

A
DEFENCE
OF THE
DOCTRINE
OF
Eternal Justification,
FROM SOME
EXCEPTIONS made to it
BY
Mr. BRAGGE, and others.

By JOHN BRINE.

L O N D O N :

Printed and sold by A. WARD, at the *King's-Arms*
in *Little-Britain*; and H. WHITRIDGE, at the Cor-
ner of *Castle-Alley*, near the *Royal-Exchange*, 1732.

[Price One Shilling.]



A
D E F E N C E
O F T H E
D O C T R I N E
O F
Eternal Justification, &c.

TH E doctrine of Eternal Justification has been lately objected to by Mr. *Bragge*, in some sermons of his on that subject, published with some other sermons preached at *Limestreet*, by several ministers; wherein they propose, according to the general title, to state and defend the great doctrines of the gospel, and to answer such objections as are usually advanced against them.

As I have reason to believe Justification from Eternity to be a scriptural doctrine, I think my self under obligation to appear in its defence ; and therefore have determined to communicate my thoughts on that subject in this public manner.

I hope that my attempt to establish, what I apprehend to be a truth of the gospel, though opposed by Mr. *B.* will not be interpreted as an instance of disrespect towards him ; who, I am sensible, deserves well of all who are friends to the interest of Christ, for his long standing and eminent service in the church of God.

I am humbly of opinion, that it would have been to much better advantage, if Mr. *B.* had spent those pages which are taken up in treating about the time of Justification, in more fully proving that Christ's righteousness is the matter of it, instead of militating against Justification from eternity ; which he cannot but know has been asserted by some able and judicious divines.

It is generally allowed, that in refuting any opinion, it is necessary not only to raise objections against it, and to consider with what difficulties it is clogged ; but also to answer the arguments offered in defence of it, by those who believe it a truth. The latter of which Mr. *B.* has wholly neglected : His reasons for it he best knows. I am persuaded he could not be insensible, that there are several arguments
made

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made use of, to clear up and defend that important truth, which deserve consideration; and therefore his passing them over in silence gives just reason to conclude, that he thought those arguments too cogent and forcible to admit of a real answer.

This great doctrine has been fully stated, and strongly defended, by Mr. *Gill*, and others before him; whose arguments ought to be considered, and answers given to them, if any thing is done to purpose in this controversy.

In the vindication of this great point, it is not necessary that I should treat of the matter or form of Justification, for in neither of these do I differ from Mr. *B.* The matter of our Justification I firmly believe to be the righteousness of Christ; and the form of it, the imputation of his righteousness to us: Though I must confess, that some expressions have fell from this gentleman's pen, which do not very well consist with his own sentiments with respect to the form, as we shall have occasion to observe hereafter. Nor is it needful, that I should largely treat of Justification, as it is eternal, seeing it has not long since been set in a good light by the author whose name is mentioned above; that would be *actum agere*, doing the same thing over again, which cannot be judged necessary: Yet it may not be improper to mention briefly those arguments, by which this truth is confirmed. The method

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I shall observe, in treating on this subject, will be as follows :

First, I shall enquire what it is to be justified by faith.

Secondly, Mention those arguments which have been advanced for the proof of eternal Justification. And,

Thirdly, Attend to Mr. B's objections against that point, as well as some additional objections from other persons.

First, I am to enquire what it is to be justified by faith. Very great controversies have been moved concerning this. Some affirm, that we are so, in a proper sense ; or that faith is the matter and cause of our Justification, as the *Arminians* and *Socinians* : This others justly deny ; and assert, that Christ's righteousness alone is the matter and cause of our Justification. I shall here endeavour to prove, that Justification by faith has no causality in this affair ; it is not the impulsive, material, nor instrumental cause thereof.

1. Faith is not the impulsive or moving cause of Justification. It is an act of pure and free grace, without any motive in the creature : Therefore the Apostle saith, " being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption which is in Jesus Christ ^a." But this benefit

^a Eph. i. 7.

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would not be of grace, but of works, was our faith the impulsive cause of it ; because faith is a work or act of ours, as we learn from the words of Christ : “ This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent ^b. ” Salvation is not of works, in any branch of it ; “ for by grace are we saved, through faith ; that not of our selves, it is the gift of God : not of works, lest any man should boast ^c. ” From whence it is evident that Justification, which is a considerable part of salvation, cannot be by works. The grace of God eminently appears in contriving the way of our Justification by Christ’s righteousness, and in sending him into the world to work out a righteousness for us, in which we stand compleat in his sight : Hence we are said, “ to be justified by his grace, that we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life ^d. ” No other cause can be assigned why sinners are justified in the sight of God, than his free favour and sovereign pleasure, as the effect of which he determined to justify them in the righteousness of his Son.

2. Neither is faith the matter of our Justification ; which appears by these arguments.

(1.) Because that righteousness, by which we are justified before God, is not our own. All true believers, as the great Apostle did, esteem “ their own righteousness and works

^b John vi. 29.

^c Eph. ii. 8, 9.

^d Tit. iii. 7.

but lofs and dung, for the excellency of the knowledge of Chrift Jefus their Lord; and defire to be found in him, not having their own righteoufnefs, which is of the Law, but that which is through the faith of Chrift, the righteoufnefs which is of God by faith^e." It is manifelt, that the Apoltle excluded every thing from the bufinefs of his Juftification which might be accounted his own; and, confequently, faith it felf, which though it is a fruit of fpecial grace, may properly be reckoned our own, as we are the fubjects of it. Hence it is that the Holy Gholt fpeaks of faith as ours: "But the juft fhall live by his faith^f." All dependance on faith for Juftification is laid afide by the faints, who are fenfible that many deficiencies attend it, and that nothing which is imperfect can recommend them to God.

