have been bestowed upon them *directly* from God, as were those of our Saviour himself; but were given to them by Jesus, to be exercised in his name, he having previously received them of the Father for this purpose. This is the light, for instance, in which the Scriptures represent that great event, the out-pouring of the holy spirit on the day of Pentecost. *Being by the right hand of God exalted, said Peter, and having received of the Father the promise of the holy spirit, he hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear.\** Thus, we cannot fail to recognize our Lord's personal interference and agency, as the Minister of God, in all that relates to the original redemption of the world, by the introduction and establishment of the Christian religion. *Without him was not any thing done that was done*, in the accomplishment of this wise and merciful work.

On this topic I must crave to express my own sentiments fully. It was the solemn promise of our Saviour to his disciples, when he was about to deprive them of his bodily presence, that he would *be with them even to the end of the world;*

\* Acts ii. 33.

or, according to a more probable meaning of the words, unto *the end of the age*.\* Now, whatever may have been the exact meaning of our Saviour's promise, whether we suppose it to be confined to the apostles and the apostolic age, or to extend to his disciples in all ages, it plainly relates to a large exercise of personal agency, as the medium of divine blessings to men. Nor can we entertain a doubt that the promise has been faithfully accomplished. I can see no reasonable grounds for denying, that the actual mediation of Christ, in the salvation of souls and the moral regeneration of the world, is still continued, and shall be continued throughout all probationary ages. It is worthy of consideration, that a period is foretold in the Scriptures, when the agency of Christ in the moral government of the world shall be still more splendidly exhibited, than it has ever yet been. At his voice, we are told, the dead shall be raised. He shall come again *in the glory of his Father, and of the holy angels*, and the whole race of mankind shall be judged by him. We are expressly informed that he is not to give up the kingdom to which he has been appointed, until a future and glorious period, when sin and death and all other enemies shall have been put under his feet. Then he shall re-

\* Matthew xxviii, 20.

sign it to the Father, that *God may be all in all*.\* This being so clearly revealed, why should it be supposed that the personal mediation of Christ between God and sinful men, is at present entirely suspended? He is not slumbering in the tomb. He is possessed of immortal life, and crowned with the eternal reward of his obedience and sufferings. Why should we imagine that the discharge of his mediatorial office is interrupted, since we know that his work is not yet finished? It is surely more reasonable, as well as more agreeable to the language of Scripture, to believe in and to acknowledge him as still the medium of all spiritual blessings; the appointed steward of God to dispense his favours and mercies to faithful souls; the chosen instrument in whom and by whom the Father is still operating to reconcile the world unto himself. Any attempt to explain the precise manner and degree of our Saviour's present ministration in the moral and spiritual concerns of mankind, would be seeking to be wise above what is written for our instruction; and might be justly open to the charge of presumption. But in the general doctrine, there appears to me to be truth supported by the authority of scripture; truth perfectly agreeable to the dictates of right rea-

\* 1 Cor. xv. 28.

son; truth abounding in holy and consolatory influences. It is cheering to the mind, struggling against the temptations of the world and the manifold weaknesses of humanity, to believe that if we sin, *we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.*\* There is something at once soothing and elevating, in the thought that Jesus our elder brother, that holy and merciful man, is engaged in so near and interesting a relation between ourselves and our Father in heaven. All minds may not feel an equal need of such influences, to support them in trial and trouble. This kind of provision for assisting men to comply with the obligations of righteousness, may not be necessary in the more advanced stages of our progress towards perfection. Perhaps the Scriptures imply this, when they represent the consummation of God's moral government as consisting in the surrender of our Saviour's personal authority and agency, that God may be all in all; that the union between the Father of spirits and the souls of his regenerate creatures may be full and direct. But in the present condition of human nature, all minds, however wise and philosophic, require the aid of these gracious influences, resulting from an earnest faith in the personal mediation of Christ, from regarding him

\* 1 John ii. 1.

as the Friend of Sinners; the appointed Saviour of them that believe and obey. All minds, at least, may be rendered happier and better by a rational and serious attention to these peculiarly Christian principles.

These imperfect remarks must suffice in illustration of the apostle's position, that *through the one Lord Jesus Christ are all things*;—all which we enjoy or hope for in our spiritual capacity. It is affirmed moreover, that *we are by or through him*; by which I understand, as already explained, that through him we are to seek reconciliation with the Father, through him to approach God in acts of penitence, homage, and obedience. This principle is directly or virtually inculcated in many other places; and it may be traced in all the language and conduct of the early disciples. It seems to have been regarded by the apostles as necessary to the perfection, to the complete acceptableness, of all acts of Christian virtue and piety. This faith in Christ this serious and affectionate remembrance of him, in fulfilling those duties by which we are instructed to work out our own salvation, imparts a humility, a tenderness and evangelical spirit to the character, which elevates even the ordinary virtues of life into deeds of Christian piety and discipleship. It were easy to mention a number of important particulars contained in this general

duty; but a few remarks on some of the more obvious will be sufficient for our present purpose.

It is proper that a disciple should keep the authority and precepts of his Teacher constantly in view, and make them the positive rule of his conduct. We should therefore discharge all our religious duties immediately *as disciples of Christ*; urged by the consideration that he, who is our beloved Lord and Master, and who laid down his life for our sakes, has commanded us to do such good works. We should exercise charity, purity, meekness, humility, resignation, and every kind of Christian excellence, out of a spirit of reverence and submission to him, our great Instructor and Guide, whose laws we are solemnly bound to obey. So far as we neglect to cultivate this spirit, whatever may be our outward behaviour, it cannot be truly said, that we *do all things in the name of the Lord Jesus*:\* we are wanting in the proper feelings and dispositions of his zealous followers. To sustain this latter character worthily, we must cherish sentiments of true faith and attachment to Christ; so that our obedience to his precepts may not be a mere constrained submission to custom or authority; but may be offered with cheerfulness, as a proof of gratitude for his compassionate labours, and

\* Colossians iii. 17.

of delight and confidence in the hope of securing his favour. Other motives are by no means to be forgotten; especially such as are of a still higher and more sacred nature; those, I mean, arising from the fear or the love of God. But I must believe that this class of motives, amongst others, ought to form a leading feature in the character of every true Christian. The apostle Paul avowed and gloried in this principle of conduct, and so should we. *The love of Christ*, he says, *constraineth us, judging this, that he died for all, that they who live should not henceforth live to themselves, but to him that died for them.*\*

There is one instance of the application of this principle so clearly enjoined in the sacred writings, and of so interesting a nature, that we must give it particular attention. It is thus inculcated by the apostle Paul:—*Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.*† We are to cherish a solemn remembrance of Christ, and to make faithful mention of him to God, in all our prayers and thanksgivings, in all our supplications for pardon and grace, offered up at the throne of divine mercy. Nothing, as it seems to me, can be plainer than our Saviour's own instructions to this effect. *In that day*, he

\* 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

† Coloss. iii. 17.

said to his disciples, (meaning the period following his resurrection and ascension, when he entered upon the full glories of his office,) *ye shall ask me nothing, but whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you.\** All who have perused the New Testament with attention, must be aware how faithfully the apostles and apostolic converts appear to have observed this precept. It is clear, indeed, that they regarded the Father as the supreme and only proper object to whom prayer was to be addressed; as well as the original Author of all the spiritual blessings of the gospel. But they also seem to have regarded it as an obligation no less pleasing than sacred, to offer their prayers to the Father *through his Son Jesus Christ*; being fully sensible that such was the will of their Master, and that their devotions would on that account be more profitable to themselves and more acceptable to God. Hear the sublime doxology of the apostle; and mark how clearly he recognizes the obligation of this practice upon all true believers throughout all ages of the church! *Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world*

\* John xvi. 23.

*without end. Amen.\** This practice, seriously and earnestly observed, cannot fail to give a peculiar character to acts of Christian worship. Our prayers must be, in a sense, purified and refined, in their passage to the throne of God, by passing through such a holy medium, as that created in the mind by a devout recollection and acknowledgement of our benevolent Saviour. Our gratitude will be more ardent; our thoughts more spiritual and elevated; our hearts more humble and meek; when we are thus inspired with a new remembrance of the great mercies bestowed upon us through this well-beloved Son of the Most High. Even, therefore, if the instructions of our Lord, and the undoubted practice of the primitive Christians, were not such as to leave no uncertainty about our duty in this respect, it would still be natural and beneficial, to *give thanks always for all things unto God and the Father, IN THE NAME OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.*

The substance of these observations may be comprised in a few words. *No man cometh unto the Father, saith Jesus, but by me.†* And we have seen that there is an important sense in which these words are true, and applicable to his disciples in all ages. No man can approach the Fa-

\* Ephesians iii. 20, 21.

† John xiv. 6.

ther as a consistent follower of his Son, but BY HIM, in his name, and through faith in his mediation. This is one of the undoubted privileges of his office; which if we neglect to observe, we rob him of his glory, and may deprive ourselves of the benefits of his mediation. In so doing, we cast ourselves proudly on the blindness and weakness of unassisted nature; instead of laying hold of the support and guide offered for our assistance; instead of walking in the consecrated path, which the mercy of heaven has marked out purposely that we should not wander in darkness.

If this Scriptural view of our Saviour's office were more generally attended to, it would surely have the effect of opening the eyes of Christians to the erroneous nature of many doctrines which they now embrace. It is equally opposed to the contrary extremes, of those who would exalt the Lord Jesus to an equality with his Almighty Father, and of those who would represent him as a mere Teacher, and his religion as a mere system of moral lessons. Our Saviour is not the one true God from whose grace every spiritual blessing proceeds. But neither is he to be regarded only in the light of an Instructor, whose occupation was gone for ever as soon as he had delivered certain moral truths to the world. The error of either supposition will, I hope, be manifest from

the considerations which have been submitted to your attention in this Lecture.\* To use the Jewish phraseology adopted in the New Testament, Jesus is a Priest as well as a Prophet. He has *an unchangeable priesthood*, and is entered into heaven, the holy place, there to mediate between God and his followers; *wherefore he is able to save them to the uttermost, that come unto God by him.*\* All this we know, is highly figurative; but still it must have a meaning. And how can it mean less, or why should we take pains to make it mean less, than that Jesus is appointed to act continually between God and men by spiritual intercourse, to carry on the blessed work of human redemption? *He ever liveth to make intercession for us.* † From this it is *not* necessary to understand that he prevails on the Father to forgive our sins and accept our obedience; but surely it *is* necessary to understand that he is in some way employed for the benefit of our souls. Believing this, our Lord Jesus Christ should be habitually present to our thoughts, especially when we are about to perform any pious and Christian act. He should not be disregarded in the encounter with temptation, in the discharge of arduous duties, in the endurance of trials, in the solemn exercises of devotion. It is in this

\* Hebrews vii. 25.

† *Ibid.*

particular, among others, that Christian virtue and piety differ from natural religion and worldly morality. How conducive this habit is to our present improvement and happiness, every true Christian knows. How necessary it may be to our full participation in the joys of a future world, it is impossible for any man to know. In the mean time, our duty is sufficiently plain. Christ is to be acknowledged, and treated, as the medium of spiritual communication between his followers and their Father who is in heaven. And consequently, every view of divine things which tends to keep this principle in the background—to thrust it, as it were, in the rear of the great contest between sin and righteousness—every opinion which tends to cause our Saviour to be personally overlooked, though he may not be rejected, to be forgotten and slighted, though he may not be denied, is deeply to be lamented by all who love and rejoice in *the glorious gospel of the blessed God*.

## LECTURE III.

MEN RECONCILED UNTO GOD THROUGH THE  
MEDIATION OF CHRIST.

2 Cor. v. 18, 19.

AND ALL THINGS ARE OF GOD, WHO HATH RECONCILED US TO HIMSELF BY JESUS CHRIST, AND HATH GIVEN TO US THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION; TO WIT, THAT GOD WAS IN CHRIST, RECONCILING THE WORLD UNTO HIMSELF, NOT IMPUTING THEIR TRESPASSES UNTO THEM.

THERE is no light in which the merciful dispensation of Christianity can be more truly, or more advantageously viewed, than that in which it is here represented. Men reconciled unto God through Jesus Christ! This is the great, prevailing topic of the Christian Scriptures. The whole system of the gospel is a gracious covenant of reconciliation, proceeding from the ineffable love of God, established by the mediation of Christ, and sealed with his blood as of *a lamb without spot and without blemish*. In entering upon the investigation of this article of divine truth, let us bring to it minds candidly prepared

to receive whatever the sacred writers teach: this will certainly be found most worthy of God, as well as most conducive to our own moral and spiritual improvement.

It deserves to be well considered, that this representation of the gospel is borrowed, as almost every other necessarily must be, from human transactions. It would have been in vain, to have informed us of a *reconciliation* between men and God, if we had not previously had some ideas of a reconciliation, derived from observing the ways of mankind, or from our own experience in social intercourse. But we all have such ideas: and when we read in the Scriptures of a reconciliation between mankind and their Almighty Ruler, we naturally conceive of it according to our settled notions of such an occurrence between one man and another, or between different parties of men. This was not only unavoidable, (as the sacred teachers were constrained to instruct us in human language,) but it is, generally speaking, a great advantage: it helps to convey to our minds at once a clear and familiar apprehension of their meaning. Yet this very circumstance may be the source of great and lamentable error, if we judge of divine things without sufficient discrimination. The ways of God, though they may be *compared* to human transactions, are not altogether *as our*

*ways*, nor his thoughts *as our thoughts*. We must be cautious not to overstrain these analogies, these illustrative comparisons between natural and spiritual affairs; for this will be apt to lead us into very dangerous mistakes. Thus, in respect to a reconciliation,—it usually happens amongst men, when two parties are at variance and need to be reconciled, that there has been from the first some folly and injustice on both sides. But how egregious would be our error, should we include this idea in our views of the reconciliation between God and men; and thus impute iniquity to Him in whom there is no evil at all! This, it may be said, is an error too gross to be entertained by any persons of sound mind; and perhaps it is so. But again, let it be considered that it still more frequently happens, in the case of enmities and estrangements amongst men, that even where there may not have been any fault originally in one of the parties, yet at length there exists some great obstacle, some strong dislike and reluctance to be overcome *on both sides*, before a sincere reconciliation can take place. Now, if we have formed enlightened conceptions of the Supreme Being, such as reason and revelation unite to teach us, we shall surely admit, that to include this idea in our views of Christian reconciliation would likewise be an egregious error. If there be truth in the Scrip-



ture declarations of the infinite mercy and compassion of God, it were highly absurd to imagine any unwillingness, any natural impediment, any opposing principle in God, standing in the way of a reconciliation between him and his sinful creatures. Yet who will say that *this* is an error too gross to be entertained? Who does not perceive that this error forms the pith and strength of the popular doctrine of atonement by the blood of Christ? How familiarly do the believers in this doctrine speak of a *reconciled God*; an expression unknown to the Scriptures, and which savours far more of heathenism than of Christianity. The thought which evidently occupies the chief attention of serious Christians of the popular persuasion, relates to the infinite wonder which Jesus has accomplished in *prevailing* on God to be reconciled to the world; in *procuring*, at the price of his own infinite sufferings, the boon of forgiveness from the offended majesty of heaven! Thanks be to God, the sacred writers are in no degree to be charged with this monstrous delusion! They, as the ambassadors of Christ, *beseech men to be reconciled unto God*, and declare this to be the purpose of the gospel dispensation. But in no one instance have they taught that Christ *reconciled God to the world*. This important difference, between the language of the apostles and the language of modern creeds, cannot be owing

to accident. The doctrines cannot be the same, which require to be uniformly expressed in opposite terms.

In our further investigation of this subject, therefore, let it be clearly borne in mind, that the object of our inquiry is,—not how Christ reconciled God to sinners,—but how *God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself*.

