

The Faith of the Gospel Vindicated:

SERMON II.

GALATIANS III. 11.

THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.

THE context informs us of the dreadful state of those who have not faith in Christ. That they are under the law, under the covenant of works; and, consequently, under the curse: for it is written, *As many as are of the works of the law, are under the curse—cursed is every one that continues not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.* What a wretched situation is this! Under the law, and under the curse! And this is not the state of the wicked profligate only; but of many *professedly* virtuous and pious: who are working *for* life, and *desire* to be under the law. Who are in bondage to the law, and have not *one desire* to be liberated! If an objection is made to their being placed upon a level with the profligate; let it be considered, that they are more especially, and *avowedly*, the enemies of the Lord Jesus Christ, and are more hostile to the Gospel, than those who never made any profession of Christianity!

Self-righteous thoughts and imaginations are as inimical to the attributes of Deity, as offensive to the Lord of glory, and as great a violation of his holy law, as the immorality, and open profanity of the profligate part of mankind! (Romans x. 2.) *For, they, going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for RIGHTEOUSNESS, to every one that believeth.* Here they are represented, in open rebellion *against the Lord, and against his anointed Son. the LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.* They are seeking justification by a righteousness of their own, in opposition to the righteousness of Christ! And the pompous language of their proud, self-righteous hearts, is, *We will be like the most High.* Is this the humility, self-abhorrence, and self-abasement, requisite in poor, lost, undone, rebellious sinners, when coming before a God of immaculate purity, and unsearchable holiness?

If any such persons are before me, I would address them in the language of Paul, "*Ye that desire to be under the law, do ye hear the law?*" *Do you hear its* extensive demands, its holiness, and purity? Do you hear its spiritual voice? Its threatening and condemning language, for the least violation, of any one of its righteous precepts? No, the law is more *spiritual*, more *holy*, and more extensive in its demands, and prohibitions,

than you are aware! The law of God is not like human laws, which condemn only for external transgressions; it extends to the thoughts, and intents of the heart!

It is thought a privilege, by some people, that human laws cannot condemn for *thinking*: but, it is not so with the Lord Jehovah, who searches the heart, tries the reins, and knows our every thought! The omnipresent God is privy to all your vain thoughts, and impure desires, which shame forbids you to reveal to mortals! He demands *truth in the inward parts*; but finds, in us, nothing but falsehood, iniquity, and rebellion!

The law is a glorious transcript of his immaculate purity, and teaches the holiness of a God! One sinful thought is a violation of all its righteous precepts! Oh Sirs! you that desire to be under the law; let me ask you once more, Do ye hear what it saith to you? Do you know that you are cursed by it? **CURSED IS EVERY ONE** that continues not in **ALL THINGS**, and you have not continued in *any one*; but violated every precept. You are not aware, I say, of its extensiveness, but are yet in nature's darkness and ignorance! If you had ever been taught by God's Spirit, you would see the consequence of being under the law—you would see its spirituality, purity, and holiness; and would confess, that by the law is only the knowledge of sin. It shews no mercy, nor lenity,

nor discovers any way of deliverance from sin! The letter killeth, but administers no healing, no life-giving balm!

In what state did the apostle find himself, when the law was brought home to his heart and conscience? He tells us in Romans vii. 9. *When the commandment came, sin revived and I died!* He died to all hopes of being justified by it, in the sight of God. And now let me ask the *convinced* sinner, how *he* views the law? what his experience is in this respect? You are ready to reply, poor sinner, in such language as this, "I see and feel myself condemned by the law, which is an administration of death, how am I to escape its dreadful sentence? Sin does, indeed, revive in me: and I feel myself incapable of subduing it! To whom, or where shall I flee for refuge?" Poor distressed soul, take comfort; the Eternal Spirit, who convinced you of sin, will carry on that work which he has begun in you; and give you a knowledge of salvation, by a crucified Jesus. Our text informs you, that justification, in the sight of God, is not by the works of the law, but, that the vilest of sinners, shall be cleansed from their sins in the blood of Jesus, obtain pardon through him, and live a life of faith on him: for

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The just, or justified ones, those who were eternally justified in Christ. Though I suppose that

is too ancient a date for some of you ; but, it must be so, consistent with the analogy of faith. For what is it to be justified, but to be acquitted from the wrath of divine justice, against sinners? And that God's people were thus acquitted, from eternity, is provable from his love. *I have loved thee with an everlasting love ;* (Jeremiah xxxi. 3.) and there is no wrath nor anger in love. To be just, or justified, is, also, to be delivered from all charge that justice may bring against the sinner. And were not the people of God thus holy, and without blame, by virtue of their union to Christ, from everlasting? Was not Christ set up from everlasting, as the righteousness of his people? And are they not completely justified in his righteousness? Nevertheless, this is not known to any of those justified ones, till revealed, by the Eternal Spirit, in their regeneration.