(2.) A perfect righteoufnefs is required, in order to our Juftification in God's fight. His law infifts upon a compleat obedience to all its precepts, and condemns where it is wanting; for the language of it is, "Curfed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law, to do them^g." Nor will God, in any inftance, aft contrary to his own law, which cannot be made void; for it is the eternal ftandard and rule of righteoufnefs, according to which he will always

^e Phil. iii. 9.^f Habak. ii. 4.^g Gal. iii. 10.

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proceed in judgment. Faith is not a righteousness free from imperfection, and therefore it is not such as is demanded by the Law ; wherefore we cannot be justified by it.

3. Faith receives that righteousness by which we are justified, and therefore cannot be that righteousness it self. That which is laid hold on, and embraced by faith, must needs be something different from it, as the act and the object are distinct. Christ's righteousness is that to which the faith of a believer looks, and on which it wholly depends for Justification before God : Therefore faith is not the matter of his justifying righteousness.

4. Justification is not by works ; for if so, boasting will not be excluded, as it must eternally be in the whole of our salvation : For " it is not of works, lest any man should boast^h ; " as was observed before. Faith is an act and work of ours, and therefore cannot be the matter of our Justification.

5. We are justified by the obedience and sufferings of Christ, and consequently not by faith. The Apostle expressly asserts that we are justified by his blood ; " Much more then being justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through himⁱ : " And also, that we are made righteous by his obedience ; " As by the offence of one many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous : " Therefore not by faith.

^h Eph. ii. 9.

ⁱ Rom. v. 9. Ver. 19.

3. Faith is not the instrumental cause. In this I am entirely of Mr. *Baxter's* opinion, who reasons thus : " If faith be an instrument, it is the instrument of God or man ; not of man, for man is not the principal efficient, he doth not justify himself ; not of God, for it is not God that believeth ^k." No act of man can be an instrument in those acts of God which are immanent : Justification is such an act ; and as Justification is not an act of man's, or he doth not justify himself, faith cannot be his instrument in an act which is none of his. Upon the whole, it may be strongly concluded, that the *credere*, or act of believing, is not imputed to us for righteousness, but the object of faith. That this was the Apostle's meaning, when he thus expresses himself, " for we say that faith was reckoned to *Abraham* for righteousness," is justly observed by *Maresius* " ¹ This faith, which is imputed to us for righteousness, ought to be taken metonymically for Christ being apprehended by faith ; inasmuch as faith apprehends and applies the righteousness of Christ to us, not simply, or as

^k Aphorisms, Thesis 56. p. 219.

¹ Haec fides, quae nobis ad justitiam imputatur, metonymice sumi debet pro Christo ipso fide apprehenso ; & in quantum justitiam Christi, ceu nostram, nec simpliciter, & omnimodo ut *alienam* apprehendit, & nobis applicat ; prout Paulus, Phil. iii. 9. propria inhaerente & legali abdicatâ justitiâ eam quaerit, quae est per fidem Christi, & ex Deo per fidem ; unde & etiam *justitia Dei* appellatur, 2 Cor. v. 21. ita juravit Jacob *per pavor* patris sui, Gen. xxxi. 53. ubi *pavor* ponitur metonymice pro Deo, quem timuerat. *Hydra Socin.* Vol. III. c. xxi. p. 604.

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altogether anothers, but as ours: As *Paul*, his own inherent legal righteousness being rejected by him, sought that which is through the faith of Christ, and of God by faith; whence also it is called the righteousness of God, as that fear by which *Jacob* swore, was called the fear of his father; where fear is metonymically put for God, whom he feared." Thus far he. It is evident, that sometimes by faith Christ must be understood; as when it is said, "but after that faith is come, we are no longer under a school-master^m:" That is to say, since Christ, the object of faith, is come into the world, we are no longer under the law as a school-master. Faith is not so much as *causa sine qua non* in this affair, as appears by the eternal Justification of the elect: It has not the least concern herein, if Justification is properly taken. But,

If Justification be considered in the knowledge or perception of it, it is by faith; and that is intended when we are said to be justified by faith, if faith is to be taken in a proper sense. By this grace we behold our natural pollution and inability to perform that which is good; the perfection and spirituality of the law; the necessity of an interest in Christ's righteousness, in order to our acceptance with God; the glory and excellency of it: In consequence of which we renounce our own works,

^m Gal. iii. 25.

and wholly depend upon the spotless righteousness of Christ. At some times also we by faith view that we are all fair, and without spot in the sight of God, as he considers us in the glorious robe of his Son's righteousness, though full of impurities and spots in our selves. In those seasons we are filled with joy unspeakable, and full of glory; and can draw nigh to God, as our Father, with a holy freedom and liberty. This is the concern which faith has in our Justification: It beholds and views it, but doth not give being to it, or impute the righteousness of Christ to us, that is God's act without us; and therefore Justification by faith, is only the comfortable knowledge or perception of that gracious privilege.

Two reasons may be offered why we are said to be justified by the grace of faith, even in our apprehension thereof.

1. Because faith is the eye of our souls, by which we view it, or discern the justifying righteousness of Christ, as imputed to us.