The main points to be treated of, are the nature and means of this reconciliation. But I must first be allowed to say a few words respecting the fact here so plainly asserted, that *God was in Christ*. If I am not greatly mistaken, this also is quite at variance with reputed orthodoxy, and consistent with no scheme of doctrine but Unitarianism. If we be guided by the plain meaning of words, is it possible to avoid the conclusion, that Christ himself was not God? With what propriety of speech, in what possible sense, could it be said of any being or person, human or divine, that he was *in himself*? The expression of the apostle is doubtless boldly figurative: but surely it is not mystically absurd. It is not the language of one whom much learning or much fanaticism had rendered mad; but of one who spake on all occasions the words of truth and soberness. And what truth or soberness there can be, in saying that God was in Christ, unless Christ be essentially a distinct being from

God, it will ever surpass the powers of the human mind to explain or conceive. We may choose to affirm, that we do believe what appears to be neither possible or intelligible; but to imagine that such a blind prostration of understanding can be required by the gospel, that it can in the slightest degree promote the merciful and sanctifying ends for which revelation was bestowed, is an opinion that ought not to be rashly embraced.

In fact, however, the Scriptures shed a clear light on the sense in which God is said to have been in Christ. By a form of speech which belongs to most languages and abounds in the sacred writings, God is said *to be* especially, where his power and wisdom, his glory and presence, are *more particularly manifested* to the eyes of men. It was probably on this principle that the heavens have been, from the remotest times, considered as the peculiar dwelling-place of God; because the heavenly bodies first attracted the rational attention of mankind to the might and wisdom of their Creator. On the same principle, also, Jehovah was said to dwell in the sacred temple of Jerusalem; because there his mercy and favour were believed to be especially vouchsafed to his worshipers, and his glory to be manifested. Now, in Jesus Christ all the awful, and all the gracious attributes of God, were dis-

played to the apprehension of men with unexampled brightness. His almighty power was seen in the stupendous miracles which he enabled Jesus to perform; His infinite wisdom was manifested in the divine truths which Jesus taught from the inspiration of his holy spirit; His fatherly goodness and compassion were set forth in the terms of pardon, in the means of salvation from sin and restoration to purity and happiness, which constitute the religion of Christ. With such sacred wisdom did Jesus teach, with such sacred energy did he recommend his teaching to the world, that the authority and majesty of the Most High were reflected in all his words and actions, and the glory of God shone upon his steps. Such were the signs and wonders he wrought, that the presence of the great Author of nature seemed visibly to accompany him. The Father dwelt in him by His holy influence, with wonderful fulness and brightness, and by him wrought the purposes of His grace. Why, then, should we seek for any obscure and mystical meaning of the expression in our text, when we have a sense so scriptural, so obviously consistent with fact, and so abundantly sufficient for all the objects of Christian faith and confidence? Let us rather rejoice in the simplicity of divine truth: and heartily believing that in this clear and important sense, *God was in Christ*, let us not fetter

and weaken the operation of this truth upon our minds, by dogmas about union of nature, and person, and essence, which are neither scriptural or intelligible.

We proceed now to consider the nature and means of reconciliation by Jesus Christ. In order to see this subject in its true light, it will be necessary to call to mind the peculiar account which the Scriptures give of a state of idolatry and sin. In the sight of reason idolatry is error; and sin, in the sight of reason, is folly and guilt. But in the peculiar—language of Scripture, a state of idolatry and sin is a state of *alienation from God*; a state of enmity in the hearts of men towards the true God, who alone is entitled to the worship and spiritual obedience of all his intelligent creatures. This is the scriptural, the religious, the Christian view of the condition of sinners. It must be allowed, that it is a view of the sinful state of mankind quite distinct from that which can be taken *by reason alone*, apart from all feelings and principles of a religious nature. Vicious practices are evidently a misapplication of the exalted faculties of human nature; they are the source of much disorder and misery; ultimately, they lessen the enjoyment both of the individual who is enslaved by them, and of society at large. In this point of view, wickedness is justly con-

demned by every man of sense and reflection. But all this, it is plain, would be equally true of immoral practices, if there were no God in existence. This cannot therefore be the *religious* view of sin: religion necessarily implies a regard to the will and favour of God. In addition to all this, then, sin may likewise be a state of enmity and alienation, a state of disaffection and rebellion towards the moral Ruler and Judge of the world; in which peculiar light it is the proper object of true religion to represent it. That such, in fact, is the representation of the Christian Scriptures, few persons will venture to dispute. All sinners and idolaters are said in the Scriptures to be *under condemnation* before God,\* to be *alienated from God by their wicked works*,† to be *without God in the world*,‡ and in consequence to stand in need of *reconciliation*. Such is the account which revelation gives of the moral condition of mankind, both under the law of nature and under the law of Moses. It cannot be shewn that this account of the state of the world is false; it cannot be shewn that it is in any degree exaggerated or unjust. Nor do I conceive that it is fairly chargeable with any of that obscurity and mysticism, which some friends to rational religion have been disposed to insi-

\* Rom. v. 18.

† Colossians i. 21.

‡ Ephesians ii. 12.

nuate. Some subtle objections and difficulties have been raised against it; but this will have little weight with him who considers, that the same thing is true even of the plainest principles of natural religion. The Christian revelation undoubtedly gives a *true* representation of the actual state of mankind, as subjects of God's moral government; but it ought ever to be borne in mind by the candid inquirer, that it is wisely and designedly a *popular*, not a *philosophical* representation. Regarded in this light, there is surely great truth and justice, as well as great simplicity, in the account which the Scriptures give of the fallen, corrupted, and ungodly condition of the human race, previous to the redeeming and regenerating influence of the gospel.

Now, if we carry these considerations in mind, we shall easily perceive how justly the purpose of God, when he dwelt in Jesus Christ, is represented to be that of *reconciling the world unto himself*. The appointed work of our Saviour, the great design of his mission, was to call men off from the practice of idolatry and sin, to render that pure worship and obedience which they owe to the ever-living and ever-blessed God. The burden of all his exhortations and commandments to sinful men, is briefly this,—Repent and turn unto God! Come unto the Father by me! Cease from the evil of your ways, not merely

that ye may better enjoy this life and benefit your fellow-creatures, but especially that ye may no longer live as miserable sinners and strangers before God;—that ye may prepare yourselves, by the practice of holiness, for an everlasting communion in purity and happiness with your Father in heaven! I mean, that all the doctrines and precepts of Jesus Christ, uttered for the salvation of the world, agree with the views given in Scripture of its previous state. They all tend to impress our minds with this solemn truth,—that the chief evil of sin consists in the alienation of the heart from God, and that the principal reward of holiness is to be found in complete reconciliation and union with Him.

There can be little doubt, that when the apostle speaks of *the world*, as being reconciled to God, he alludes particularly to the heathen world, sunk as it then was into the lowest depths of idolatry and wickedness. To his Gentile converts, therefore, there must have been a peculiar truth and force in his words, which we may not so fully appreciate. They knew, from experience, what corruptions and miseries belong to a state of utter ignorance regarding the almighty and all-merciful Spirit. They had been themselves delivered from this condition and *brought nigh unto God; called out of darkness*

into his marvellous light.\* They knew, therefore, and felt deeply, what the apostle meant, when he declared that *God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself*.

But I have no thought of questioning the application of this doctrine to the case of all other men, as well as to the first converts from heathenism. Sin, from which no mortal creature is always and altogether free, naturally carries the mind away from God, and sets the heart at enmity with Him. It makes the very thought of that holy Being unwelcome and burdensome. And a most painful and desolate condition it undoubtedly is, to be obliged to shun the thought of that adorable Parent who rules the world in wisdom and loving-kindness; who desires nothing of his rational offspring but that they should practise his will, in order that they may be happy with him for ever. But such is the natural effect of wilful and habitual sin. The wicked set themselves against God in their thoughts, their affections, and their lives; consequently, every human being, when he sins, and as far as he sins, needs *reconciliation with God*. To provide for the supply of this spiritual necessity in every believing soul, was the gospel given.

\* 1 Pet. ii. 9.

God was in Christ to reveal and consecrate a way for sinners to return unto Him. And to be delivered from their former state of alienation, to be permitted to enjoy the pardon and favour of God, to have fellowship with the Father as dear children; in the spirit of filial trust and devotion, — this is the sum of all the privileges which men derive from a sincere profession and practice of Christianity.

We have now endeavoured to express our views of the *manner* and *purpose* of God's being in Christ, according to the doctrine of the apostle Paul, supported and illustrated by the general tenor of the Scriptures. We have seen that it differs in some essential particulars from the opinions commonly entertained. There is no mention of God's having been reconciled to the world by Christ; on the contrary, the work of mercy was the entire act of God himself, operating through the agency and ministry of Jesus Christ. It was truly a work of *atonement*, if this word be understood in the sense in which it occurs (once only)\* in the Christian Scriptures, as being equivalent to *reconciliation*. And be it remembered, that it is not God but men, who are said to have *received the atonement*; in other words, to have been reconciled. They who sin-

\* Rom. v. 11.

cerely embraced the gospel, casting themselves upon divine mercy declared through Christ, and opening their hearts to all the sanctifying influences of divine truth, were reconciled unto God by being reclaimed from idolatry and sin; for these alone can cause a separation between the souls of men and that all-merciful Being who is ever *waiting to be gracious*.

There is yet a distinct topic connected with this subject, on which we must proceed to explain ourselves. What did our Saviour Jesus Christ perform, on his part, in order to effect this reconciliation of the world to God? The generality of modern Christians may feel astonishment that we should think it necessary to raise such a question. They will answer, confidently, that Jesus brought about the reconciliation of sinners by the full satisfaction which he made to the offended justice of God, in his own sufferings and death; that he turned aside from guilty men the consequences of divine wrath, by the infinite merits of his own sacrifice; that he became the legal substitute of sinners, by enduring in his own person the strict punishment of their offences; that by thus fulfilling the claims of the divine law to the uttermost, he truly purchased of God the forgiveness and salvation of all those to whom his righteousness is imputed. It is next to impossible to misunder-

stand this doctrine. The language of its advocates is clear and decisive. We must also acknowledge that, if it be true, it is a doctrine of supreme importance, making the faith of Unitarians appear lamentably defective.

But, in the name of our Saviour, whose teaching we revere, in the name of his God and Father, whose grace we adore, we demand to be shewn where there is a single syllable of all this in the holy scriptures. Present us with the warrant for the truth of this doctrine, in the words of inspired writers, and we will bow to their authority. But on a doctrine so opposed to the natural sentiments of reason and piety, on a subject which so deeply involves the character of God and the very spirit of true religion, we could not consent to receive the mere inferences and interpretations of fallible men;—not, even if we were unable to discover their fallacy, which however we think we can do most plainly. The bold, rash, groundless assumptions, by which such a meaning is forced upon the language of the Christian scriptures, appear to us as wonderful as any thing in the history of human error. Taking all that is written in Scripture concerning the death and sacrifice of Christ in its most literal sense,—making no allowance for those peculiarities of Jewish phraseology, those strong modes and figures of eastern speech, which yet

ought to be considered in the rational interpretation of the Bible,—still, there is nothing in the Scriptures that can be said to express the doctrines against which we protest. You shall bring together all the passages that are so readily and so loosely quoted. We will say nothing of mis-translation. We will enter into no speculative reasoning. We will have recourse to no comment, lest we should be accused of substituting our own gloss for the plain meaning of the Scriptures. We will only insist, that there is not one passage in which it is written that Jesus suffered and died to satisfy the justice of God; not one passage in which it is said that he reconciled God and men by vicariously fulfilling the judicial claims of the divine law; not one passage in which it is said that his mode of redeeming mankind by his blood, was by purchasing of God the forgiveness of sins at the price of his blood. The reputed orthodox doctrine of atonement still remains to be *assumed*; it must be *inferred*; for most assuredly it is no where *stated* in the sacred volume. We may be asked, perhaps, what other meaning can be attached to this language? It were better to attach none at all; it were safer to confess our complete ignorance; than to draw conclusions, which change the merciful covenant of the gospel into a close bargain between the justice of one divine person and the

compassion of another. But we are not reduced to this necessity. We are not disposed to allow that the glowing words of scripture must be without meaning, unless they bear the sense which the prejudice of ages has ascribed to them. We are willing to meet our brethren in the spirit of Christian seriousness and humility, and to consider, for our mutual edification, what was the real importance, what were the real effects of the sufferings and death of Christ. Only, we must beg to provide, that beyond what is written nothing shall be assumed, nothing shall be inferred, inconsistent with the clear and acknowledged principles of divine revelation. We must put in a preliminary caution, in behalf of the *free grace of God*. It is surely a reasonable condition, that no doctrine shall be made an article of Christian faith by deduction, which goes to contradict, or even to qualify, such truths as are enforced and repeated in the words of inspired authority.

On the supposition, that there was nothing in the moral relation between God and Christ, to give a different character to his death from that of other righteous martyrs, there would still be sufficient to justify our warmest gratitude, and to account for the language of the Scriptures. His blood was shed in the cause of human salvation. He died for our sakes, for our benefit, to

complete the gracious work of reconciliation. By his death, under the peculiar circumstances which preceded and followed it, the truth and divinity of the Christian covenant were fully established. So that it is literally true, that we have been reconciled unto God through the death of his Son;—but not in the way of vicarious expiation. Before the coming of Christ all men were in bondage to spiritual darkness, to sin and death. From these evils we are delivered by the gospel, to consummate the revelation of which his life was sacrificed on the cross. Again therefore it is literally true, that we are redeemed by his precious blood, being bought therewith, as with a price paid for our release from the worst of slavery;—but not paid to satisfy the justice of God, or to purchase his forgiveness. The sinfulness of men was the cause of his being sent on his heavenly mission; in fulfilling which he suffered as a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and finally by wicked hands was crucified and slain. It is literally true therefore again, that by his stripes we are healed, that he died for our sins, on account of our guilt and wretchedness, to cleanse our souls from the pollution and degradation of sin;—but not in the way of a substitute, bearing in his own innocent person the guilt and punishment of wicked men. In short, we earnestly maintain that all the language

of the sacred writers, relating to the sufferings and death of our Lord, expresses no more than is included in Unitarian views of his work and office. Whatever is added to these views, in the popular doctrine of atonement, is pure inference and gratuitous assumption. That there are some peculiarities of phraseology employed on this subject in the Scriptures, which would not have been employed by any but Jewish writers, and which require to be interpreted accordingly, appears to me undeniable; but I cannot perceive that this circumstance affords any advantage to the believers in the Trinitarian doctrine. *They* may repeat the language of holy writ with their own ideas attached to it, till they imagine the language conveys those ideas. *We* may so often have heard this language confidently appealed to in support of what are termed orthodox opinions, as almost to be rendered fearful of giving it a fair hearing. But a calm and steady consideration of the language itself, with a reasonable attention to the character and circumstances of the writers, will dispel all doubts from our minds, and bring us back to an unwavering faith in the pure doctrine of the gospel.