Having received the like precious faith, which is once revealed to all the saints, the soul is enabled to look to Christ. And is made happy in the knowledge of this, rejoicing that he stands in a justified state! Happy, being free from all condemnation, and at peace with God. He has now access to him, free access—can approach him as his gracious God, and loving Father, in Christ Jesus. Looking to Christ by faith, having peace with God, his love shed abroad in his heart, he has fellowship with him as his God, his Father, and his friend!

Persons, possessing this charming experience,

are the just intended in our text; who shall live by their faith. And, Christians, your experience attests the truth of this. May the Eternal Spirit, then, engage your hearts and attention, while I consider,

I. The blessed effects of faith.

II. The qualities and properties of faith.

First, the blessed effects of faith; of that precious faith in Christ, which brings joy, peace, comfort, consolation, and full satisfaction, to the justified soul!

How precious must that faith be which has the Spirit for its operator, Christ for its object, and which brings the sinner, arrayed in Immanuel's righteousness, near to the infinitely holy Jehovah, who communes with him as a man with his friend! Which assures him that he shall dwell with the Lord for ever! That he has, agreeable to the eternal promise, an inheritance in the skies, where God shall wipe all tears from his eyes; where all sorrow and distress shall be for ever banished, and where the whole soul, swallowed up in the beatific vision of God, shall, with inexpressible delight, gaze upon the dear God-man, who redeemed him with his own blood!

O invaluable blessing! Is it ours? Do we feel the influence of this precious faith? If so, we are

experimentally acquainted with its powerful and wonderful effects,

First, in delivering the poor distressed, and self-condemned sinner from that dreadful law-work upon the conscience, which all God's people, in some measure, experience. O! what dreadful apprehensions, and tormenting expectations of divine wrath, are then felt by the convicted criminal! Convinced of the awful disparity between the pure law of God, and his polluted heart and life, his most earnest and insatiate enquiry is, "*What shall I do to be saved?*"

He feels sin warring in every member, and strives against it; but in vain; it overcomes him; and daily carries him captive in its odious and galling chains! This is to convince him, that sin is conquered only in the strength of Jesus! In vain does he strive in his own strength; for every struggle he makes, serves but to convince him that he is a helpless sinner; and that he must unavoidably fall a victim to sin, which is the dreadful sting of death!

In the 24th and 26th verses of the context, the law is spoken of under the character of a school-master. According to some, the *ceremonial* law, to teach and instruct; as this law taught the Jewish church, through types and shadows, to look to the great and illustrious Antitype, the adorable Redeemer. But as this epistle was written to a Gentile

church, I think it is very evident that the decalogue, or law of Ten commands, is intended, which teaches the holiness and purity of God, and shews the exceeding sinfulness of sin. And as it is the office of a school-master, not only to give instruction, but also to correct and chastise; the law severely chastises, and rigorously condemns, for the least transgression of its righteous precepts!

You that have felt this law work in your consciences, have known the severe correction of this school-master. But mark the design of God: *The law was our school-master to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith; but after that faith is come, we are no longer under a school-master.* Faith delivers from the law. It enlightens the eyes of the sin-despairing soul, to look to Christ; to behold him as the way to God, paying his ten-thousand-talent debt to inflexible justice, and standing in the sinner's place, as *the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.* (Romans x. 4.) Faith teaches him to see his sins in the wounds of Christ, whose precious blood heals his wounded conscience, and sets him at happy liberty! He is no longer *under a spirit of bondage to fear, but has received the spirit of adoption, whereby he cries, Abba, Father!* (Romans viii. 15.) O! happy experience! Wonderful change!—Brought out of darkness *into marvellous light,* (1 Peter ii. 9.) from death to life, (James ii. 10.) from a prison of bondage to

perfect liberty, from sorrow, almost insupportable, to joy, unspeakable, and full of glory!

Before this wonderful change took place, the poor sinner was shut up in bondage to the law, and crying in the bitterness of his soul, *A wounded spirit who can bear!* His wounds appeared to him incurable, and his salvation impossible! And in this state, he must have continued, had not the skilful hand of the great Physician, who wounded him, applied the balm of Gilead. No cure from any other! No other hand can administer relief to the wounded conscience! It is the prerogative of God alone, *to kill, and make alive; to wound, and make whole.* (Deuteronomy xxxii. 39.)

No wounds like those a wounded spirit feels,
No cure for such, till God, who makes them, heals.

COWPER.

O what a sweet healing balm is the blood of Jesus! It cleanses from all sin, heals the wounded conscience, and administers peace to the troubled mind. By faith in this precious sin-cleansing blood, the sinner is brought near to his covenant God, and Father!

By faith the sinner looks to the man Christ Jesus, and affectionately embraces the record that God gives concerning his Son! He hears the proclamation of Divine forgiveness with rapture and astonishment! Such a charming invitation as this, is music in his ears, and inexpressible joy

to his regenerated soul: "*Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.*" (Isaiah i. 18.)