2. This grace is of a soul-humbling, and Christ-exalting nature, as Mr. B. observes: "Of all the graces of the Spirit, faith is the most emptying, and accordingly goes poor and indigent to Christ; other graces bring as it were something along with them, whereas faith brings nothing to Christ but a naked backⁿ." And so it is eminently suited to the design of

ⁿ Vol. II. of Sermons preach'd at *Lincolns-inn*, p. 153.

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God in the Justification of sinners : “ For it is of faith, that it might be by grace ; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed °.” It may not be improper to observe here, that it is asserted, that “ elect infants dying in infancy, are justified by faith in the habit, though not by faith in the act^p.” If this is true, it follows, that God doth not justify all his elect in one and the same way, but some by the habit, and others by the act of faith : For the proof of which, I am of opinion that no solid argument can be offered. Again, a principle or habit cannot see, or receive an object : Now if Christ’s righteousness is to or upon us, in a way of believing, and it cannot be ours till actually received by faith, both which are affirmed by our author ; how come elect infants, who die in infancy, to be actually interested in that righteousness, seeing they cannot act faith, and consequently are incapable of receiving Christ’s righteousness ? Therefore it must necessarily be concluded, that the gift of Christ’s righteousness becomes actually theirs, without any receiving act in them : And unless it can be proved that God justifies his elect in a different manner, that is to say, some by the habit, and others by the act of faith ; the same must be granted concerning those of the elect, who live to riper years. Farther, from hence I cannot but con-

° Rom. iv. 16.

^p Vol. II. p. 170.

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clude, that no act of faith is necessary to the being of Justification; for, if so, those of the elect who die in infancy, cannot be justified. But why an act of faith should be required to the actual Justification of some of the elect, and not to the Justification of others, I am not able to conceive.

The grace of faith, by which we apprehend our Justification is of the operation of God, it is an effect of powerful and efficacious grace, and not the produce of human power, skill, or industry. It is not got, but given, as is evident from those words of the Apostle: "By grace are ye saved, through faith; that not of your selves, it is the gift of God^a." And the grace of God is abundantly displayed, in working faith in our souls; over which, as I take it, a veil is drawn by our author in this exhortation of his, "With all your gettings, get faith^r." Dead sinners, or such as are void of spiritual life, cannot act spiritually, and therefore it is not in their power to get faith; and as they have no ability to believe, they have no inclination to it, for their hearts are full of enmity against God. Besides, if faith is got or acquired by men, they make themselves to differ, and have whereof to boast, for then they have something which they did not receive as a gift of free grace; which is constantly denied in scripture, and will never be owned by the saints. Again: It may as well

^a Eph. ii. 9.

^r P. 173.

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be required of sinners to form divine and supernatural principles in their souls, or to create spiritual life in themselves, as to get faith, for the meaning is the same, which is a work proper to God. Moreover, such an exhortation is not likely to debase and humble proud sinners, or to convince them that they are impotent to good ; but rather to swell their haughtiness and pride, and occasion them to imagine they are possessed of a power which they are not : Thereby also, it is not improbable, but many saints, who are sensible of their weakness, and of the strength of unbelief, may be dejected in their souls, because they cannot, many times when they desire it, exercise that faith which is wrought in their hearts by the Spirit of God. But this by the by.

Secondly, I now proceed to mention those arguments, by which the truth of eternal Justification is confirmed. And,

1. Justification is an immanent, and consequently an eternal act. This argument must be allowed conclusive, unless it can be proved that Justification is a transient act.

2. The elect were by God considered and viewed in Christ from everlasting ; which is excellently expressed by Dr. *Goodwin* in these words : “ Look, as God did not, in his decrees about creation, consider the body of *Adam* singly, and apart from his soul, nor yet the soul without the body (I speak of his
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creation and state thereby) neither should either so much as exist, but as the one in the other: So nor Christ and his church in election, which gave the first existence to Christ as a head, and to the church as his body, which each had in God's decrees^f. Now as God considers his elect in Christ, they are either objects of condemnation, or Justification. The former must be denied, and therefore the latter evidently follows; except, as God beholds the elect in Christ, they are neither objects of condemnation, nor Justification; which is an absurdity that none will admit.

3. The elect were blest with all spiritual blessings in Christ before the foundation of the world; and therefore with Justification, for that is a spiritual blessing. "This grace by which we are justified, was given us in Christ from eternity, because from eternity God loved us in Christ, and made us accepted in him^g."

4. When Christ, as a surety, engaged for the elect, they were justified. "At the same time in which Christ became a surety for us, and our sins were imputed to him, we were absolved from guilt, and reputed just; that is, actively justified^h:" Which was from everlast-

^f On *Eph. i.* Part 1. p. 72.

^g Gratia igitur haec qua justificamur coram Deo, data fuit ab aeterno, quia ab aeterno amavit nos in Christo, & in eo nos sibi gratos fecit. *Zanchy de natura Dei, lib. 4. c. 2. p. 355.*

^h Quo tempore Christus factus est vas pro nobis, & peccata nostra ipsi imputata sunt, eo nos sumus absoluti à reatu, & reputati iusti; hoc est, active justificati, *Maccov. Πρώτον Ἰεσοῦς, Armin. c. 10. p. 120.*

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ing, or before the foundation of the world.

5. God eternally decreed not to punish sin in his people, but in his Son. His decree to punish sin in his Son, includes his will to impute it to him; and his purpose not to punish it in his elect, takes in his will not to impute it to them, and must be their Justification from all sin in his sight.