I have said that all this is true and interesting, even on the supposition that there was nothing in the moral relation between Christ and God which might give a peculiar character to his



death. I am more than doubtful, however, if this supposition be correct. Is not death plainly declared in the Scriptures to be the moral penalty of sin? Was not our Saviour *without sin*;\* a perfectly righteous character; one who fulfilled the law of God in all things? Though *naturally subject*, therefore, to mortal dissolution like other men, was he not *morally exempt* from death, which was introduced on account of sin? And if it were so, was there not in his voluntary death for the good of mankind, out of submission to the divine will, a meritorious act of obedience, such as no other man could render, and which might well be precious in the sight of God? Is it not the doctrine of the Scriptures, that for this meritorious obedience unto death, even the shameful death of the cross, Jesus has been rewarded by God with that exaltation to spiritual authority and power, in which he now reigns, and shall reign till sin and death are destroyed? Is it not true, then, more emphatically than appeared before, that there is a close and solemn connexion between his death and all the spiritual privileges we derive from the gospel? I can only say that these views of the subject have long appeared to me to be true and scriptural; and that I seem to perceive in them a

\* Heb. iv. 15.

moral propriety and beauty, which increases greatly my attachment to the Christian religion. Surely, the various blessings of our holy vocation are not the less a free gift from God to us, for being at the same time a reward to the benevolent Jesus, *who loved us, and gave himself for us*.<sup>o</sup> Rather, they should by such a consideration be the more endeared to us. We should rejoice in such a striking exhibition of the connexion which God has appointed between obedience and immortality; between purity of moral character and the highest glory and happiness which a creature can enjoy.

But as the means employed by Christ in the work of our redemption will come to be discussed in the next Lecture, I shall conclude at present with a practical exhortation, arising out of the views that have been thus far developed. The gospel, we have seen, makes the way of reconciliation appear plain and delightful. May we give heed to the earnest invitation of the apostles: *In Christ's stead, we pray you be ye reconciled unto God!*† This invitation is addressed to us, and to all who believe in every age. Let us hear it with gladness, and turn with ready feet to tread the paths of holiness and peace. God has graciously declared himself willing that

\* Gal. ii. 20.

† 2 Cor. v. 20.

we should be reconciled unto him. Our Saviour has pointed out the way, and proclaimed the conditions of reconciliation. *There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit.\**

\* Rom. viii. 1.

## LECTURE IV.

## CHRISTIAN REDEMPTION.

Romans v. 20, 21.

BUT WHERE SIN ABOUNDED, GRACE DID MUCH MORE ABOUND; THAT AS SIN HATH REIGNED UNTO DEATH, EVEN SO MIGHT GRACE REIGN THROUGH RIGHTEOUSNESS UNTO ETERNAL LIFE, BY JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD.

We have hitherto treated of the divine office of Christ, the work which his Father gave him to do, so far as it may be said to consist in *mediating*, in all spiritual things, between God and men; in effecting the *reconciliation* of a sinful world to its holy and merciful Parent. These topics are now to be viewed under a somewhat different aspect; though we shall still find ourselves engaged with the same great principles of moral truth and obligation, and be led to the same conclusions. Indeed, it deserves to be noticed, that whilst the object of the gospel dispensation is one and simple, the representations given of it by the sacred writers, for purposes of argu-

ment and illustration, are many and various. The sole ultimate design of Christianity is, probably, to render men wise, virtuous and pious, that they may be mutual blessings to one another in this life, and prepared for the enjoyment of everlasting happiness in a future life. The apostles speak of this design as a work of *reconciliation, regeneration, salvation, or redemption*, according to the peculiar views of it most congenial to their own minds, and according to the character and circumstances of those to whom their writings were first addressed.

A similar observation may be made in regard to most of the particular doctrines of revelation. The great discovery of the gospel, in respect to immortality, is simply, that all mankind shall be raised from the state of death which terminates this life, to another condition of being, in which a righteous judgment and retribution await them according to their deeds;—a condition in which the wicked shall suffer for their sins, and the good be exalted to endless joy in the presence of God. This is all that we need to know; this is all that was intended to be revealed; yet the imagery and phraseology employed by the sacred writers, to bring these solemn truths home to the hearts and consciences of men, are most various, and even, when considered together, of an inconsistent character.

Now, concerning either the general object or particular doctrines of Christianity, to fix on any one of these representations to the exclusion of others; to pervert a figurative expression, or description, into a literal statement of facts; to strain that, which was meant only as a particular mode of enforcing some general truth, into a separate and peculiar doctrine;—this is a great source of error, absurdity, and fanaticism. On the contrary, to look upon these various representations in a sober and rational frame of mind; to compare one with another, so as to prevent hasty and partial conclusions; to gather from all of them the general principles and true spirit of the gospel;—this is the source of that pure wisdom which marks the character of an enlightened Christian, and exhibits the profession of religion in its most dignified and graceful form.

The subject of the present Lecture is *Christian Redemption*, its nature, objects, and means. In calling your attention, my brethren, to this most important and comprehensive subject, I feel considerable difficulty in determining within what limits to confine myself; so many are the interesting topics which present themselves for discussion. I shall endeavour to be full and explicit on the most essential points: others must be left to future opportunities, and to your private investigation.

The words of the apostle Paul, then, with which I have introduced the subject, declare the redemption of the human race from sin and death, *through righteousness unto eternal life*. This work, we are told, displays in a signal manner the triumph of the grace of God over the guilt and disobedience of men, and is wrought by the mediation or agency of Jesus Christ.

We shall begin with the consideration of the *evils*, from which it is the purpose of Christian redemption to deliver mankind. These evils are stated by the venerable apostle in this place, as well as in the Scriptures throughout, to be *SIN* and *DEATH*; including, of course, all the sufferings and miseries properly resulting from these grand calamities of human nature. It is plainly the doctrine of revelation, that sin entered into the world by the first man, Adam; that the guilt of disobedience to the perfect law of righteousness and of God, was contracted even by the first of our race; that sin reigned or prevailed amongst all men from Adam to Moses under the law of nature, and with peculiar aggravation from Moses to Christ under the divine law of the Jewish economy. And this, simply, is so far from being an unreasonable doctrine, that it would be in the highest degree unreasonable to doubt it. Although the first man was perfectly innocent and upright, when he came from the hands of his

Maker; yet, since he was a *man*, we cannot be surprised to learn, that when temptations assailed his weakness, through his senses, appetites and passions, he fell from the state of purity in which he had been created, and committed that original sin which began the awful course of human disobedience to the will of God. This evil example all his posterity have followed;—with the exception of one man, who, though *in all points tempted like as we are*, was *yet without sin*.\* The entire scheme of Christianity, as it is expounded by the apostle Paul in his epistles, certainly rests on this foundation,—that all mankind, in their natural, unconverted state, are sinful and guilty creatures. Whether Adam, in consequence of his fall or first transgression, suffered any kind of physical or moral change in the constitution of his nature, does not appear of much importance to us, in a religious point of view. I cannot see, however, that the Scriptures give any countenance to such an opinion. It is sufficient to know, that we all inherit from him, as the natural Head of our race, that frail and imperfect nature, which, being acted upon by the circumstances of our present condition, does lead us into many sinful departures from the laws of reason, of conscience, and of God. As we are the chil-

\* Hebrews iv. 15.

dren of Adam, therefore,—in other words, as we are human beings,—we are sinners; and the gospel is avowedly addressed to us in this character. As we are the offspring of him who was fashioned out of the dust of the earth, and whose frailty was so manifest in the readiness with which he yielded to the first temptation, so are we earthy likewise. And though we may not all sin after the similitude of Adam's transgression, yet have we all fallen short of the just requirements of the divine law; we all feel the power of sin reigning in our members, and too often in our hearts, warring with the influence of all good principles.

Thus far the Scriptures teach; and their teaching is confirmed by the testimony of our own minds. Thus far, to the best of my knowledge, all Unitarian Christians believe. But the popular doctrine on the subject, as you are well aware, goes a great way beyond this. It assumes that, in consequence of the first sin of the first man, there came a great and total corruption of nature upon him and all his posterity; that the whole race of mankind are born in sin and corruption, guilty and depraved by nature, and thereby incapable of fulfilling the will of God in the practice of holiness. Nothing that I have said respecting the actual sinfulness of the world is to be understood as giving the slightest countenance to this

gloomy doctrine. It appears to me to be altogether unfounded in scripture, to be manifestly false in fact, inconsistent with the justice and goodness of God, destructive of human responsibility, and fatal to all rational endeavours after righteousness. Nevertheless, it is true that sin entered the world by Adam; he being the first of transgressors as well as the first of men. All his posterity have shewn the same corrupt propensity to disobey the moral law of God. It is necessarily to be admitted, therefore, that from the beginning the whole human race have stood in need of redemption from sin.

It is also the doctrine of the Scriptures that, in the moral government of God, DEATH is connected, as a consequence and a penalty, with the sinfulness of men. *Death*, we are assured, *is the wages of sin.*\* And in this chapter of the epistle to the Romans, we read that, *as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.*† But on this point, likewise, the popular doctrine ventures far beyond the teaching of the Scriptures. We are required to believe, that by *death* we ought to understand *everlasting misery*, to which all men have been condemned since the fall of Adam, and from which those only can be

\* Rom. vi. 23.

† Rom. v. 12.

saved to whom the merits of Christ shall be imputed. This is nothing short of a bold and dreadful perversion of God's judgments. Whatever interpretation may be given to the language of the Christian Scriptures, relating to the future punishment of those who, after being called to repentance by the gospel, live and die in wickedness,—there is not the shadow of a reason for believing that endless misery was, from the first, appointed as the penalty of that universal moral delinquency consequent upon the frailty of human nature. There is not one word of this in the original sentence passed upon Adam. No mention is made of it in this elaborate exposition of the subject by the apostle Paul, where he so clearly unfolds the consequences of human transgression, and explains the moral condition of all mankind when strangers to the gospel covenant. All that can be fairly gathered from the Scriptures is, that because all men are sinners, death passes upon all men: because the whole race of Adam fail, in the present state, to attain that blameless and holy character which alone can fit them for the enjoyment of perfect happiness, it has pleased God to decree that they shall all undergo the mysterious change of death. Into the wisdom and equity of this appointment, perhaps, it is not our business to inquire too boldly. From this observation, however, I would not have it

understood that I think there is any particular difficulty in the case: there is none that I can perceive. But it is sufficient for us to know, that whatever physical necessity there may be for that dissolution of the body, that change, that interruption or suspension of life, to which we are all made subject,—it is *morally justified* in the ways of God to men by being made the wages of sin.

In complete salvation from these great evils, then, does Christian redemption consist: in deliverance from the pollution and misery of SIN, from the fear and condemnation of DEATH. It can scarcely be necessary to observe, that they who faithfully improve its benefits, will be saved also from what they must otherwise suffer, the future and awful punishment announced by Christianity itself against impenitent sinners. This may, perhaps, be rather looked on as a necessary consequence, than as one of the direct purposes of Christian redemption. The sentence of death being now remitted, and all former frailties and transgressions forgiven, to those who heartily embrace the new covenant of grace,—it follows, of course, that no future punishment is to be dreaded by those who continue in faith and obedience. Reason and conscience, however, may teach us to expect, (and the Scriptures largely confirm the expectation,) that in the day of final

retribution, a sentence far more severe than death will be passed upon all who obstinately refuse to comply with the invitations of divine mercy.

If these be the *evils* to which Christian redemption relates, it will not require many words to explain the nature of its corresponding *blessings*. These are **RIGHTEOUSNESS** and **ETERNAL LIFE**. Pardon and justification in his sight, on the grounds of true faith and repentance, (which may be the doctrinal meaning of the term righteousness in the text,) and immortality as the proper consequence of this justified state, are *the gifts of God through Jesus Christ*.\* Personal **RIGHTEOUSNESS**, or holiness of character, is the end to which all the dealings of God with his intelligent creatures lead, and the Christian dispensation in a most eminent degree. Wherever there is moral purity, there is the true foundation of lasting happiness; and where there is both purity and happiness, there is no more place or occasion for death, which was ordained on account of sin. On those believers, therefore, who shall have been brought into this state by the influence of the gospel, the Father of spirits will bestow **ETERNAL LIFE**. There is a connexion established, in the moral government of God, between holiness and immortality, as indissoluble

\* Rom. vi. 23.

as that between sin and death.\* In that heavenly home to which it is the purpose of our Saviour's spiritual power to conduct all his true disciples, every soul shall be filled with the perfect love of God, with affections of piety and benevolence, with sources of sacred and unutterable bliss, which eternity shall behold perpetually increasing, reflecting the glory and goodness of God to a universe of redeemed spirits! But on this part of the subject, as there is no material difference of opinion, there is no call for further discussion.

A question of the first importance now presents itself for consideration. How is this salvation of men to be brought about? What means are employed by God, through Christ, to effect this redemption of a fallen and sinful race? We know the answers that many would return to these questions. They would remind us of the infinite merits of our Lord's sacrifice, and of the divine scheme for transferring his righteousness by imputation to guilty men. But as these things are no where clearly revealed in the Scriptures,—as they appear to the judgment of calm reason somewhat unworthy the character of God,—we cannot venture to include them in our views of the method and means of Christian redemption.

Some of the means by which this work of grace is carried on may be concealed from our observation at present; but many of them are open to

our grateful notice and admiration. Look upon the perfect law of Christ; his holy precepts which embrace every duty of piety, benevolence, and self-government; which not only regulate the whole conduct of life, but demand the purification of our hearts, the sanctification of our inmost thoughts and affections, the dedication of our bodies and souls to the moral service of God. Look upon the awful, pleasing sanctions with which this divine law is accompanied and enforced in the gospel;—the denunciation of woe and anguish to every unrepenting sinner, the promises of glory, honour and immortality to all that obey. Look upon the bright and spotless example of Christ, himself a fulfiller of all righteousness, a pattern of every kind of moral excellence, shining forth in the dark history of our deluded and wicked race, like a brilliant star in the obscurity of night. Look upon the many cheering and delightful truths which Christ has revealed concerning the mercy of God, the goodness and loving-kindness of our heavenly Father; who is not willing that any should perish in their sins, but will have all men brought to a knowledge of the truth, that they may be saved and sanctified thereby. In short, look upon the whole system of rational doctrines, holy commandments, consolatory promises, and all the heavenly and blissful prospects, which the Christian religion

opens to the contemplation of its sincere believers. These, being received in the mind with strong faith and love, with a reasonable conviction of their truth, with a solemn sense of their authority, with an earnest desire to cultivate the character they encourage, and to realize the hopes they inspire,—these are the principal means of Christian redemption. By the operation of these principles, I doubt not, through the discipline of life and the grace of God, the hearts of many thousands of true believers, in all ages of the church, have been sanctified and prepared for the happiness of heaven. In this simple teaching of our Saviour,—enforced and illustrated as it is by his own example, and clothed in the authority which belongs to the word of God,—there is a power to render his disciples wise unto salvation, to purify them from all sin, to make them, what he desires they should be, *a peculiar people, zealous of good works.*\*

The effect of the genuine gospel, where it is rightly apprehended and sincerely believed, is to supply those deficiencies in our knowledge of spiritual and eternal things, which the natural light of our own minds never could have supplied. It clearly discovers purposes of heavenly

\* Titus ii. 14.



mercy towards men, which being entirely future in regard to their accomplishment, being entirely of God's appointment, and parts of the secret counsels of his providence, never could have been fully known without the help of revelation. It sets before us motives and aids to holiness which nature, in her blindness and feebleness, could not suggest. It raises hopes far beyond all that reason, in her most sanguine anticipations, ever inspired in the breasts of her most gifted and favourite sages. If we have ever seriously felt the cravings of our moral nature after the knowledge of God and of eternity, if we have thirsted for the waters of life, and gone to the pure fountain of the Christian religion, surely we are conscious that we have not been sent empty away. Men may undoubtedly run on in a course of wickedness, or of worldly-minded levity, and not being sensible of their own spiritual wants, may therefore not be sensible of the powerful assistance which the true doctrine of Christ affords. But all who think and feel aright, all who habitually experience the proper sentiments of penitent, mortal and accountable creatures, will thankfully acknowledge the holy influence of that light which has beamed forth from the throne of Him who dwelleth in light, for the illumination of sinful and dying men. The gos-

pel of Christ is *the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.*\* This religion is founded on an enlightened faith in things spiritual and eternal; it creates a lively hope of eternal happiness, and becomes perfected in the sincere love of God and of Man. Whilst it purifies and strengthens the characters of individuals to the highest degrees of piety and virtue, it is fitted to accompany human society through all its stages of improvement, to mature the faculty of reason and cherish the best affections of human nature. Only through the sincere belief and practice of this religion, therefore, can mankind hope to be redeemed from error, superstition, and sin; those evils with which the whole moral creation groaned and travailed together until the coming of Christ, and with which even those who enjoy in some measure the fruits of the spirit, often groan within themselves, waiting for a more perfect redemption.

