
THOUGHTS ON SALVATION BY FAITH.

[PRINTED IN THE YEAR 1770.]

1. It is now upwards of forty years since my brother and I were convinced of that important truth, which is the foundation of all real religion, that "by grace we are saved through faith." And as soon as we believed, we spoke; when we saw it ourselves, we immediately began declaring it to others. And, indeed, we could hardly speak of anything else, either in public or private. It shone upon our minds with so strong a light, that it was our constant theme. It

was our daily subject, both in verse and prose; and we vehemently defended it against all mankind.

2. But in doing this we met with abundance of difficulty; we were assaulted and abused on every side. We were everywhere represented as mad dogs, and treated accordingly. We were stoned in the streets, and several times narrowly escaped with our lives. In sermons, newspapers, and pamphlets of all kinds, we were painted as unheard-of monsters. But this moved us not; we went on, by the help of God, testifying salvation by faith both to small and great, and not counting our lives dear unto ourselves, so we might finish our course with joy.

3. While we were thus employed, another storm arose from a quarter whence we least expected it. Some of our familiar friends declared open war against us for preaching salvation by works! This we could not in anywise understand; we wondered what they meant. We utterly disavowed the charge; we denied it in the strongest terms. We declared, over and over, both in public and private, "We believe, and constantly preach, salvation by faith. Salvation by works is a doctrine we abhor; we neither preach nor believe it." But it did not avail: Say what we would, the same charge was still repeated; and that not only when we were at a convenient distance, but even before our face.

4. At first we were inclined to think, that many who affirmed this, did not believe themselves; that it was merely a copy of their countenance, spoken *ad movendam invidiam*.* And could we have been fully persuaded of this, the difficulty would have been solved. But we did not dare to give way to the thought: Whatever they might think or say of us, we could not but think they were upright men, and spoke according to their real sentiments. The wonder therefore remained, how they could impute to us a doctrine which our soul abhorred, and which we were continually opposing, and confuting with all our might.

5. I was in this perplexity when a thought shot across my mind, which solved the matter at once: "This is the key: Those that hold, 'Every one is absolutely predestinated either to salvation or damnation,' see no medium between salvation by works and salvation by absolute decrees." It follows,

* To excite ill-will.—EDIT.

that whosoever denies salvation by absolute decrees, in so doing (according to their apprehension) asserts salvation by works.

6. And herein I verily believe they are right. As averse as I once was to the thought, upon further consideration, I allow there is, there can be, no medium. Either salvation is by absolute decree, or it is (in a scriptural sense) by works. Yea, this I will proclaim on the house-top,—there is no medium between these. You must either assert unconditional decrees, or (in a sound sense) salvation by works.

7. This deserves a fuller examination: Let us consider it more attentively. If the salvation of every man that ever was, is, or shall be, finally saved, depends wholly and solely upon an absolute, irresistible, unchangeable decree of God, without any regard either to faith or works foreseen, then it is not, in any sense, by works. But neither is it by faith: For unconditional decree excludes faith as well as works; since, if it is either by faith or works foreseen, it is not by unconditional decree. Therefore, salvation by absolute decree excludes both one and the other; and, consequently, upon this supposition, salvation is neither by faith nor by works.

8. If, on the other hand, we deny all absolute decrees, and admit only the conditional one, (the same which our blessed Lord hath revealed,) "He that believeth shall be saved;" we must, according to their apprehension, assert salvation by works. We must do this, (in a sound sense of the expression,) if we believe the Bible. For seeing no faith avails, but that "which worketh by love," which produces both inward and outward good works, to affirm, No man is finally saved without this, is, in effect, to affirm, No man is finally saved without works. It is plain, then, if we affirm, No man is saved by an absolute, unconditional decree, but only by a conditional one; we must expect, all who hold unconditional decrees will say, we teach salvation by works.

9. Let none, therefore, who hold universal redemption be surprised at being charged with this. Let us deny it no more; let us frankly and fairly meet those who advance it upon their own ground. If they charge you with holding salvation by works, answer plainly, "In your sense, I do; for I deny that our final salvation depends upon any absolute, unconditional decree. If, therefore, there be no medium, I

do hold salvation by works. But observe: In allowing this, I allow no more than that I am no Calvinist. So that, by my making you this concession, you gain—just nothing.”

10. I am therefore still consistent with myself, as well as consistent with the Bible. I still hold, (as I have done above these forty years,) that “by grace we are saved through faith;” yet so as not to contradict that other expression of the same Apostle, “Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.” Meantime, those who maintain absolute predestination, who hold decrees that have no condition at all, cannot be consistent with themselves, unless they deny salvation by faith, as well as salvation by works. For, if only “he that believeth shall be saved,” then is faith a condition of salvation; and God hath decreed, from all eternity, that it should be such. But if the decree admit of any condition, it is not an unconditional decree. Either, therefore, you must renounce your unconditional decrees, or deny that faith is the condition of salvation; or (which is just the same thing) affirm, that a man may be saved without either faith or works.

11. And I am consistent with myself, as well as with the Bible, when I affirm, that none shall be finally saved by any “faith” but that “which worketh by love,” both inward and outward holiness. I fear, many of them that hold unconditional decrees are not sensible of this. For they seriously believe themselves to be in the high road to salvation, though they are far from inward (if not outward) holiness. “They have not “put on humbleness of mind, bowels of mercy, brotherly-kindness.” They have no gentleness, no meekness, no longsuffering; so far are they from the “love that endureth all things.” They are under the power of sin; of evil-surmising; of anger; yea, of outward sin. For they scruple not to say to their brother, “Thou fool!” They not only, on a slight provocation, make no scruple of rendering evil for evil, of returning railing for railing; but they bring railing accusations unprovoked; they pour out floods of the lowest, basest invectives. And yet they are within the decree! I instance in the two late publications of Mr. Rowland Hill. “O,” says Mr. Hill, “but Mr. Wesley is a wicked man.” What then? Is he more wicked than him that disputed with Michael about the body of Moses? How, then, durst he bring a railing accusation

against a man, when an archangel durst not bring one
against the devil? O fight, fight for an unconditional
decree! For if there be any condition, how can you be
saved?