6. "Christ's atonement and bearing sin was in the eye of God from eternity, as if already done: Hence the patriarchs were actually and personally justified by it^x," as Dr. *Chauncy* well observes. Therefore why may it not be concluded that the elect were justified from everlasting, since God had the atonement of Christ then in his eye? I should be glad to see these arguments thoroughly examined, and solidly refuted, if they do not sufficiently prove what they are brought for.

Thirdly, I shall now go on to answer those objections which are advanced against eternal Justification.

Here I shall, *1st*, attend to those raised by Mr. *B.* and, *2dly*, to various objections made by some other persons.

I am, *1st*, to begin with those objections which Mr. *B.* has advanced against eternal Justification. Now he objects thus:

Object. 1. ^y "Faith must be more than a manifestation of our Justification, because the saints are

^x Neonomianism Unmasked, Part 2. p. 53.

^y P. 156.

said in scripture to have access, by faith, into the grace wherein they stand ;” “ being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ ; by whom also we have access, by faith, into this grace wherein we stand :” That is, we stand actually pardoned, and actually justified before God, as well as actually reconciled with God. In the opinion of our author, this text is a sufficient proof that the saints, by faith, enter into a justified state, and consequently cannot be justified before they believe. In order to shew that he mistakes the sense of the text, I would observe these things.

If by faith we are actually brought into, or fixed in a justified state, it will follow that this grace has a causal influence on our Justification ; which it is evident it has not, because Justification is no other than the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to us, which is an act proper to God. If our actual Justification is by faith, it is either by the habit, or the act of faith : Now, as I apprehend, there is no ground to assert that Justification is by the habit of faith, because no action can be ascribed to faith as a habit ; and should any assert that it is by the act of faith, I would enquire of them, whether Justification is only by the first act of faith, and not also by renewed acts ? If it is only by the first act of faith, it then evidently fol-

² Rom. v. 1, 2.

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lows, that faith has not the same concern or use in our Justification, in its renewed acts, as in the first act of it. Besides, if our actual Justification depends upon, or is by repeated acts of faith; this, as a necessary consequence, will arise from thence, That when faith is not in exercise, believers are not justified; because, according to this, faith gives actual being to Justification. Wherefore, I cannot but conclude, that if Justification be the benefit designed by that grace, into which the saints are said to have access by faith, thereby is not intended, that Justification, as to its actual being, commences when they believe, but only that at that time they have the comfortable apprehension of it. But I am persuaded, that upon a due consideration of that strict connection which these words have with the first verse, we shall see reason to conclude, that some other privilege, and not Justification, is intended by that grace, into which the saints are said to have access by faith: For it is to be observed that the Apostle, in the first verse, asserts that we are justified by faith; "being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ." Now, if we suppose that he intends the same thing in the second verse, we shall make him guilty of a gross tautology, and shall then be obliged to take the words in this view; "being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom also we

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have access, by faith, into the grace of Justification;" or thus, "being justified by faith, by faith also we are justified." But I imagine, that none will allow that the Apostle could possibly be guilty of such a needless repetition; and, if not, it must be granted that some other privilege, and not Justification, is to be understood by that grace, into which the saints are said to have access by faith. ^a Now our access to the throne of grace is usually intended, when the *Greek* word for access is made use of in other places. And I can see no reason why that may not be allowed to be the sense of it in this. The design of the Apostle in the words, seems to me to be this; That through Christ we have freedom of access unto the throne of grace: The preposition *εἰς* may as well be rendered *unto*, as *into*: Whereat we stand; for *εἰ* may be translated *at*, as it sometimes is: As for instance; *εἰ δεξιᾷ τῆ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ*, "at the right hand of the throne of God ^b." So that the words strongly imply, that our access to the throne of grace, is a standing privilege or benefit, of which we

^a By *προσάγωγη*, in Eph. ii. 18. & iii. 12. is intended our admission into God's presence, or freedom of access to the throne of grace, through Christ. For, as we are sinners, we cannot immediately draw nigh to God in our own persons, but must as it were be led, or introduced into his presence by Christ. See also 1 Pet. iii. 18. *ἵνα ὑμᾶς προσάγῃ τῷ Θεῷ*, that he might bring us to God: That is that he might introduce us into his presence, as the word properly signifies.

^b Heb. xii. 2.

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shall never be deprived, because our liberty of access to God depends upon, or is secured by the infinite merit of Christ's blood and righteousness, which will eternally remain the same. From the whole, it is evident, that this text affords nothing for the proof of what is collected from it by Mr. B. that the elect of God are not actually justified before they believe, or that their actual Justification is by faith.

Object. 2. " Was faith only a manifestation, *i. e.* of our Justification, why is it compared to a hand, as well as to an eye " ? "

I answer: Faith, as an eye, views that it is necessary we be furnished with a righteousness which is perfect, and that we have no such righteousness of our own. It also beholds the perfection and glory of the righteousness of Christ; and, as a hand, it lays hold on and receives that righteousness for our Justification in the sight of God. But our act of receiving this righteousness, is not the imputation of it to us, which is the *ratio formalis* of our Justification, and is God's act alone; our receiving act can have no concern therein. Besides, we receive Christ's righteousness as justifying, and consequently are justified before our reception of it. Further, if the act of receiving Christ's righteousness is our actual Justification, we justify our selves; whereas Justification is

^c P. 159, 160.

an act of God's grace towards us in Christ, as has been before observed. Moreover, if actual Justification is by our receiving Christ's righteousness, it is repeated as often as we act faith on the justifying righteousness of Christ, except this grace, after the first act of it, ceases to have the same concern in Justification as it has in its first act; which, if any take the liberty to assert, I hope they will make it fully appear. To conclude; when it is said that Justification by faith is the comfortable knowledge of it, therein is included the act of renouncing our own righteousness, and applying to Christ's, as that which alone can justify us before God. But what proof this affords, that Justification by faith is to be understood in a proper sense, and cannot precede it, I am at a loss to understand.