In connexion with this part of our subject, one thing of great importance is still to be noticed. It is the persuasion of many sincere Christians, that *the favouring influence of God's holy spirit* is promised and granted to all who earnestly labour, through faith and obedience, to work out their own salvation. So much that is false and pre-

\* Rom. i. 16.

sumptuous, fanatical and pernicious, has been boldly professed respecting spiritual influences, that we cannot greatly wonder if the rational and sober-minded friends of religion have been, in a few instances, disposed to discard such a persuasion altogether. But may not this be equally rash in the contrary extreme? On a subject of this nature, it is probable there will always be some diversity of sentiment, according to the character and experience of individuals. All pretensions to a special guidance from the spirit of God, in regard to the truth of doctrines, or to authority in teaching, we may safely reject, until they are supported by some such miraculous and decisive proofs as those which the inspired apostles were able to exhibit. But surely there is nothing in reason, nothing in sound and comprehensive views of nature, to hinder us from believing that sincere Christians, in their secret struggles against infirmity and sin, may always look for spiritual assistance from God. Certain it is, that there is nothing in the peculiar doctrines of Unitarianism to discountenance this cheering expectation. Is it not perfectly agreeable to our views of the grace of God, to believe that such *extraordinary* and effectual means of redemption may be often bestowed, in reward of a faithful application of the *ordinary* means already mentioned? The sacred Scriptures appear

strongly to favour these hopes: the hearts of good men have an inward evidence of their truth. Why, then, by our language and conduct in opposition to popular delusion, should we give occasion to men to charge us with a positive denial of all such influences? If any have done so, let it be well considered if they may not have been too unguarded. I trust and believe that such spiritual aid is afforded to men of sincere and persevering piety; and that an assurance of this nature is contained in the promises of the gospel.

I shall, in the last place, offer some remarks on the *impartial* and *universal* character of the Christian scheme of redemption. To whom are the blessings of this salvation freely offered? On whom will they be finally bestowed? On the elect only? Is there a chosen number of the human race, for whom alone the gifts of righteousness and eternal life are reserved, according to a sovereign decree of God? And are all the rest of mankind reprobate? have they no part or lot in this dispensation of grace? We all know, my brethren, that such narrow and gloomy views of the gospel stand on record in creeds and articles of human invention, and are still zealously professed by thousands. The doctrine amounts to a bold and unrighteous limitation of divine goodness! But, blessed be God, it is false! The

invitations and promises of our Saviour are addressed to *all that labour and are heavy laden*—oppressed with the burthen of sin and the fear of death. In these last days God hath spoken by his Son Jesus Christ to his whole human family; encouraging all to seek his favour by repentance; pledging the word of his eternal faithfulness that all who comply with the conditions of salvation by a life of Christian obedience,—all who cherish such a practical faith in their Saviour as may lead them to keep his commandments, and tread in his footsteps,—shall assuredly enjoy the reward of everlasting happiness. There is no respect of persons with God towards the followers of his Son. The means and privileges of redemption are freely proffered to all who sincerely embrace the gospel.

The doctrine of the Christian Scriptures on this all-important point is too plain to be reasonably disputed. At the end of the present scene of probation, the whole world shall be judged in righteousness. Then, all to whom the holy law of the gospel has been proclaimed, shall be tried by this law according to their works. They that have honoured their Redeemer in their lives shall be exalted to immortal glory. They that have abused the precious advantages of their faith shall pass into a state of condemnation and punishment. They also, they whose ears the glad

tidings of the gospel have never reached, shall be judged in righteousness according to their works; not, however, by the Christian law which they have never received, but by that law of reason and conscience which their Maker had written on their hearts, and with a merciful regard to their several degrees of religious knowledge. *God will render to every man according to his deeds; tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil; but glory, honour, and peace to every man that worketh good.\**

Here perhaps it was the design of the Author of Revelation to veil our prospects. I sincerely pity the man, and wonder at the constitution of his mind, who after due reflection and inquiry finds it necessary to believe, that Christianity has absolutely determined *the eternity of future punishment*. Nothing in controverted theology appears to me more sound, than the criticisms and reasonings by which such a conclusion from the figurative, indefinite language of the Scriptures, is shewn to be wholly unwarrantable. I am not altogether prepared to maintain, however, that the doctrine of the universal restoration of the wicked, the final purity and happiness of all mankind, is a positive doctrine of the Christian religion. Yet I *hope* in its truth; and though

\* Rom. ii. 6—10.

disposed to admit that it is neither certainly deducible from nature, nor fully revealed in the Scriptures, I even *believe* in its truth. But is it not probable that we put ourselves upon a wrong search, when we endeavour to gather from the sacred writings a clear and express account of the *final issues* of God's moral government? Is not this looking somewhat further than even the light of revelation was intended to conduct us?

In tracing the past ways of Providence, in connexion with revealed religion, we find that there have been distinct periods, (or *ages*, as they are styled in scripture,) succeeding one another by divine appointment; and we may remark, that the people of one age were never permitted to have a perfect foreknowledge of the blessings ordained for the next. The worthies of the Patriarchal age were promised, that their posterity should multiply exceedingly and become a great people. But they had no clear foresight of the glories displayed at Mount Sinai, nor of the many divine favours granted to the Israelites during the continuance of the Mosaic economy. The Jewish nation, on their part, were fully instructed by prophecy that a new age, a better dispensation, was to come; they expected the advent of their Messiah; they knew that he was to be the author of a happy and glorious era. But who will say that they were thoroughly informed of

the nature and effects of the gospel dispensation? Who is not aware that their views of it fell far short of the wisdom, the beneficence, the universality, by which it is now seen to be characterized? May we not be similarly situated with respect to the proceedings of the future state? We know that the present world is a state of probation; we know that the world to come, whereof the Scriptures speak, is to be a state of retribution. *After death comes the judgment.* We are instructed by the word of God in all the duties of the present state; and in the *general prospects*, both of the righteous and the wicked, in regions beyond the grave. Further than this, it seems likely, the design of the Christian revelation does not extend. In the mean time, it would seem to be incumbent on us to encourage such hopes respecting the final destiny of the wicked, as are most consistent with the infinite wisdom and goodness of God, most in harmony with the compassion and loving-kindness of all his past dispensations. That the countless multitudes who die in their sins, will be consigned over to endless and unmitigated torments, is a doctrine that ought not to be entertained without the surest warrant of holy writ; and this, I am confidently persuaded, it has not. Rather, should reason and piety anticipate the period when the ways of the Almighty shall appear, even to the most guilty

of his creatures, to have begun, to have proceeded, to terminate in LOVE; when sin and misery shall be abolished, and purity and happiness shall reign universally throughout his moral dominions; when the whole intelligent creation shall be made free with the glorious liberty of the sons of God; when he shall have redeemed ALL MEN, and reconciled them unto himself, through Jesus Christ! I have no doubt that these sublime hopes affected the hearts of the evangelists and apostles, as they must affect the hearts of all who are truly imbued with the spirit of the gospel. Though the sacred penmen were, perhaps, not commissioned to teach universal restoration as one of the doctrines of Christianity,—yet the prospect of this holy and happy consummation of the ways of God arose in their minds, as it must arise occasionally in the hearts of all good men. If indications of this be not sometimes found in their writings, I must confess I do not understand them. The reasoning of the apostle Paul, particularly, in many parts of his epistles, will seem to be weak and inconclusive, unless we allow that he had such high and blissful prospects in view.

How grand and merciful, then, is the work of human redemption! How should our hearts glow with devout gratitude to the Author of such vast and unutterable blessings! How faithfully should

we attach ourselves to the Saviour, whom God has raised up to deliver us from such evils, and to conduct us to immortal felicity! How earnestly should we labour to improve all our means of salvation, and implore the divine assistance, that we may be able to make our calling and election sure! This was the great design which Christ came into the world to promote. His character and qualifications were suitable to his heavenly task. As Adam committed the first transgression, and commenced the reign of sin, so did our Lord set the first example of complete obedience, and introduce the reign of grace, *through righteousness unto eternal life.* The influence of his doctrine and promises has already made immense progress in redeeming the world. And if there be faithfulness in God,—if there be sufficiency in Almighty power and wisdom,—he shall finally put all the enemies of his spiritual kingdom under his feet, and people the mansions of his Father's house with the whole family of mankind, through him redeemed and blessed for evermore!

LECTURE V.

THE NEW CREATION BY JESUS CHRIST.

Colossians i. 16.

FOR BY HIM WERE ALL THINGS CREATED THAT ARE IN HEAVEN, AND THAT ARE IN EARTH, VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE, WHETHER THEY BE THRONES, OR DOMINIONS, OR PRINCIPALITIES, OR POWERS; ALL THINGS WERE CREATED BY HIM AND FOR HIM.

THE creation of the material universe is the peculiar work of Almighty God. It is in the countless and magnificent wonders of the natural creation, that we trace the proofs of God's existence, learn to fear his power, to revere his wisdom, and to glow with adoration of his unspeakable goodness. The order, beauty, utility of the productions of nature, both animate and inanimate, fully justify the ascription of these attributes to their Creator. They proclaim, in language not to be unheeded, "The hand which made us is divine.

When the visible heavens, the earth, the sea,

and all things therein, when the natural world is spoken of in the Scriptures, in reference to its creation, this marvellous exercise of divine energy and skill is ascribed to Jehovah, the God of Israel, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the present stage of the discussion, indeed, it must not be affirmed that this remark is true of every passage, without exception, where the creation of material things is mentioned in the Scriptures: this would plainly be to assume one of the chief points which it is the object of this Lecture to prove. But I cannot suppose that any class of Christians, or any well informed person, will dispute that the *general voice* of Scripture ascribes the creation of all things to the sole, unassisted, immediate power of Jehovah. *Thus saith the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker, I have made the earth, and created man upon it; I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens.\** The prophet Isaiah writes; *Thus saith Jehovah, thy Redeemer, and He that formed thee, I am Jehovah that maketh all things, that stretcheth forth the heavens alone, that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself.†* When the first disciples prayed for spiritual aid and protection against their enemies, we read that *they lifted up their voices to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, who hast*

\* Isaiah xlv. 11, 12.

† Isaiah xlv. 24.

*made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is.\** Of Jesus Christ they speak also in the same prayer; but speak of him as an entirely distinct and inferior being, calling him the *holy servant* of God. It would seem, then, to be clearly the doctrine of sacred writ, that the work of CREATION, properly so called, belongs to THE FATHER ALONE, the only true God; and not, either wholly or in part, directly or instrumentally, to his Son Jesus Christ.

Notwithstanding this plain truth, it is Jesus Christ of whom we read in the words of the text. It is Christ of whom the apostle says expressly, that *by him all things were created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible.* Nor is this the alone place in which Jesus Christ is spoken of as having created all things. Thus it appears, that Jehovah is declared to have created the heavens and the earth *alone, by himself;* and yet that creation is repeatedly ascribed to Jesus, the servant and messenger of Jehovah. How are these apparent inconsistencies to be reconciled? This inquiry involves the subject which I now propose to bring under your consideration.

There are three hypotheses, or interpretations of Scripture, on this subject.

\* Acts iv. 24.

First, it is believed by most Christians that Jesus Christ is Jehovah; that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, are one God; that for this reason, the original creation of the world may be ascribed to either, or to both the Father and Jesus Christ; the three persons of the Godhead having been equally engaged in this mighty display of divine power and wisdom. This is the common Trinitarian interpretation. Now, this interpretation we cannot embrace, since it is directly contrary to that great fundamental doctrine of the Christian scriptures, which we have sought to establish in our first Lecture. To us the Father alone is God—to the exclusion of Jesus Christ as much as of any other person or being in existence. This interpretation is also open to many other formidable objections, which I shall not discuss at present. It is not my object, in these Lectures, to argue against the doctrines of the Trinitarian system, further than is absolutely necessary to a full exposition of Unitarian sentiments.

Secondly, it is believed by others that Jesus Christ, though not truly God, is a Being of super-human and super-angelic nature, who existed before all worlds, and was delegated by God to create the material universe. This interpretation clearly escapes some of the difficulties attending the first, as it allows the Father alone to be God, and Jesus Christ only the agent of almighty

power. But is it not exposed to other difficulties of almost equal magnitude? How can it be truly said, (as it repeatedly is said in the scriptures,) that Jehovah created all things *alone, by himself*, by his simple command, *Let it be!*—if he created nothing by himself, but every thing through the agency and instrumentality of Christ? Here again, however, I must not be tempted to occupy your time in disputing against error, but must proceed to explain and defend the truth.

Thirdly, then, I maintain that with respect to the frame of nature, the material heavens and earth, and all the inhabitants thereof, Jehovah, God even the Father, is the only Creator; that all things were made by his immediate and unassisted power. And I hope to shew, that when any kind of creation is ascribed to Jesus Christ, it is not, in a single instance, intended of the *natural world*. It is always and exclusively meant of that *moral change* in the condition of mankind, both Jews and Gentiles, that *new state* of things in relation to men's religious principles and practices, which the Christian dispensation has effected. The creation by Jesus Christ is *a new and moral creation*; a change in the moral condition of God's rational family; the formation of a new spiritual man within us by the sanctifying influence of divine truth.



Let us honestly inquire, if this view of the subject be not free from all solid objections—be not forced upon our reception by the very language of the passages in question, as well as by a just regard to the general principles of divine revelation.

It is to be well considered, then, in the first place, that beyond all doubt the words *creation* and to *create* are used in the scriptures in a moral sense; to describe spiritual changes in the state of mankind; more particularly, to describe the effects produced by the gospel of Christ. *I CREATE the fruit of the lips; Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near, saith the Lord.\** In this instance from the prophecy of Isaiah, the work described as a *creation* is of precisely the same nature, as that which is wrought upon all sinners, by sincere faith in Christ and obedience to his precepts: it is the restoration of sinful men to God, and to the enjoyment of that peace which flows from his favour. The very same expressions the apostle applies to the state of Jews and Gentiles, when speaking of the new creation by Jesus Christ: *Peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh.†*

Another passage in the writings of the same prophet is equally favourable to our views.

\* Isaiah lvii. 19.

† Ephes. ii. 17.

Speaking, as most Christians believe, of the future age and dispensation of the gospel, Jehovah declares: *Behold I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create.\** Or rather, (as the original is translated by that accomplished master of the language, Bishop Lowth,) *Ye shall rejoice and exult in the age to come, which I create.* Is it possible to doubt, that the language of the apostle was borrowed from, or written in imitation of, the language of the prophet? Here, in the very words of prophecy, we have a scriptural key for the interpretation of all those passages in the New Testament which set forth, that by or through Christ all things have been created anew in heaven and in earth. Can it be thought strange, that the Christian writers should employ such language as descriptive of the moral renovation effected by the gospel, when they knew it had been so employed by that evangelical prophet, whose effusions they had been used to study and revere from childhood?

Accordingly we find, that in the Christian scriptures also this phraseology is employed, in a great many instances, where it is impossible not to understand it in a figurative and spiritual

\* Isaiah lxxv. 17 18.

sense—the very sense indeed for which we contend. Paul addresses the Ephesians in these words: *We are his workmanship, CREATED IN, (or by,) CHRIST JESUS UNTO GOOD WORKS, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.\** Further on in the same epistle, he writes thus: *Be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man, which after God IS CREATED IN RIGHTEOUSNESS AND TRUE HOLINESS.†* In his second epistle to the Corinthians, the same writer has these words: *Therefore if any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a NEW CREATURE; old things are passed away, behold all things are become new.‡* There can be no misunderstanding of these passages. Men are here certainly said to be created in Christ Jesus. But is it their original existence? is it their mortal bodies? is it their natural frame which is spoken of? Assuredly not. They are made *new creatures* by him—created *unto good works, in righteousness and true holiness.*

It is thus clearly established, that both in the Jewish and Christian scriptures, the renewing and purifying effects of the gospel are spoken of as a *creation—a new creation* wrought by Jesus Christ. No candid adversary, therefore, can object to our mode of interpreting the disputed passages, that it is in its general character wholly

\* Ephes. ii. 10.

† 2 Cor. v. 17.

‡ Ephes. iv. 23, 24.

unscriptural. It has at least the advantage of being, on the very face of it, in strict analogy with the idiom of the Scriptures, as well as with the leading principles of revelation. But we claim more than this. Is it not reasonable to suppose, that the creation ascribed to Jesus Christ in one portion of scripture, is the same kind of creation, the same moral and spiritual regeneration, which we know to be ascribed to him in other parts of the sacred writings? Surely it is incumbent on those who assert that it is the same, to prove their assertion by the fullest and most decisive evidence. The whole burden of proof justly lies with them. They are bound to shew, that there is some peculiarity in the disputed passages, which renders it absurd to understand *them* of the new moral creation;—something which compels us to apply them to the creation of the material world. Unless they can accomplish this, the doctrine of Trinitarians must appear like a wanton departure from the known signification of the Scriptures, for the sake of introducing confusion into our highest and most settled conceptions of the distinguishing glory of God.

Now, that there is no such peculiarity in the passages under consideration, will be evident, I trust, from the observations I shall now offer to your serious attention.

We will first examine the words of the text.

For by him all things were created that are in heaven and in earth, visible and invisible; all things were created by him and for him. The language of the apostle appears unequivocal. But the question is,—ought we to understand that he is here speaking of the original creation of natural things? I am at a loss to imagine why we must so understand him. Is there any thing in the context that necessarily leads to such a conclusion? Far from it. We shall find that the apostle is writing throughout the chapter, not of the creation of the world, but of Christian redemption and reformation. In the previous verses, he says, *God hath delivered us from the power of darkness; and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son; in whom we have redemption, through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins; who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature;\**—that is, the head of the new creation, *the firstborn from the dead*, as the apostle explains himself in the verses that follow. We read afterwards, that *He is the head of the body, the church; the beginning; the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; and, (having made peace through the blood of his cross,) by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him*

\* Coloss. i. 13—15.

*I say, whether they be things in earth or things in heaven.\** All this relates to the moral effects of the Christian revelation. And why should it be thought that, in the midst of this, the apostle turns off abruptly to speak of the original creation of the world? Why should we have recourse to such a rambling interpretation, when we know that the same writer has in various places spoken of another creation, a moral creation, which would be altogether suitable to the subject of his present writing? Is it not reasonable to believe, that the sixteenth verse relates to the same subject as the verses before and after it, which is the renewing of men in knowledge and holiness by the gospel of Christ? The context, therefore, so far from being against us, is clearly in favour of our interpretation.

Perhaps it may be thought that the language of the passage itself, the terms and phrases made use of, require that it should be understood of the natural creation. Let us see if this be the case. That the expression, *all things*, must frequently be taken in a very limited sense in the Scriptures,—that it often means, simply, *all things* relating to the Christian revelation,—are facts well known to every diligent reader of the New Testament. *Ye have an unction from the Holy One*, says the

\* Coloss. i. 18—20.

apostle John, *and ye know all things*;\* that is, beyond a doubt, all things connected with the true doctrine of Christ. In the same sense our Saviour promised his disciples, that *when the holy spirit, the comforter, was come, he should teach them all things*.† This phrase, therefore, is always to be qualified by the nature of the subject to which it refers; and consequently it affords no evidence that the passage before us should not be interpreted of the new moral creation.

Some may stumble at the expressions *heaven* and *earth*, as though they must of necessity denote material objects. But here, again, the interpretation we contend for is borne out by the Scriptures. We have seen, in the passage already quoted from the prophecy of Isaiah, that a new creation of heaven and earth may imply no more than a great change in the spiritual condition and privileges of mankind. The truth probably is, (according to Mr. Locke's suggestion,) that these phrases often refer, in the writings of Paul, to the Jewish and Gentile communities. Whether this be admitted or denied, the words of our context will afford the unbiassed inquirer full satisfaction on the point under consideration. *It pleased the Father by him to reconcile all things unto himself,*

\* 1 John ii. 20.

† John xiv. 26.

*whether they be things in earth or things in heaven.*\* To the same effect is the language of the apostle in writing to the Ephesians: *God made known unto us the mystery of his will, that in the dispensation of the fulness of times, he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth.* † What can this mean, if it do not mean, that by the dispensation of the gospel God has determined to bring all mankind, Jews and Gentiles, under the influence of one pure and heavenly religion, and under one spiritual Head, even Christ? What can we understand by *all things in heaven and in earth*, which God had purposed to reconcile to himself by the cross of Christ? Do we understand them to be the hills and trees, the stars and planets, of the natural earth and heavens? No! We readily admit that this language must be used to designate mankind,—since it is mankind alone who are capable of reconciliation with God, and of being gathered together into one spiritual fold. Let us not, then, entirely abandon the use of our reason on these subjects. Let us do justice to the sacred writers. Let us allow that when it is said, *by Christ all things were created that are in heaven and in earth*, this likewise may signify, that through Christ all mankind are

\* Coloss. i. 19, 20.

† Ephes. i. 9, 10.

brought into a new state of moral existence. This conclusion would seem to be unavoidable;—unless, indeed, when the apostle comes to specify these *things in heaven and things in earth*, his words plainly shew that he intended to speak of the natural universe. Does he tell us that he meant the sun and moon, the mountains and the valleys, the sea and all things therein? Far otherwise! He says, *all things, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers*. What are thrones, and dominions, and powers, if they be not different states of the social, the ecclesiastical, the moral and religious world? They are not parts of the material creation. The apostle has thus explained his own meaning by descending to particulars. The sense we put upon his language, so far from being a forced interpretation, or a loose gloss, is borne out, in regard to every important expression, by the common style of the Scriptures, and recommends itself to the unprejudiced mind by its harmony with all the great and unquestionable doctrines of revelation.

I have dwelt at some length, my brethren, on this remarkable passage, because it is undoubtedly the strongest and most explicit portion of holy writ, relating to the subject of our present Lecture. There are a few other passages which require only a brief notice. In another epistle,

the same sacred writer has a passage in all respects so similar to the one we have already examined, that instead of calling for separate consideration, they serve mutually to illustrate one another: *And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God; who created all things by Jesus Christ, to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places, might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God.\** Here also the apostle speaks, not of the stars in the firmament, not of the air and sea, and the creatures that dwell therein, but of *principalities and powers in heavenly places*; alluding, I suppose, to the powers and authorities of the Jewish hierarchy, in the downfall and abolition of which, to make way for the new dispensation, the new state of light and liberty created by the gospel, the wise providence of God was manifested to all men through the prosperity of the church of Christ.

In the first chapter of John's gospel, as is commonly supposed, there are passages in which it is affirmed that *all things were made* by Christ. The application of these passages to Jesus, however, is very doubtful; but even if they are properly so applied, our former observations will

\* Ephes. iii. 9, 10.

shew that they ought to be understood of the new moral creation effected through the gospel. *All things were made by him*, says the Evangelist, *and without him was not any thing made that was made.*\* But it has often been remarked that the word translated *made*, is rarely, if ever, used in the Scriptures to signify the creation of natural things. The passage might even be rendered, *all things came to pass through him*; all things relating to the Christian dispensation were done by Jesus, or under his immediate authority and direction. This is on the supposition that the words refer to Christ; which, however, is not my own opinion.

In the epistle to the Hebrews also, there are one or two passages which require attention. Speaking of Jesus, the writer says, *by whom he (God) made the worlds.*† But can this relate to the natural creation? Did the apostles believe in a plurality of worlds? The truth is, the language of the original Scriptures will not fairly warrant such a meaning. The word rendered *worlds* does not signify the outward and visible frame of nature, but an age, a duration of time, a period or series of events in the dealings of Divine Providence. Whatever may be the exact meaning of the passage, therefore, (on which I

\* John i. 3.

† Hebrews i. 2.

confess myself doubtful,) it certainly relates entirely to the *moral* dispensations of God, and rather confirms than weakens the evidence of our general doctrine.

In the same chapter we meet with a sublime quotation from the Psalms, which is commonly thought to be here applied to Christ. *Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of thine hands.*\* This is one of those passages which will ever be understood differently, (and with equal consistency by all parties,) according to men's views of the true doctrine of the Scriptures concerning the nature and dignity of Christ. Were I a Trinitarian, I should probably understand it as addressed to the Son. But being fully persuaded that the passage will justly admit of a different construction,—and being also persuaded from a thousand considerations, that the sacred writers would have turned away with astonishment and fear from the very thought of addressing such language to Jesus,—I have no hesitation in believing that it is addressed to the Father, the only true God.

From the views we have been able to take of this interesting subject, we may safely pronounce that the only kind of creation in which the

\* Hebrews i. 10.

agency of Jesus Christ was concerned, was that moral creation of mankind to newness of life, which he wrought by declaring the will and working the purposes of God in the revelation of the gospel. In fact, this is but one of those figurative modes of representing the great design and influence of Christianity, of which we have considered several in the preceding Lectures. Sincere believers are created by Jesus Christ unto a life of good works; as by him they are also reconciled unto God, and redeemed from sin and death. That this is the sense of the Scriptures in some places where the creating agency of Christ is mentioned, can never be disputed. That the same is not seen to be the sense in all other places, must arise, I apprehend, solely from this circumstance:—in the plainer passages the apostle speaks of the renovating effects of the gospel on the character and conduct of individuals; in the obscurer passages he treats of the revolution which it brought about in the institutions, customs, authorities, and general condition of the whole religious world. In this latter view of the subject, he makes use of phraseology which, though perfectly natural to a Jewish writer, is not so familiar to a modern reader. From this circumstance, and owing to a prevailing conviction that Christ is God, the language in question has been greatly misunderstood. Yet some learn-

ed and excellent men of the orthodox persuasion have seen the error; and have honestly sought to expose it.

A little reflection may teach us, that the reforming and reviving effects of the gospel of Christ were sufficiently great and various, to be worthily styled a new creation. It is hardly possible, indeed, for us in the present age, who have been nurtured from childhood in the holy principles of Christianity; whose minds have always been more or less accustomed to the influence of its truths; to judge of the mighty changes this religion produced at its first publication, on the minds and hearts of Heathen and Jewish people. The gospel makes known a number of solemn, comprehensive, luminous truths, which, suddenly revealed to the minds of idolatrous men, confirmed by signs and wonders wrought before their eyes, possessed a divine power and efficacy which its present careless professors can but faintly conceive. It is necessary, however, only to recur to the pages of the New Testament, to be convinced that when the gospel first beamed its heavenly brightness on a beclouded world, the changes it wrought in the moral condition of mankind were vast and wonderful. Wherever its truths were received, the face of things quickly wore a new, a brighter, a lovelier aspect. The religious world underwent

transformation. The Jewish hierarchy declined and perished. The heathen gods were driven from the empire they had held for ages over the enslaved hearts of their ignorant votaries. Their temples were deserted, and their impious worship gradually exchanged for the love and service of the true God. A complete moral regeneration was effected. The poor and despised of this world arose from the spiritual degradation under which they had lain for ages, and displayed the energies of rational and virtuous beings. The rich and great—though it was hard for them to enter into the kingdom of heaven—freed themselves, in not a few instances, from the enslaving avarice and luxury of their station, and started into a new existence of pious and benevolent zeal. Idolaters and sinners shook off the chains of vice and superstition which had held their souls in bondage from infancy. Age forgot its feebleness and inveterate habits. Youth forsook the enticing pursuits of pleasure, to lead a godly and sober life. A peculiar people, zealous of good works, every where gave testimony to the holy and gracious operation of the new religion. They were endowed, not with the spirit of fear, but with the spirit of adopted children of God, a spirit of power and of love;—power to overcome all temptations, power to endure all things for righteousness' sake, power to set at nought the

malice of persecutors, and to persevere unto the end in the ways of uprightness, faithfulness and charity. Where the gospel shed its benign influence, truth and righteousness, hope and joy, were seen to flourish with unwonted vigour. Where its pure light and reviving energy penetrated the souls of men, a new creation was seen to burst into being. And the fruits which adorned this new creation were not material and perishable, but the spiritual and immortal fruits of love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance.

Let us dwell for a moment in grateful meditation on these truths. Before this goodly frame of things was created by divine power, all was deformity and confusion. *The earth was without form and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep.* But God said, *Let there be light, and there was light.* The spirit of creating love breathed upon the face of the waters;—and out of blind chaos arose this scene of wonders, which it so much delights the eye and gladdens the heart of man to witness. The firmament of heaven was adorned with brilliant worlds, shining far and near, and travelling to tell their Maker's praise throughout the infinity of space. The earth awoke from her eternal bed of darkness, spreading her rich bosom, adorned with every goodly thing, beneath the eye of heaven, and in-



viting man and beast to enjoy the bounties of their benevolent Creator. The face of all nature smiled with the brightness of new created beauty, harmony, and abundance. God beheld the work of his hands, and saw and pronounced that it was good!—a declaration which has never, since the infancy of the world, failed to find an echo in the hearts of all his reflecting, all his pious and grateful children. Such was the work of original creation. In this work, Jehovah, the one true God, had neither partner, counsellor, or agent. By himself he stretched out the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth. *He spake, and it was done! He commanded, and it stood fast!*

Through the powerful working of the gospel, according to the figurative language of the Scriptures, the world has now been created anew in Christ Jesus. Before the revelation of Christianity, all things in the moral world were mingled in a chaos of ignorance, delusion, and superstition. *Darkness covered the earth, and gross darkness the people.* The minds of all men were overwhelmed with idolatrous error. Every heart slept in the coldness of vice and impiety. The noblest and fairest parts of God's creation, the souls of his rational offspring, were polluted with the abominations of sin. It pleased the all-merciful Father, when the fulness of times was come, to deliver his creatures from this bondage of cor-

ruption, into the glorious liberty of his children. The Sun of Righteousness arose to dispel these clouds from the moral hemisphere. Error, superstition, unbelief, were succeeded by the light of divine truth, and by the hope and joy of believing in the divine promises. But not in this, as in our original creation, did God perform all things by the mere word of his power. He raised up our Saviour Jesus Christ to be the honoured minister and instrument of his purposes. Jesus was himself made, in this new creation, *the first-born of every creature.* He was deputed to create all men anew in purity and goodness, after the pattern of his own heavenly image. He is the Head of his spiritual church; the beginning; the first-born from the dead; that in all things he might have the pre-eminence.

Finally, my brethren, let us resolve to apply this doctrine of a new creation to the state of our own hearts, to the conduct of our own lives. Have we so sincerely embraced the gospel,—do we so faithfully abide in Christ,—that we are redeemed from the sins of the flesh, and renewed in spirit even unto a life of righteousness and true holiness? It was for the purpose of effecting this divine and blessed change in us, that the Christian faith was revealed. If the fruits of the new creation do not abound in our hearts, it must be because our hearts are hard, and sterile, and

incapable of receiving the good seed which has been sown by the Son of Man. But may God grant that we may all be fruitful in good works, and that the principles of our holy religion may perfect and prepare us for his everlasting presence!