Object. 3. "Faith, in the business of Justification, must be more than a manifestation; because, was it no other, other graces would share with faith, in its use and office, as it respects our Justification, for they all speak by way of manifestation, and evidence our being loved, and chose in Christ from everlasting^a."

In this objection there are several grand mistakes: There is something in it which is perfectly irreconcilable to what our author has before asserted. Here he tells us, that faith, and other graces, are a manifestation of God's everlasting love, and his choice of us in Christ;

^a P. 160.

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which are immanent acts, or I know not what acts of God must be looked upon to be such: Nay, he himself allows they are, in these words; "All the purposes of God, as they are in him, are immanent acts^e." Therefore God's purpose or will to love his people from everlasting, and his eternal election of them in Christ, must needs be such acts. He elsewhere asserts, that it is impossible the immanent acts of God should be known by any creature: For, concerning them, he delivers himself in this manner; "As he must be a man, and not an inferior being, who knows what the immanent acts in man are, or how things lie in his mind and will; and he must be an angel, who knows what the immanent acts of an angel are; so he must be God, who knows what the immanent acts of God are, or how things lie in the divine mind and will. Thus God himself speaks of them; "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways, saith the Lord: For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts^f."

It must be allowed, that it is a most palpable contradiction to assert, that the immanent acts of God cannot be known, and yet that faith, with other graces, is a manifestation of those acts. Again, let us consider what Mr. B. has said about the impossibility of knowing

^e P. 169.

^f P. 95, 96.

the immanent acts of God. Now, that no creature below man can understand his immanent acts, must readily be granted; because no creature inferior to man, is endued with reason: But that no creature, unless an angel, can know the immanent acts of angels, is a mistake. Their acts are rational acts, and may be understood by a principle of reason, with which the mind of man is furnished; not but the immanent acts of angels must be discovered to man, in order to his knowledge of them; and so likewise the immanent acts of men must be declared, before they can be known by others. The same also is to be observed concerning the immanent acts of God; they, in some measure, are to be understood by rational or intelligent creatures, as our author himself is obliged to allow in another place, though he is so unhappy as to contradict himself here. It is certain, that God's immanent acts could never have been understood by us, if God himself had not revealed them: But have we not, in the Bible, a clear discovery of his immanent acts, which relate to the salvation of his elect; and are they not revealed, in order to be known by them for their peace and comfort? Further: Are not God's purposes to save the elect, and the contrivance of proper ways or methods to effect such a gracious design, his immanent acts? And are not they declared to us in the holy scriptures? And also are they not, in some degree, known by us, as we are illuminated

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nated by his grace ? Besides, if it is impossible for us to conceive of God's immanent acts, we must remain eternally ignorant of them, for we shall not be deified in heaven.

Add to this, If it is absolutely impossible for us to know the order of things in the divine mind, we shall not, to eternity, be able to resolve this question, Whether God, in his decree of election, foresaw that we would believe, prior to, and independent on his purpose, that we should believe, and be holy ? And therefore all disputes with the Remonstrants about it must needs cease, and be acknowledged vain and impertinent. Whence it appears, that this observation favours eternal election no more than eternal Justification. I also add, that how much soever it may be thought, upon a cursory view of this text, (" My ways are not as your ways," &c.) that it affords sufficient evidence to support what it is brought in favour of ; I doubt not, but upon a close enquiry into it, the judicious reader will easily see that the true meaning of the words is this : That God's mercy, which is displayed in the remission of our sins (and is spoken of in the verse before) is not to be limited by our narrow conceptions, but that it infinitely exceeds those notions which we are too ready to entertain concerning it. To this purpose are those words of *Calvin* upon the text : " I am not a mortal man; that I should act towards

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you as one severe and implacable^s." If our author intends that God's immanent acts cannot be comprehended, I believe none will oppose him in that. But there is a wide difference between conception and comprehension; we are capable of conceiving, or forming ideas of God's love, but shall never be able to comprehend it. I observe, that faith is not a manifestation of God's love to us, and choice of us in Christ from everlasting. This grace cannot pry and search into God's heart, and acquaint us with his secrets, any farther than they lie open to our view in divine revelation; our knowledge of them arises wholly from the discovery God himself makes about them. The manifestation of these things, is either external or internal. The external manifestation of God's favour to his elect, and his eternal designs of grace concerning them, is in the Gospel: "That is the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ^h." Herein are made known God's eternal love to his chosen, and the secret actings of his goodness to them before the world was, his covenant-transactions with Christ their Head, to secure their eternal salvation and happiness. For what is the gospel but a manifesta-

^s Isa. lvii. 8, 9. Non sum homo mortalis, ut me durum & implacabilem vobis praebeam. *Vid. Calv. in loc.*

^h Eph. iii. 9.

tion of the contrivance of our redemption, and the actual accomplishment of it by Christ? Upon this account it is called the "wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world to our gloryⁱ." There is also an internal manifestation of these things to our souls, of which the Spirit of God is the author: "For he searches all things, yea, even the deep things of God," and reveals them to us, or enables us spiritually to understand them; as is evident from those words of the Apostle: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him; but God hath revealed them to us by his Spirit^k." It is therefore very obvious, that faith is not the manifestation of these things, neither externally, nor internally. It may be farther observed, that other graces, as well as faith, are manifest proofs of our interest in God's eternal love, and of our being the objects of his eternal choice in Christ; because they are effects which flow from thence. But tho' they are an evidence of these things, as effects are clear proofs of the existence of the cause by which they are produced, that ought not to be confounded with the manifestation of God's everlasting love to our souls, and of our eternal election in Christ: For then we must be suppo-

ⁱ 1 Cor. ii. 9.