## LECTURE VI.

THE PERFECT HUMANITY OF CHRIST, AND THE  
CONFORMITY OF ALL TRUE CHRISTIANS TO  
HIS IMAGE.

Romans viii. 29.

FOR WHOM HE DID FOREKNOW, HE ALSO DID PREDESTI-  
NATE TO BE CONFORMED TO THE IMAGE OF HIS SON,  
THAT HE MIGHT BE THE FIRSTBORN AMONG MANY  
BRETHREN.

It is not only one of the most certain, but also one of the worst effects, arising from the prevalence of religious error, that it tends to keep the true principles of religion partially or entirely out of view. The direct and proper influence of error itself, indeed, must usually be of an evil nature. But this is often prevented, in a great measure, by its speculative absurdity, its unpractical character, its felt opposition to the moral sentiments and rational convictions of the human mind. Owing to these qualities, many doctrines which make a great figure in creeds and systems,

are happily almost a dead letter in every other respect. The attention of the simple-minded is seldom drawn towards them: they are utterly beyond their comprehension, and have no correspondence with their unsophisticated views and feelings. The more enlightened and reflecting of those who nominally embrace such doctrines, habitually shun the thought of them, and turn for consolation to other principles which they feel to be of far greater value. Some few zealots may follow out the errors of their faith to their full practical consequences,—making their religious character and conduct not less blameable than their creed is erroneous. But in the present times, we may hope, such instances are daily becoming less frequent. It is therefore probable, that one of the greatest evils now resulting from the remnants of error which past ages have left us, consists in the indifference and inattention which they produce towards the plain truths of scripture;—in their tendency to keep out of view the vast importance, the extensive application, the heavenly beauty, the full moral efficacy, the many glorious consequences, which undoubtedly do belong to the *genuine principles* of Christianity.

I am convinced that such is at present the state of mind of a large portion of the Christian world, on the subject of this Lecture;—the pro-

per, simple, perfect humanity of Jesus Christ, and the consequent value of his example as a pattern of all human excellence, a pledge of the glorious and happy destiny of the human race. That our blessed Saviour was in nature simply a man, is not merely a conclusion that follows from the want of all solid evidence for the doctrine of his essential deity: it is a positive truth of the utmost practical moment, the foundation of some of our dearest hopes in the gospel, repeatedly appealed to by the sacred writers as a most efficacious principle of obedience and of consolation. The reception of this doctrine will not only clear the great truth of the Divine Unity from all shadow of doubt or difficulty: it will also help greatly to unveil the mysteries of human life; it will cast a new light on the trials and duties of the present state, and tend to illumine our prospects of the future.

In the words which have been read, I understand the apostle Paul affirms it to be the appointed privilege of all true followers of Christ, that agreeably to the Divine will concerning them, they should be conformed to the image of their holy and glorified Master. So that he, in his present exalted condition of being, is not to be a solitary individual, but the first-born of many brethren, the head of a numerous family of the rational children of God, assimilated to his like-

ness in purity, immortality and bliss. Such is the high expectation held out to us in the Christian Scriptures. It is taught by our Saviour himself, urged under various forms of expression by all his apostles, and well entitled to be regarded as one of the most important principles of the gospel. In all which goes to constitute the moral perfection and supreme good of human nature, our Lord Jesus Christ is proposed in the sacred writings as the great pattern for imitation: it is the good pleasure of God, that what he was and is, all his faithful followers should finally become. Craving your best attention, then, I proceed to explain my own views on this highly interesting subject.

First: the followers of Christ are to resemble him in *character*. They are to be conformed to his image in those qualities of purity, sanctity, and love, which render him worthy to be styled the best-beloved Son of God, and the brightest example for human imitation. *Such a High Priest became us*, says the apostle in writing to the Hebrews, *who is holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.\** It is not often, indeed, that we meet in the Scriptures with such direct statements of our Lord's blamelessness and perfection. The apostles and evangelists were usu-

\* Hebrews viii. 26.

ally otherwise and better employed, than in vain attempts to eulogize the undoubted excellence of our Saviour's character. But whoever has studied their writings with attention, must have discovered abundant proof that they themselves regarded Jesus, and taught mankind to regard him, as an example of unspotted righteousness;—a complete display of that obedience which all intelligent and moral creatures owe to their Divine Ruler. In him the Father was always well pleased. He fulfilled the whole law of God. For this purpose, among others, he was chosen, sanctified, and sent into the world. He came that he might not only bear witness to the truth by his teaching and miraculous works, but also exhibit to men the pure beauty of holiness in his own life and character; and thus leave them an example, that by following in his steps they may attain the highest moral culture of that human nature which they share in common with him.

This appears to me, not a mere incidental advantage arising from our acquaintance with the character of Christ; but a part of the very design of the gospel, a leading and essential feature in the divine scheme for the regeneration of men. That this is not the light in which the character of our Saviour is usually contemplated, I am well aware. The purity and righteousness so conspi-

scious in his life, seem rather to be looked upon, by the generality of Christians, as beams of divine perfection shining faintly through the human form, in which the deity of his nature was clothed for a time. But surely this is not the view which the sacred writers entertained of the virtues of their great Master. The feeling created in our minds by the perusal of their artless narratives,—the feeling inspired by every scene and event of our Lord's history,—is one of intense admiration for what appears to be the finished excellence of *human piety and goodness*. We there behold him evidently *a man in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin*.

It cannot be denied that our Lord, on several occasions, declared himself to his disciples in this character; as an example the likeness of which they were to cultivate with all diligence. Indeed, some of his actions were designedly performed to this end: they appear to have little other merit, in his circumstances, than that which they derive from their influence in the way of example on his followers. It became him to fulfil all righteousness, that he might be a pattern of all righteousness to mankind. After he had condescended to wash his disciples' feet, he said, *If I, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you ought also to wash one another's feet; for I have*

*given you an example that ye should do as I have done to you.\** On another occasion, he said, *A new commandment give I unto you, that ye should love one another as I have loved you.†* In these instances, he clearly proposes his own humility, meekness, and benevolence, for the imitation of men. And if in these particulars he was an express image of the moral rectitude of human nature, surely he was not less so in regard to his sublime patience under injuries; his dispositions of pure and fervent devotion; his calm and cheerful resignation to the Divine will; and all the gracious, lofty qualities of his perfect character. Yes! he was raised up by the wisdom of God, and sanctified through the influence of His Spirit, to be the great Master of holy living and holy dying,—teaching men by his own faultless practice of every human duty, by his own splendid manifestation of every virtuous and pious disposition, how they must walk to attain the favour of their heavenly Father. He is the Captain of our salvation, who not only *commands*, but *leads on* his followers,—shewing us, by many victorious deeds of piety and virtue, how the glory of the divine approbation is to be won, and conducting us to the noblest triumphs over sin and the world. In this respect, as well as in regard to

\* John xiii. 14, 15.

† John xiii. 34.

his doctrine, he is to be looked upon as the true Light, enlightening every man that cometh into the world,—a Sun of Righteousness, ordained of God to shine with perpetual and unlimited brightness, illumining the path of every accountable creature who is travelling on, through suffering and temptation, to his eternal home in the mansions of heaven!

It is the will of God respecting all men,—it is the very business of our Christian vocation,—that we should be daily growing in similitude to this illustrious pattern of the divine life. The great work of Christians on earth, is an uninterrupted process of assimilation to their Master in heaven. In order that we may be fitted to dwell with him where he now is, and to behold his face in glory, we are required to be changed into his likeness, in all purity and worth; especially, as he has himself taught us, in the great perfection of LOVE. When, by seriously cherishing the holy principles he delivered, and still more, by studying his righteous conduct, we have transferred the image of our Saviour's goodness into our own characters, we are then his truest disciples: the purpose of God concerning us is then accomplished. In no other way is the Christian religion adapted to train mankind to moral greatness. No precepts, however numerous and exact, could answer this end. In fact,

there is no appearance, in the writings and discourses of the Christian teachers, of any attempt to deliver a complete system of moral precepts. Certain great, divine, comprehensive principles of a religious life, are given in the gospel; and those principles are gloriously illustrated in the character of Christ. The true way, therefore, to grow up to *the stature of a perfect man in Christ Jesus*, is not so much by looking to the letter of the law, the preceptory instructions of Scripture, as by enriching the heart with the heavenly principles of faith and love, and by a close attention to the living commentary with which they are accompanied in the actions of our blessed Lord. We shall there find, that whatever he has taught us to do in words of authority, he has taught us again, with far more grace and emphasis, in his own deeds of righteousness and self-denying piety.

Now, with these views of the character of Jesus Christ, and of the purposes it was intended to serve, the doctrine of his simple humanity appears to be essentially connected. It is plain, that to be thus held up as an example of all human obedience to his followers, he must himself have been truly and properly a man. He must have been naturally subject to all the frailties, infirmities, and temptations of human nature. His pious and virtuous character must

have been formed by the influence of moral and religious considerations, acting on his mind in the same manner as on the minds of other men, only with greater purity, and in a far more powerful degree. This is absolutely necessary to render his example of humility, patience, meekness, resignation, of any particular efficacy to us as human beings. And I scarcely need remind you, that this is the manifest and reiterated doctrine of the holy scriptures. *For in that he himself hath suffered, says the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.\** The same writer exultingly exclaims: *Seeing, then, that we have a great High Priest that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession; for we have not a High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.†* Beautiful and animating thought! But what becomes of its beauty, or even of its truth, when applied to a Being whose human susceptibilities must have been every moment swallowed up in the secret consciousness of Deity? Could such a person have been really tempted in all points like as we are? Could he have been really an example to us of all human

\* Hebrews ii. 19.

† Hebrews iv. 14, 15.

*obedience?* Christianity is little indebted to those who would load it with such a doctrine. Granted, that we are exhorted to imitate the moral character of God himself;—that is, God being perfectly holy, just, and benevolent, we are to imitate him, inasmuch as we are continually seeking after higher degrees of holiness, justice, and benevolence. Nothing more than this can be meant, or is possible. God cannot be an example to men of every particular exercise of virtue. We cannot be called upon to imitate the fortitude, the humility, the meekness, the pious resignation of God. These are qualities which none but a creature can possess; and which none but a human being can exemplify for the imitation of human beings. Such a person was Jesus Christ, a *man* in whom the malicious scrutiny of his bitterest enemies could find no fault.

There is also an important distinction, which seems to be frequently overlooked, between the intrinsic excellence and the actual efficacy of an example. Its excellence must depend entirely on the nature of the qualities of which it consists: its efficacy will depend greatly on other circumstances; especially on the relative situation of him who affords it towards those who are to follow it. Not the bare approval of the judgment only is necessary. Admiration and sympathy must be warmly excited; the feelings

must be interested; a reasonable hope of success must be grounded on a sense of natural equality between the parties. We must all be aware, how readily men seize on the smallest difference of circumstances, to excuse themselves from imitating the good actions of others; and the principle on which their excuses are built, though too often abused, is unquestionably just. Any vast and essential difference of circumstances must be allowed to diminish the suitableness and efficacy of the example. It must be something more to the purpose than I have ever yet heard, therefore, which can avail to rob me of the persuasion, that we believers in the simple humanity of Christ enjoy a great advantage, in this respect, over Christians of the Trinitarian faith. It appears to me clearly, that in whatever degree we weaken or qualify our conception of his humanity, in that degree we destroy the zest, the pathos, the reality, the fitness and influence of his holy example.

Secondly: it is the will of God, that they who are conformed to the image of Christ in moral excellence of character, should also be made to resemble him in the enjoyment of *immortality*. This is the clear, repeated assurance of the sacred Scriptures. We are told by the Apostle Paul, that when our Lord Jesus Christ shall come the second time, in his glory, to raise the

dead and judge the world, he shall *change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself*.\* If this should not be looked upon as a positive revelation on the subject, it shews at least the confident expectation of this inspired writer. The Apostle understood, that our Saviour has received from God power and authority to bring all his faithful disciples into participation of the same immortal, glorified state of being, which he himself already enjoys. Our manner of existence is to be similar to his. Our present frail and mortal constitution of body is to be exchanged for one that shall resemble his, who, *being raised from the dead, dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him*.†

Equally decisive are those remarkable words of the Apostle John: *Beloved, now are we the sons of God, (heirs of the resurrection,) and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; (we cannot at present fully understand the nature of our final and eternal state of existence.) But we know that when he, (our Lord Jesus Christ,) shall appear, we shall be like him*.‡ It is worthy of observation, how justly and beautifully this apostle connects resemblance in immortality with re-

\* Philipp. iii. 21.

† Rom. vi. 9.

‡ 1 John iii. 2.



semblance in character, between Christ and his disciples. *And every one,* he remarks, *who hath this hope in him, purifieth himself even as he is pure.\** There is no reasonable ground of expectation that we shall hereafter be conformed to the image of Christ in immortality of being,—except that which is founded on our previous conformity to his moral image, in purity and righteousness of life. But on this foundation our hope is built, both sure and steadfast.

The illustrious apostle of the Gentiles alludes to the same subject, in that invaluable portion of his writings, the fifteenth chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians. Speaking, as I conceive, of Adam and our Lord Jesus Christ, as the two great Heads or Representatives of the whole human race,—the first introducing sin and death, the second bringing life and immortality to light,—he says: *As we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.*† I am not ignorant of the fact, that these words are by some understood in a different sense. But this appears to me, (as well as to others more competent to judge,) to be clearly the apostle's meaning, and necessary to the support of his argument. It is surely to our Saviour Jesus Christ that he refers, under the title of the

\* John iii. 3.

† 1 Cor. xv. 49.

*second Adam*; who has been made a quickening spirit, and whose heavenly and immortal image we are destined to bear, as we already inherit the frail and mortal constitution of our first progenitor. This mortal must put on immortality; this corruption must be exchanged for incorruption; even after the similitude of him who has created us anew to this lively and blessed hope. That natural body which is sown in the grave, in weakness and dishonour, shall appear at the harvest of the resurrection a spiritual body, in power and glory. The full import of these glowing expressions,—which cannot be heard or read without the most intense emotions of delight,—will never be understood by us, till they are explained by our experience of the glorious change to which they relate. We know not, we are not able to conceive at present, what we shall be, when we shall have been called to exchange this perishable frame-work of flesh and blood for the bodies of saints in light. But how much is contained in the promise of scripture! *When he shall appear, we shall be like him!* When our present frail covering of clay is dissolved, we shall be clothed in the same garments of celestial light and glory with which our Saviour is for ever adorned. Because he liveth, we shall live also. We shall bear his image!

Viewed in this light, the resurrection and im-

mortality of Christ afford something more than a proof of his divine mission. They furnish an argument of the most convincing kind, that God will in like manner raise all men from the dead, and bestow eternal life on the righteous. They are the true pledge and pattern of our own resurrection; shewing that it is both possible to the power, and agreeable to the will of God, to exalt his obedient sons to the enjoyment of a durable and glorified condition of being. Our Saviour has shewn by his own example,—rather, God has mercifully shewn us through his resurrection and ascension,—that eternity and spirituality of existence may be given to the essential elements of human nature, and without the destruction of personal identity: a truth we might otherwise have doubted, when we behold the spectacle that man presents at his departure out of this life. We learn from the instance of Christ, who is *the firstborn from the dead of many brethren*, that immutable stability of being, and the perfection of heavenly grace, may be communicated to this same nature which, during our pilgrimage through the vale of mortality, is capable of gaining only such scanty portions of wisdom and goodness. Weak and sinful creatures as we are in our present state, the example of our elder brother proves, that when strengthened by the influence of divine truth and grace,

we may grow up from day to day in spiritual improvement, and finally be conformed to his image in the enjoyment of a glorious immortality.