^k Ver. 9, 10.

sed to have a constant sense of God's love to us, and choice of us, because our graces, at one time as well as another, are evidences of these things. Besides, the revelation of God's love to us, is only received by faith. For neither love, nor fear, nor repentance, can embrace the witness of God's Spirit; that is peculiar to the grace of faith, "which alone is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen¹:" That is, it is by faith only that we view invisible things. Therefore this grace has its peculiar use distinct from all others, in the sense or apprehension of our Justification, and, consequently, this objection vanishes.

Object. 4. "If faith, in the business of Justification, is no more than a manifestation, one believer may be more justified than another, as his manifestation thereof may be clearer and fuller^m."

I answer, that Justification is God's act, not ours. He only justifies the ungodly by imputing Christ's righteousness to them. Therefore Justification by faith is not to be understood properly, *i. e.* the being of Justification is not designed; for that has no dependance on faith, but the knowledge of this benefit is intended, when it is said we are justified by faith. Nor is it any absurdity to affirm, that one believer has a fuller discovery of his Justification by Christ than another; and that the saints, at one time,

¹ Heb. xi. 1.

^m P. 161.

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may have a stronger assurance of their Justification, than at some others. Farther, Mr. B. suggests, under this head, that the doctrine of eternal Justification smells rank of the *Arminians*. Every one knows they are no friends to it, any more than some others. And I am well assured, if those who embrace it, could once discover what connection there is between that doctrine and *Arminian* principles, they would, with the greatest freedom, part with it : For, in their opinion, that scheme is wholly contrary to scripture. To conclude: If Justification is by faith, in a proper sense, or if it has a dependance on faith as to its actual being, and faith has always the same use in Justification, I may take leave to return our author's words upon himself: "That a believer in the dark would be no more justified, than whilst he was shut up in unbelief." All which is unscriptural, and smells rank of the *Arminians*, who hold a falling from grace. This absurdity is a natural consequence, which arises from the opinion of actual Justification by faith ; because, when that is not in being, upon which any thing depends, that which has its dependance on it cannot then exist ; but faith, on which actual Justification depends (according to this author) is not always in the act, though it is in the habit. The consequence is easy to be understood.

Object. 5. "To talk of God's actually imputing a thing of that worth, as is Christ's
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righteousness, to nothing, or to that which as yet has no actual being ; that he should actually impute Christ's righteousness to a *non ens*, or to one who as yet is not, is to talk, not only unscripturally, but unintelligibly ⁿ."

To this objection I answer : The immanent and transient acts of God are to be distinguished ; the latter produce a real change in their subjects, and necessarily require their existence ; but God's immanent acts are not productive of any physical change in their objects, and consequently it is not necessary that they should exist, when those acts take place. Justification is not a transient, but immanent act : It is the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us, which is an act in God's mind, and effects no real change in us ; therefore our existence is not necessary to our Justification before God. Let it be farther observed, that if the imputation of righteousness requires our actual existence, the imputation of sin doth also. There is the same reason for asserting the one, as the other. That sin was imputed to us before we had an actual being, is evident ; for sin was imputed to us when we were made sinners, which we were immediately upon, or by the fall of *Adam*, as we may justly collect from those words of the Apostle : " For by one man's disobedience many were made sinners ° : " That is, all the posterity of *Adam* were by

ⁿ P. 164.

° Rom. v. 19.

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God reputed sinners, because they sinned in him as their public head. This clearly proves the imputation of sin to us long before our actual existence. Again: That sin was imputed to the elect (as considered in themselves) from everlasting, is fully demonstrated by the covenant of grace, which God and Christ entered into in eternity, to save them from the dismal consequences of their sins. Sin must be first imputed, before any penal evil can be inflicted on us. The corruption of our nature follows the imputation of sin: That is the cause why we are shapen in iniquity, and conceived in sin. Therefore we stand charged with sin in God's sight, before our conception in the womb. For, as *Maccovius* well observes: "This sin, *i. e.* original sin, arises from sin imputed, as the desert of it; or, as some love to speak, the demerit. For God, on account of this imputation, most justly punisheth all who are propagated from *Adam* in a natural way^p." And elsewhere he answers this question, When, or at what time, is sin imputed, after this manner:

1. "To impute, says he, is a moral act; that is to say, that this or that thing is accounted as done by one for another, as tho' the other had done it." He adds, 2. "That this act may be, where the object, or rather the subject, to which something may be

^p Peccatum hoc oritur ex peccato imputato, tanquam merito; sive, ut alii loqui amant, demerito. Nam Deus, propter imputatum hoc, plectit, tanquam iustissimâ poenâ, omnes ex Adamo naturaliter propagatos, *Loc. Com. p. 463.*

imputed does not exist; and that it may have respect to this future subject; or, that sin may be imputed to any one, who doth not as yet exist, but whose future being is certain. Thus, for instance: Our sins were imputed to Christ the Saviour, as man, and were imputed to him as soon as he was promised as a Mediator; hence it was that believers, who lived before Christ was incarnate, were delivered from eternal death. These things being thus, we now answer to the question, That sin was imputed to all who were to be propagated from *Adam*, as soon as *Adam* sinned. For as to what *Scharpius* supposes, that sin is imputed when man first exists, or begins to be, that is refuted from hence; that the matter of which man is to be born, is already polluted with inherent sin. Hence the Holy Spirit is said to have sanctified the mass of which Christ was to be born; which is taken from *Luke* i. 35. So then sin inherent is later than sin imputed¹. And, in his

¹ Imputare, esse actum inoralem; id est, censerī pro eo ab aliquo ac si fecisset, hoc vel illud. 2. Actum istum fieri posse, nondum existente objecto, vel potius subiecto, cui quid imputari possit, & habere rationem ad hoc subiectum futurum; sive, posse peccatum alicui nondum existenti imputari, sed certo futuro. Ita verbi gratia: Christo Servatori imputata peccata nostra, qua hominī, & imputata simul ac promissus in mediatorem; quare ex eo liberi erant a morte aeterna, qui ante natum Christum vivebant fideles. His ita se habentibus, jam respondemus ad quaestionem, imputata peccata omnibus, qui ex Adamo propagandi erant, simul ac Adam peccavit. Nam, quod *Scharpius* putat imputari, cum homo incipiet esse homo, illud refellitur ex eo, quod materia ex qua homo nasci debet, jam peccato inhaerenti sit inquinata: Hinc dicitur Spiritus Sanct. sanctificasse massam ex qua Christus nasciturus erat, quod deducitur ex *Luc.* i. 35. jam autem peccatum inhaerens posterius est imputato. *Anti-Socin.* c. 6. p. 76.

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book of metaphysics, he makes use of this as an argument for Justification preceding regeneration. He asks this question, Whether or not Justification goes before regeneration? And answers: "Thus it is; for as sin inherent supposes that sin is imputed, so also inherent righteousness presupposes righteousness is imputed^r." Now as sin may be, and actually is, imputed to us, before we exist; so righteousness may be, and actually is, imputed to us, prior to our existence.

Object. 6. "All the purposes of God, as they are in him, are immanent acts; his whole counsel is so, as it takes in his works of nature, grace, and glory. Now if this, without the intervention of his power, gives actual being to any thing, to our Justification, for instance, it should, by a parity of reason, give actual being to every thing, to this world, and to all that is therein; to the church militant, and to the church triumphant^s." I answer:

All transient acts of God are put forth in time, and they give being to something which did not exist before, and therefore cannot be eternal. Creation is such an act; it is an act, without God, not in him: Therein his infinite power is exerted, for the production of that which had

^r Utrumne Justificatio nostri activa nostri praecedat regenerationem? Resp. Ita est: Quemadmodum enim imputatum peccatum inhaerens est, ita & inhaerens justitia praesupponit justiciam imputatam. *Maccov. Metaphy.* 118.

^s P. 169.

no existence, till such a creating act takes place. His decree to create, and creation it self, are different acts; the former is an immanent, the latter a transient act; the one is eternal, the other is in time. But Justification is an immanent act, not without, but in God; and is not expressive of any real or physical change in its objects: It therefore must be eternal. Again, it is altogether impertinent and inconclusive to argue thus: If God's decree gives actual being to any thing, to our Justification, for instance, by a parity of reason, it should give being to every thing, &c. For God's bare decree gives not actual being to any thing out of himself; but his will, purpose, or decree, as it respects an act in his own mind, is no other than the act it self: As for instance, his will or immutable purpose to love his elect, is his actual love to them, and his will to elect, is election; or it gives actual being to the thing it self, which has no existence but in his infinite mind. So his will or purpose not to impute sin, and to impute righteousness, is his real non-imputation of the one, and actual imputation of the other; and is the complete Justification of the elect, which has no being but in God's breast. I add, it ought to be proved that Justification is a transient act, by which actual being is given to something out of God himself; or that it is effective of some real and physical change in its objects, as it needs must be, if there is an intervention of God's power between his decree
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to justify, and Justification it self. If this is not done, as I am of opinion it can't be, it will evidently appear that it is far from solid reasoning to infer, that as God's mere decree to create, gives not actual being to any thing ; so his will and purpose to justify, doth not give being to Justification.

Object. 7. “ *Paul* was a chosen vessel before he believed ; but where is he said to have been pardoned, or justified, or reconciled, or adopted, whilst lying out from, and persecuting of the Lord Jesus Christ ? ”

Why should it be enquired whether these things were spoken concerning *Paul*, before he believed ? If they are declared of God's elect in general, that is sufficient to support the doctrine of their actual Justification, reconciliation, and adoption before faith. It would no way affect the argument, if we no where read any of these blessings about *Paul* in particular, whilst he was a persecutor of Christ. But, because *Paul* was justified, reconciled, and adopted, even when in a state of unbelief, therefore he was converted in God's appointed time. If Christ's righteousness had not been imputed to him when he was dead in sin, he would never have received spiritual life from Christ ; for regeneration is the effect of Justification, or follows upon it. Agreeably to which this gentleman himself asserts, “ That Christ first is

^t P. 165.