I must again observe, however, that the force of these considerations entirely depends on the fact, that the *nature* of our Saviour was properly and simply *human*. The resurrection of a being of another, and especially of a superior nature, could be no pattern of the resurrection of men. In moments of fear and despondency, the fainting heart cries out for an *instance*, an *illustration* of the possible resurrection of a man from death to immortality. To the believer in the strict humanity of Christ, and to him alone, is this cry of nature answered. *If Christ be preached, that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?\** This argument is unanswerable in the mouth of a Unitarian, such as I believe the apostle was; but very imperfect, if the human nature of Jesus was essentially united with a divine person who could not die.

Thirdly: it scarcely requires separate notice, though it may be profitable and cheering to notice it, that the true followers of Christ shall also be made to resemble him in the attainment of *perfect happiness*. Immortality itself were no

\* 1 Cor. xv. 12.

blessing, without the means and sources of pure enjoyment. But the word of revelation is express, that a kindred portion of that bliss which our great Redeemer now enjoys, awaits all his faithful and obedient disciples. Having purified ourselves as he was pure, being sanctified through the power of his teaching and example, as he sanctified himself for our sakes, and being exalted to the same inheritance of incorruptible life; we shall partake with him in those pleasures of divine and human love, those high delights of the soul, which have already become his reward for obedience unto death, even the death of the cross. When we have been transformed, by diligent imitation of Christ, into a truly Christian disposition and character, we shall be fully prepared for those sublime occupations in which he rejoices for evermore. Like him, we shall cast off the pains and infirmities of our nature for ever, and dwell together in a state where shall be no more sorrow, or crying, or pain. Like him, we shall delight in intimate and blessed communion with God, in admiring his wisdom, adoring his goodness, and celebrating with heart and soul the great designs of his mercy. Like him, we shall then be inspired with love to the universal race of man, and we shall derive our sweetest enjoyments from everlasting union with the wise and good. What a happy society will that be,

when all the saints who have honoured and obeyed their Saviour on earth,—all who have shewn their love to him by keeping his commandments,—shall be gathered together at his gracious welcome, and assembled round the throne of God, to enjoy the harmony, the peace and happiness of an eternal brotherhood!

These views enable us to perceive the true glory of Christ. How many various and contrary characters have the errors and prejudices of men assigned to him! Some there are, who would fain persuade us that he was an amiable enthusiast; one who had nurtured and wrought up his own mind into a kind of imperfect conviction, that what he uttered was true and divine. Others would represent him as a wise and ingenious impostor; one who took advantage of the credulity of mankind to introduce among them a new and better system of religion, and at the same time to fill the world with his own fame. Others again,—the majority of professing Christians,—exalt him to the rank of Deity, and worship him as the living and true God, the Creator of the universe. We believe that all these are delusions. The character in which Jesus desires to be received of all men, is that of the true Christ; the best-beloved Son of God; the most highly favoured, because the most holy, amongst the rational children of heaven; the Head of the great human

family, exalted before all others to the possession of immortal life; the appointed Saviour of the whole race of Adam; the first-fruits of that harvest of righteousness and joy, which the Father of spirits shall gather in, when he shall have brought to the mansions of heaven the wise and pious of all generations, a multitude of happy people whom no man can number, of every kindred and tongue and nation upon earth! Then will Christ appear in his glory, the glory designed for him, in the determinate foreknowledge of God, from the foundations of the world. And happy would now be the consequences, if Christians had learned to abandon their many errors respecting the dignity and office of Christ, and to look up to him with unclouded faith in this, his true, scriptural character,—his real relation towards us,—as *the perfection of humanity, a SANCTIFIED AND GLORIFIED MAN, chosen of God for accomplishing the highest purposes of His will, and raised up for the imitation and encouragement of all his brethren.*

## LECTURE VII.

## THE PERPETUAL INTERCESSION OF CHRIST IN HEAVEN.

Hebrews vii. 24, 25 :

BUT THIS MAN, BECAUSE HE CONTINUETH EVER, HATH AN UNCHANGEABLE PRIESTHOOD. WHEREFORE HE IS ABLE ALSO TO SAVE THEM TO THE UTMOST THAT COME UNTO GOD BY HIM, SEEING HE EVER LIVETH TO MAKE INTERCESSION FOR THEM.

HITHERTO in these Lectures our attention has been engaged, my brethren, on the work which Christ has already and manifestly accomplished, by his appearance on earth. We have considered the actual, known blessings of his ministry; the effects of his teaching, miracles, character, death and resurrection, on the moral and spiritual condition, and immortal hopes, of his followers. These must be, (however variously understood,) in some sense the subjects of belief to all who admit the truth of the New Testament *history*. If what the evangelists and apostles

have *related*, concerning the words and actions of their Master, be not a cunningly devised fable, we know that he has wrought those benefits for mankind which have been explained in the preceding discourses. But there may be other interesting particulars respecting his divine office, our knowledge of which, if any such knowledge is to be attained, must rest on a somewhat different foundation. It must depend on our confidence in the inspired acquaintance of his apostles with what he is now doing in heaven—with the secrets of that celestial and invisible state to which he has been exalted. We must believe, that the holy spirit promised by our Lord to his disciples, not only led them into an accurate remembrance and comprehension of *all things whatsoever he had said unto them*, but that it likewise enabled them to know, (imperfectly at least,) the manner in which he is still employed for the benefit of his church and the world. We have an instance of this kind in the words of my text.

Now, it is not perhaps essential to the authority and honour of our religion, to maintain that these two branches of Christian faith stand upon precisely an equal footing. It is probable that few rational believers, in the present day, will be disposed to contend for such a principle. At all events, without meaning to discuss the subject

here, without meaning to express any positive opinion upon it, I should wish it to be understood that I clearly perceive and acknowledge the distinction. I can well understand, how a man may embrace with firm conviction all that the apostles have delivered respecting the actual sayings and doings of Jesus, together with their authoritative interpretation of his doctrine; and yet may hesitate to give an equal assent to all the thoughts and sentiments which fell from them concerning our Lord's present condition, or occupations, in the world of spirits. Yet, who can avoid having his meditations sometimes directed to this latter subject? Whither is Christ removed? What is the nature of the personal connexion, if there be any, now subsisting between him and his faithful disciples? In what way does he still interest and employ himself for their welfare? What is the meaning and the value of those passages of scripture, which seem to have relation to this subject? These are thoughts that will occur to the minds of contemplative Christians. Why should they not be indulged? Whatever takes a deep hold of the affections, as the gospel was assuredly intended to do, must often carry the hopes and desires of men beyond the narrow limits of earthly experience. Visions of what is now passing in the unseen regions where Jesus resides, as well as

bright anticipations of what is to be enjoyed there hereafter, will occasionally come over the soul of every Christian who is not weak in faith, or dull in intellect, or cold in heart. Nor is there any good reason, why these soarings of thought and feeling, tending heavenwards, should not be cherished. The only necessary precaution is, that they shall be as much as possible according to knowledge and conducive to holiness. They must not be allowed to supersede the influence of the plainer principles of piety and obedience. The utmost care should be taken that they are grounded on and conformable to Christian doctrine. Let them spring out of the root of revealed truth, not out of some idle, enthusiastic fancy; and they may be suffered, without any danger of evil consequences, to spread themselves forth as freely, and be carried to as lofty a height, as the peculiar cast of every man's mind may render natural, useful, and agreeable to him. The imagination is not to be despised as an ally of faith: it is fully entitled to have its appropriate exercise and gratification on the high and moving topics of our heavenly religion. At the same time, truth, sober and divine truth, should govern our feelings, as well as guide our understandings.

I have already declared my conviction, that the mediation of Christ in the salvation of souls,

and the moral regeneration of the world, is yet continued and shall be continued throughout all probationary ages. I still abide, indeed, by the sentiment expressed in a former Lecture,—that any attempt *fully to explain* the precise manner and degree of our Saviour's present ministration in the moral and spiritual concerns of mankind, would be seeking to be wise above what is written, and might be justly open to the charge of presumption. But if any thing of this kind, however little, be written in the Scriptures, we are surely at liberty to avail ourselves of its benefits. With this view, I am desirous of engaging your minds in a calm investigation of the subject apparently spoken of in the text—the perpetual intercession of Christ in heaven.

I shall, in the first place, state and defend that which seems to me to be the true meaning of this and several other passages of Scripture of similar import. I shall then endeavour to vindicate the reasonableness of what I understand to be the doctrine of the sacred writers on this subject; and to shew the nature of the benefits which are likely to result from it wherever it is cordially received.

*But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make inter-*

*cession for them.* The expression employed here, which must be allowed to have the most direct reference to the subject, occurs only in this passage, and in the eighth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans,—where, however, it is repeated three times. If we allow, therefore, as I think is commonly believed by learned men, that the Epistle to the Hebrews, as well as that to the Romans, was written by Paul, the expression is confined to one inspired author. But most Christians will deem this sufficient to support the doctrine of Christ's perpetual intercession; especially if it can be shewn that the doctrine is countenanced by other sacred writers, though under different forms of expression, and that it is in harmony with some of the strongest dictates of reason.

What is *intercession*? What are we to understand when it is said that Christ continues *to make intercession* for men? I know it has been contended, that the word employed by the apostle may signify nothing more than a general interference of any kind between two parties, with a view to procure justice or favour from one towards the other. It is said that the phrase does not at all define the mode in which the person who makes intercession, acts for the benefit of another; whether it be by word or action, by immediate interposition, or in some distant and

indirect manner. For instance, a learned commentator who maintains this opinion, would render the words of the text thus: *He is always alive to manage their concerns for them.* I would not positively deny that the expression may have this general, indefinite meaning; for some of the authorities which assert it are highly respectable. But I cannot discover that they have been able to produce a single instance of such a wide, loose application of the word. My doubts are confirmed, by observing that they do produce, in support of their opinion, some instances in which the mode of expression is materially different. After all, however, we are bound to consider, not what the word in question may or might possibly mean; but in what sense it appears to be actually used in the New Testament, in the writings of this particular author. That is a false and worthless kind of criticism on scripture, which takes advantage of all the *admissible* uses of a word, in order to fix on any one which happens to agree with a favourite hypothesis. We must look to the general style and sentiments of the author, or to the particular scope of the passage, as the only fair grounds on which to interpret his language.

I cannot but think that, in the New Testament, in the writings of Paul, the meaning of the phrase under discussion is always, to make inter-

cession by pleading and supplication. This is probable from the simple consideration, that there is an exactly corresponding phrase, (consisting of the same verb with a different preposition,) which must be admitted on all hands to signify accusation, pleading or entreaty against a person. In his Epistle to the Romans, the apostle has written,—*Wot ye not what the Scripture saith of Elias? how he maketh intercession to God against Israel, saying, Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life.*\* Here the word rendered *maketh intercession*, is the same as in my text; only with another preposition, signifying *against*, instead of *for*. But here it very plainly means to intercede by prayer, or address to God. Ought it not, therefore, to be so understood in every other instance, in the same writer, unless there be some clear proof to the contrary? These are evidently corresponding phrases: as the one means to plead or supplicate against a person, the other must surely mean to plead or supplicate in favour, in behalf, of a person.

Again; let us look to the instances in which this expression is used by the apostle in reference to the Spirit. *Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should*

\* Romans xi. 2, 3.

*pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.\** Whatever should be understood by *the Spirit*, in this passage, is it not very evident, that the intercession alluded to consists in supplication, in earnest pleading with God? *We know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us.* Does not this mean, that when we, through ignorance and blindness, know not what particular blessings to ask, the Spirit, by its holy yearnings, by its silent, inexpressible aspirations, supplicates God to be merciful, and to deal with us according to his own Fatherly goodness? This, therefore, is intercession.

Again; if we consider the only passage of the New Testament in which the noun occurs which corresponds to this verb, it will strongly confirm this interpretation of its meaning. In his first Epistle to Timothy, the apostle says, *I exhort that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men.*† Here, *intercession* is joined with *prayer* and *giving of thanks*. There cannot be the slightest doubt that

\* Rom viii. 26, 27.

† 1 Tim. ii. 1.



it signifies intercessory address to God in behalf of all mankind.

Turning our attention, then, to those places in which intercession is ascribed, in the very same language, to Christ in his present heavenly condition,—do we find any grounds for understanding the expression in a different sense? I think, none at all. The writer of the Epistle to the Romans simply says, *It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.*\* The writer to the Hebrews simply says, *Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.*† In neither place is there any thing to limit, or extend, or in any way to qualify, what appears to be the usual and proper meaning of *intercession*. Why, then, should we seek to depart from this meaning?

Is not the doctrine which appears to be so plainly taught by the Apostle Paul, countenanced also by other inspired authorities? The Apostle John has a well known passage to this effect, in his first General Epistle: *My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.*‡ If Jesus Christ be

\* Rom. viii. 34.

† Heb. vii. 25.

‡ 1 John ii. 1.

now our advocate with the Father, he must surely plead or intercede for us in the Divine presence. This would seem to be the most proper employment of one who sustains such an office.

Does not our Lord himself give some countenance to this sentiment of his apostles, by telling them expressly that, after his ascension, he would intercede with God in their behalf for a particular blessing,—the influence of the Holy Spirit? *If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another comforter, that he may abide with you for ever, even the spirit of truth.*\* If in this instance he promised to be their intercessor, after he had attained to his immortal, glorified state, is it not probable that he would also intercede for them in respect to other blessings? and not for the apostles only, but, as he did on earth, for all them likewise who should believe on him through their word? One might not be disposed to lay any great stress on these inferential arguments, if they stood alone. But in support, in confirmation, of such clear and direct assertions as those in our text, they may be thought to have considerable weight.

I am aware it may be said that, after all, this cannot be justly regarded as a doctrine of the gospel: it is not an article of the Christian faith

\* John xiv. 15—17.

it is only a casual thought, or at the most a favourite sentiment, of some of the sacred writers, which appeared natural to them, but which it was no part of their divine mission to teach. Although hesitating myself to agree to this view of the subject, I will not venture to condemn it as certainly false, or absolutely unreasonable. But I would ask, if we can possibly do better than adopt the sentiments of the apostles,—unless it can be shewn that these sentiments are liable to some decisive objections? If they do not appear to us to be certainly opposed to truth and reason, can we act a wiser part, than to cherish those convictions, respecting our Lord's perpetual relation to his church, which evidently served to delight the hearts of his first and best disciples, the venerable apostles?

Let us proceed, then, to consider if there be any solid objection to the views we are anxious to support on this subject.

Will it be contended, that this doctrine implies the existence of any implacability, any unwillingness to be gracious, in the character of our heavenly Father? Can it be said, that to suppose Christ to be for ever supplicating the divine favour towards mankind, is at all inconsistent with our belief in the infinite and ready compassion of God? This objection must be carried much further, if it be thought to have any weight in the

present case. Why do we all, in our public and private prayers, continually intercede with God for our brethren labouring under ignorance or sin, under sickness or affliction? Why do all good men, (as I presume they do,) frequently implore the favour of the Most High towards those in whose present and eternal welfare they feel a deep interest? In short, why do we ever pray to God at all, either for ourselves or for others? Certainly it is not because we believe God to be reluctant to exercise mercy: it is rather because we know him to be good and gracious. It is our very faith in his paternal kindness, which gives propriety and encouragement to our prayers. We are taught by the strongest dictates of nature, and by some of the clearest precepts of revelation, that this is the method in which God would have us to seek and receive his blessings. We, the disciples of Christ, are exhorted to make supplications and intercessions for all men. How, then, can any Christian suppose that there is the slightest inconsistency with our faith in the merciful character of God, involved in the doctrine that our Saviour ever liveth to make intercession for us?