made righteousness, and so sanctification ;” and adds, that “ this order ought not to be inverted ^v.” Had he always delivered himself consistent with what is here said, he would have prevented this publication. Again: *Paul* was actually reconciled, or God was so to him, when a persecutor ; “ for peace was made,” for *Paul*, as well as other elect persons, “ by the blood of Christ’s cross ^w.” If God was not really reconciled to his elect before they believe, and he was full of anger and wrath against them, they never would believe : For wrath in God, is his purpose to inflict the desert of sin on guilty sinners ; which cannot consist with designs of love and favour to them. Therefore those who are the objects of God’s wrath, in this sense, never will believe. The death of Christ did not render God reconcilable to sinners, as some say, but actually reconciled. And it may be observed, that it is said of *Paul*, that he was reconciled, whilst an enemy ; that is, a persecutor of Christ : For he speaks it of himself, in these words ; “ If when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life ^x.” Moreover, he was in a state of adoption, when he persecuted Christ in his members : For, because he was a child of God, “ the Spirit of God’s Son was sent into his

⁷ P. 92.

^w Col. i. 20.

^x Rom. v. 10.

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heart ;” by whose influences he was enabled “ to cry, Abba Father ^y.” Regeneration doth not make us sons ; but, because we are sons, we are regenerated. That the elect “ are by nature children of wrath, even as others ^z,” is certain ; and that they are the children of God by grace, is equally so. And both these may be said of them at one and the same time, but in different respects. As the descendants of *Adam*, they are children of wrath ; that is, they are under a sentence of condemnation by the law : As in, and members of Christ, they are the children of God, and free from condemnation in his sight ; yea, they are the objects of his special love and delight, and were so from everlasting ; which is the reason why they are regenerated in God’s due time, when their adoption becomes open and visible. *Junius* hath this note on *Gal. iv. 5. Adoptio filiorum aeterna, sed suo tempore exhibetur* ; that is, the adoption of sons is eternal, but is manifested in time.

Object. 8. “ A sinner’s Justification may, and should be considered as the birth of time, and so personal and actual, in the joyful and blessed application thereof^a.” I answer :

Justification, as it is an act in God, or as it is taken for his non-imputation of sin, and imputation of righteousness, ought not to be considered as the birth of time, but is eternal,

^y Gal. iv. 6.

^z Eph. ii. 2.

^a P. 166.

because

because all his immanent acts are so. Again : Is actual Justification the same with personal, and cannot persons be justified before they exist ? then they cannot be personally elected, before their actual existence. If there is a personal election from eternity, there also may be a personal Justification from eternity, because the latter requires our existence no more than the former.

Those who object against eternal Justification, That the existence of the persons justified is necessary to Justification, would do well to consider, that the Remonstrants, in the same manner, object against eternal election. For, say they, " It cannot be, that any one should be actually elected, who doth not as yet actually exist, for as much as no qualities belong to a *non ens* ^b." Let our opponents see how they can remove this difficulty, which is raised against eternal election ; and closely examine if that answer, which removes it, as levelled against a personal election from everlasting, doth not also fully take off its force against the personal Justification of the elect before time. I am persuaded they will: For as election is an act in God, and is not effective of any real change in us ; so is Justification, and works no physical change in us, as has been before observed. If by actual Justi-

^b Nam fieri non potest, ut actu electus sit, qui actu nondum existit, quandoquidem non entis nullae qualitates. *Vorst. Amic. Col. cum Piscat.* § 112. p. 231.

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fication, or the application of that benefit, is intended the discovery of it to God's elect, for their consolation and joy, it certainly follows faith; and is that Justification by faith which the scripture speaks of, when faith is taken in a proper sense, but is no evidence that Justification it self is not eternal.

Object. 9. "The distinction of virtual and actual, has its use and place in scripture, as well as in nature. In nature the case is plain; for the earth virtually contains all the fruit that will be brought forth and ripened, not only the next summer, but an hundred years hence; whence it follows not that trees are now full of ripe fruit. The sea also virtually contains all fountains and rivers that can possibly flow from it, as eternity contains all possible time. And no less plain is the case as to scripture, where Christ is said to be a lamb slain from the foundation of the world: Which cannot be understood of Christ's being actually crucified, before he was born; but the slaying there must be virtual, not actual."

This distinction of virtual and actual I cannot well understand, especially as it is used in the affair of Justification. Virtual seems to me to signify something which has *esse in potentia*, being in power, or that which is possible to be effected; and may be considered as uncertain, with respect to actual being. Thus all possible

* P. 166, 167.

things may be said to be virtually in the divine mind, or to lie before God as things which may be produced by his infinite power, though never brought into real being: "For *ens* is divided into *ens* in power and act^d." Wherefore I conceive it may be as well to make use of the word potential as virtual, when the actual being of any thing, which may be, is not designed, but only its being in power. I will not pretend to say what farther may be designed by virtual (than potential imports) when it is made use of in the business of Justification. But I am not able to understand that the term it self signifies any thing more. Again: It appears very strange to me that any thing, which has no being but in God himself, (as Justification has not) should be said to have only a virtual being till time, and that its actual being commences in time; because, whatever is in God, must needs be eternal. Therefore it is an improper way of reasoning to infer, that because trees are not now full of ripe fruit, that God doth not actually, but only virtually justify his people before faith. Justification, as it is an act in God's mind, ought not to be considered as future, but as it always has been in himself, though not known to us till we believe. I add, that virtual, as standing opposed to

^d An quod in potentia est habeat essentiam? Resp. Ita est, hinc ens dividitur in ens potentia & actu. *Ibid.* p. 18.

actual,