Will it be contended, that there is in this doctrine any thing at variance with the character of Christ himself, or with what we know of the condition in which he is now placed? When

our blessed Lord was on earth, love and compassion to men, especially to the sinful and miserable, were the affections he constantly displayed. He then, by his benevolent words and actions, won the glorious title of the Friend of sinners. The desire which reigned above all others in his bosom, the prayer which found the freest utterance from his lips, was, that the world might be saved. That the unbelieving and disobedient might be converted from their evil ways, that his followers might be enlightened, comforted, and supported in all their trials, was the most earnest wish of his heart,—if we can venture to judge of his character from his works and teaching. For their sakes he sanctified himself. For mankind, he not only laboured in deeds of active beneficence, but perpetually offered up his righteous and acceptable prayer in their behalf. What is the whole of that beautiful address to the Father recorded of Jesus in the seventeenth chapter of John's Gospel? Is it not an intercession for his immediate disciples, for their converts, and for all who should believe on him through their preaching to the remotest ages? What were the last words that fell from his lips, as he hung expiring on the cross: *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do?* What were these but an intercession for men, even for his own sinful and cruel enemies? Now, what should lead us

to think, either that his character is changed, or that the same merciful ways in which he delighted on earth, are inconsistent with his exalted and glorified condition in heaven? We must believe that Jesus, who *ever liveth*, who is alive from the dead and raised to immortality, is in some manner employed in the exercise of his intellectual and moral faculties. And in what manner can we imagine him to be so suitably engaged, as in carrying on to perfection the holy and merciful work which he commenced in the flesh; namely, the spiritual redemption of the human race? But if this be allowed, why should supplication and intercession, which appear to have constituted no small part of his ministry in this world, be deemed altogether foreign from the nature of his employments, now that he is dwelling in glory before the throne of God? I cannot but think that some, who have wisely departed from the errors of popular systems, have at the same time unnecessarily weakened the influence of their own purer faith, by adopting these notions concerning the total cessation of our Saviour's interference in the spiritual affairs of his church. The light, I humbly conceive, in which both reason and scripture teach us to regard him, is as the same wise, holy, and compassionate man that he was on earth, delighting still in the same benevolent services to his race. It is when he is thus contem-

plated, that faith in him becomes a most powerful principle of virtuous obedience, and a rich source of consolation.

Will it be contended, that in this doctrine there is any inconsistency with the usual, settled methods of the Divine Government, in respect to the distribution of favours? This surely will not be alleged. If there be any truth in the records which the Bible contains of the dealings of God towards men, the greatest deliverances and blessings have often been bestowed in answer to the intercessory supplications of the righteous. The entire system of providence abounds with instances of this wise method of communicating gifts to the unworthy through the instrumentality and prayers of the good. This is peculiarly God's method of dispensing mercies; not because he requires solicitation, but because it is good for men thus to receive his mercies.

It appears, then, that the doctrine of our Lord's perpetual intercession is liable to no solid objections, either from the character of God, or from his own character, or from any thing we know of his present condition, or from the established ways of the divine government. I may now proceed, therefore, to call your attention to a few of the most obvious benefits, arising from a steady belief in this interesting sentiment of the Christian Scriptures.

In the first place, it strongly tends to keep alive in our minds the feelings of love and reverence for the personal character of our Lord. *Such a high-priest became us*, says the apostle, *who was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners*. These, indeed, were the qualities which Jesus displayed throughout the whole course of his teaching and labours on earth: and it is impossible for any serious believer to be destitute of the most ardent admiration for the character of his Lord, whatever may be thought of his present employments in the invisible world. There is sufficient in the evangelical histories, respecting what he uttered and performed and endured before he was taken from this state of being, to inspire every faithful, pious heart, with unfeigned love for his great moral excellence. I doubt not that this affection is sincerely experienced towards him, by many who are seldom accustomed to carry their thoughts higher, and to contemplate the work of intercession in which Jesus is still engaged. Yet I should feel no little surprise, if any reasonable person were to deny, that a belief in the perpetual intercession of Christ is highly calculated to preserve and strengthen these grateful affections towards him. No Christian, of course, has any doubt that Jesus is now alive and happy in the presence of God. But in respect to lessening the moral influences of his character,

next to the supposition of his being dead, is the notion of his being entirely removed from all personal connexion with his followers, taking no present interest in our spiritual and eternal concerns. This must oblige us to look upon him as one who *was*, but *is not*, our Friend, our Advocate, and Intercessor. It will be granted, at all events, that there is something well adapted to *fix* our attention on his benevolent character, to keep alive our reverence and gratitude towards him, in the thought of his ever living to make intercession for us. This belief helps us, as it were, to preserve an intimate acquaintance with the pure and gracious qualities of our compassionate Redeemer. When we consider him, not only as one who eighteen hundred years since lived on earth and went about doing good, but likewise as one who still employs his immortal powers for the advancement of human salvation, who still holds devout intercourse with the Father of spirits in behalf of his brethren for whom he died,—it seems that this faith brings us into a relation to Christ, from which we gain a nearer and fuller view of his unparalleled goodness. This must needs be productive of the highest moral advantages to our own souls. We cannot have that bright image of purity and love, which the character of Jesus Christ presents, brought thus strongly and freshly to mind whenever we

think of him, and not grow wiser and better from the contemplation. There is a sanctifying efficacy in the very recollection of his unsullied righteousness, and of his unwearied compassion for men. Whatever tends, therefore, to make this recollection more frequent in its occurrence, and more vividly realized by the mind when it does occur, must largely conduce to the spiritual improvement of his disciples. Our conviction of the merciful manner in which he is still engaged for our benefit, draws our thoughts towards him with the strong attraction of love, and we are constrained to dwell on the hallowed theme with emotions of intense pleasure and gratitude. We experience the power of these habits of thought and feeling to assimilate us more and more unto Christ. Every time our minds are recalled to these contemplations, we discover something new to admire and to imitate in the moral qualities of our heavenly Deliverer. And thus, the perfect character of Jesus more completely answers the ends for which it was designed in the wise economy of the Gospel, by engaging the hearts of his disciples warmly in the love and practice of universal righteousness.

In the second place, this doctrine of our Saviour's perpetual intercession, tends to make us feel more sensible of the real and close connexion between our present and our future state of being,

—between earth and heaven. It is this feeling which we all stand so greatly in need of, to enable us to live here as becomes the heirs of immortality. We allow that there shall be a resurrection of the dead. We assent to the doctrine of a future life, as one of the leading articles of the Christian faith. But how difficult it is to render our belief in this state, which is unseen and spiritual, so familiar to our minds that it may have a commanding and abiding influence over all our thoughts, sentiments, and actions! The world to which our views and hopes as Christian believers ought to be constantly directed, is invisible and distant. We want some link, some connecting medium, to unite that invisible state with this world, in which our trials and duties lie;—and something it should be more adapted to engage our ordinary human sympathies, than the general doctrines of the Divine omnipresence, and the final resurrection of all men. A sense of this want may have occasioned that strong reluctance, which the generality of mankind have always displayed, to embrace the doctrine of a universal sleep of souls between death and the resurrection. The same feeling may also have given support to the prevalent belief in the separate existence of departed spirits, and to the notion of their sometimes visiting this world, to commune with their former friends.

These persuasions, I say, may have been cherished the more fondly, because they obviously serve to *connect* this present state of existence with the state to be experienced after death. We are not at liberty, however, to encourage any belief which we have good reason to regard in the light of a mere superstition, or as a groundless assumption. And I think it must be admitted, that we know nothing from revelation of the actual state of mankind at large, between death and that period which is to be the final consummation of all terrestrial things:—we know not whether they are permitted to feel the least interest, to have the slightest intercourse of memory and affection, with us whom they have left to inhabit this world. But we do know something from revelation of the actual condition of our Saviour, since his departure from the earth. We do know,—if the views of our Lord's intercession which I have endeavoured to defend be correct,—not only that he is truly alive again from the dead, existing in a state of immortal glory and felicity, but also in what general works and ways he is now engaged. We know that he *is* interested in us, and in whatever concerns our highest happiness. *He ever liveth to make intercession for us.* He is imploring and bestowing the gifts of divine grace upon humble and penitent men. He is communing with God on the business of

human salvation. Now, our knowledge of these circumstances, respecting one of our own race who has been here upon earth, has a direct tendency to make the invisible world assume the palpable features of reality to our mental vision. Under the influence of this belief concerning Christ, we seem to hold heaven in view, and to look steadily towards it, as the everlasting home to which we are journeying, there to be united to him, our elder brother in the redeemed family of God, *the first-born from the dead*.

Let this be illustrated, if it may, by a familiar example. How little interest do we take in any distant part of the globe, so long as we are unacquainted, either personally or by fame, with a single individual that dwells there, and are without the slightest social connexion with it in any way! We have heard of such a place; we know its relative situation on the face of the earth; but we never send a thought or a feeling towards it of a higher kind than mere general curiosity. Only let us be assured, however, that in that place, hitherto so uninteresting to us, there lives some dear and valued friend, some brother or sister or child or parent, whose thoughts we are well assured often wander to us, and whose morning and evening supplication ascends to God for our welfare! Then what a sudden revolution is brought about in all our feelings towards that

obscure and distant spot! We eagerly seek every means of information respecting it; we are filled with an ardent desire to make it our own habitation, that we may have nearer communion with those whom we love. Even so it is, I conceive, when we are fully persuaded that Christ is in heaven interceding for us. We feel that we have at least one human friend already in those blissful regions,—that there is one benevolent soul whose works of compassion even now connect that world with this. Heaven grows less distant and unattainable to our view, as we cherish these pleasing convictions. And this is all that we need, co-operating with the dispositions of an upright heart and the grace of God, to give us the victory over all the ills and temptations and sorrows of this probationary state. The charm of sin is broken,—the triumph of faith is complete,—when we can thus realize the prospect of another and a brighter world, amidst the darkness of our earthly pilgrimage. Then, instead of the cold and formal assent which thousands give to the doctrine of a future life, who never experience its purifying efficacy on their hearts,—we attain to a full and happy anticipation of that immortal state where there are joys unspeakable and pleasures for evermore.

In the last place, this doctrine of our Saviour's perpetual intercession, must act on the mind as a

powerful inducement to repentance,—a holy encouragement to perseverance and steadfastness in all the ways of Christian duty.

Frail and wavering creatures as we are, we stand in need of every possible assistance in working out our own salvation. To this end, it is most profitable to think of the mercy and goodness of our Heavenly Father; to meditate on the loving-kindness of his ways; the compassion and forbearance which distinguish all the measures of his moral government; and above all, the inestimable love shewn in the means which he has adopted for our redemption through Jesus Christ. To this end also, it is highly useful for us to call to mind the ultimate, direful consequences of sin, and the imperishable rewards to be gained by a course of upright obedience. It will likewise conduce greatly to the same end, to reflect often on the spotless and attractive example which our Saviour exhibited on earth;—an example so perfect and so beautiful, that to think of it is to contemplate a picture of the sublimest virtue and piety, delineated for our admiration in colours that live and breathe. In short, all the facts and discoveries of the Gospel are calculated to promote the same end,—to afford guidance, support and consolation to human weakness, in its struggles after the glorious prize of immortality. Yet, different minds are apt to be affected by different

considerations; and even the same person will at various times be susceptible to the influence of various motives. So that we require all the means of grace and helps to righteousness, which can be derived from a just interpretation of the Scriptures.

It appears to me, then, that this kind of benefit is sure to result, very largely, from a sincere and practical faith in the perpetual intercession of our Lord Jesus Christ. No sinner, conscious of the guilt of his past ways and longing to be reconciled unto God, can be wholly insensible to the moving thought, that in that blessed state where no impurity can dwell, Jesus, the holy and merciful High Priest of our profession, is supplicating God in his behalf. No righteous man, when some sudden and strong temptation assaults him, can fail to be strengthened in his heart by the reflection, that he who *was in all things tempted like as we are, yet without sin*, is pleading for him at the throne of divine grace, that in the hour of his soul's peril he may stand and not fall. No child of woe, bending under the weight of accumulated sorrows and afflictions, can feel otherwise than inspired with fortitude and joy in the midst of tribulations, when he remembers that the *man of sorrows and acquainted with grief*, stands now before the God of all consolation, making intercession for him.



The consciousness that the prayers of righteous *mortals* are lifted up to heaven for their relief, is daily found to be a comfort to the sick and the dying. This sympathy, even from their fellow-sojourners in the vale of tears, greatly mitigates their sense of suffering. This persuasion that their pains and infirmities are mentioned, in the sacred intercourse that passes between good men and the Father of all, is found to be refreshing to their spirits. How much more abundantly must all these consequences flow from an earnest belief in the perpetual intercession of Christ! How consoling to think that *he* implores forgiveness for the sinner, succour for the tempted, relief for the mourner, salvation and happiness for all! My brethren, let us rejoice that he who cheerfully suffered for us in the days of his humiliation, does not forget us now that he is exalted in glory. And let this thought stimulate us to ever-fresh exertions, in fulfilling all the duties which become us as his faithful and consistent followers.

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A few concluding words, my brethren, would I now offer, in behalf of those simple and consolatory views of the Gospel of Christ, which have been so imperfectly unfolded in this course of Lectures. What can men desire better calculated

to delight the rational mind, to satisfy the devout heart?

“ Though we should trace the globe around,  
Where'er the human foot hath trod;  
There will be no religion found  
So safe to man, so just to God.”

How unsearchable are the riches of divine wisdom and goodness, manifested in this most gracious purpose of bringing sinful men into a state of everlasting purity and bliss! The *means* and *methods* of God's moral government, may oftentimes appear mysterious, and may utterly surpass the comprehension of our feeble faculties. But how glorious is the *end* to which they lead! What love and compassion belong to the character of that great Being, who, when he created the world, predestinated so many of his intelligent offspring to pass through scenes of trial and discipline, that they may finally reach the consummation of all which, in reference to their nature, is excellent and happy! The mind must be strangely constituted that can meditate on the ways of God to men, as represented in these views of the Gospel, without emotions of devout amazement and gratitude! Again, with respect to our Lord Jesus Christ, how exalted the dignity, how glorious the office, to which he is appointed! In what a solemn, pleasing relation, is he placed, both towards God, and towards the human race!

What can be imagined more congenial to his benevolent spirit, what could be to him a nobler recompence for suffering and death, than thus to be made in heaven the Author of eternal salvation to millions of those, whom on earth he was not ashamed to call his brethren? And, oh! how greatly do they delude themselves, who suppose that the sentiments we have here attempted to advocate are cold and cheerless, that they are incapable of filling the souls of men with sincere veneration and love for the Saviour of the world! Finally, let us often think, with the seriousness that becomes accountable creatures, of the obligations which these heavenly principles bring on all that believe. What a sanctifying, elevating influence, has the genuine Gospel! What infinite arguments does it afford against sin! What powerful motives to holiness! If, having such a religion offered for our guidance, having such a bright example set before us, both of the virtues we are bound to cultivate, and of the rewards we may hope to reap, we still *neglect so great salvation*, our condemnation will be deservedly great. But if, looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, as the perfect pattern of what God would have us to be, we become filled with his spirit, and clothed in the semblance of his righteousness, then is the way opened to us for the attainment of the same immortality.

Happy, most happy are they! who feel that they hold this pure religion on rational and scriptural grounds, free from the errors and corruptions with which in the minds of too many, it is still encumbered. They have a divine treasure. Let them be careful to improve their gifts. Men may call their doctrine *Heresy*. Let them zealously apply it to the purification of their hearts and lives, and it will be found A DOCTRINE ACCORDING TO GODLINESS.