Are you convinced that this Scripture is descriptive of your state! If so, it must be truly precious to you. What can be more delightful than to hear the great God proclaim himself a God of pardon! but it cannot be sweet to any but the convinced sinner. This precious balm cannot be valuable to those who never had a wound. "They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." It is the sin-sick soul, wounded by the arrow of Divine conviction, who is here addressed; to whom the Lord hath made known the purity of the law, and the exceeding sinfulness of sin! By *the law is the knowledge of sin*; and, therefore, the Lord always speaks first by the law, to convince of sin, before he reveals his Divine pardon in Christ. As in the foregoing part of this first chapter of Isaiah, (v. 15.) *When ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear; your hands are full of blood.* This is the voice of God's law, wherein he expresses his disapprobation of sin—that he cannot accept of any offering by the law of works; for the law knows nothing of pardon, and remission of sins. And, saith the Lord, *their hands are full of blood,*—they are yet un-

cleansed ; therefore, in his strict justice and holiness, his *soul hateth* their *sacrifices* ! And he not only declares his disapprobation of their sin, but farther insists upon their *spotless purity*, ere they can appear before him ! (v. 16.) *Wash ye, make ye clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, cease to do evil.* This is not a condition of salvation, but the demand of inflexible justice. Not the voice of the Gospel, but of the law. It is a blessing to know, when the Lord speaks in his strict justice, as an absolute God, and when in his infinite mercy in Christ Jesus, as a God pardoning iniquity : for the want of making this distinction, many err ; not *knowing the Scripture*, nor the voice of the law from the voice of the Gospel ! On which account, I have taken the liberty of making this digression.

Observe, here then, that the Lord speaks in his law, before he makes the precious invitation contained in the 18th verse. And thus he powerfully speaks to all his dear people, before he speaks pardon to their souls ; that they may see the necessity of being washed, and cleansed, to appear acceptable before a God of perfect holiness ! As we read again, in Isaiah xliii. 22—25. *But thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob ! but thou hast been weary of me, O Israel. Thou hast not brought me the small cattle of thy burnt offerings, neither hast thou honoured me with thy sacrifices. I have not caused thee to serve with an offering,*

nor wearied thee with incense. Thou hast bought me no sweet cane with money, neither hast thou filled me with the fat of thy sacrifices; but thou hast made me serve with thy sins, thou hast wearied me with thy iniquity. Hearing these complicated crimes alledged against him, called over by Jehovah himself, what can the expectation of the convicted sinner be, but to hear the awful sentence, *Depart thou cursed; as thou hast wearied me with thine iniquity, I justly consign thee to the gloomy regions of eternal horror!*

But, thus alarmed of his danger, convinced of sin, and driven from all his false refuges, Divine mercy interposes, and Jehovah speaks as a God of grace; informing him, that though sin hath abounded like a sea, free grace abounds like an ocean! *I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions, for my own sake, and will not remember thy sins.*

Had I the tongue of an angel, I could not express half that joy, peace, and comfort, which this administers to the soul! O the sweetness of Divine forgiveness! To hear the great God say—*I, even I am he, against whom you have sinned, that blotteth out thy transgressions; and if I lay nothing to your charge, who shall? It is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth?* (Romans viii. 34.) *It is Christ that died, whose blood cleanses from all sin; (1 John i. 7.)* Therefore, not for your sake, will I do this, but for my own

sake; for the sake of the oath, the promise, and the blood of my everlasting covenant. *This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them: and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.* (Hebrews x. 16, 17.)

Now is the invitation peculiarly precious! Because seasonable, and very applicable! Now is it, indeed, applied by almighty power, and spoken in all the sweetness of pardoning love!—Come *now*, and let us reason together; even *now*, though you have lifted up arms of hostility against me: *now* you are convinced of your sin, and are made willing to lay down your weapons of rebellion with which you have been fighting against Christ, and his truth; *come now*, wait not to make any preparation, come just as you are, for *now* will I magnify my free grace in your salvation!

Come unto me, now you have tried various ways, and cannot find any one, for an escape from endless ruin; *let us reason together*; I have found out a way, whereby my justice shall be glorified, and harmonize with mercy in the pardon of all your sins! You are *reasoning* within yourself, saying, There is no hope of being saved, consistent with strict justice,—no pardon, no forgiveness for me;—Cast away this carnal reasoning about the impossibility of your salvation; *My grace is sufficient for you: though your sins be*

as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool!

Such precious invitation being thus, powerfully applied to the soul, the sinner's terrific fear of Divine wrath is all dissipated, and he draws near to God at a gracious throne. *Having, therefore, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which he hath consecrated for us, through the vail, that is to say, his flesh; and having an high priest over the House of God, he draws near with a true heart, in full ASSURANCE OF FAITH, having his heart sprinkled from an evil conscience.* (Hebrews x. 9.)

This is the blessed effect of faith, teaching the sinner to look alone to Christ for pardon, and,

Second, To the RIGHTEOUSNESS OF CHRIST for justification. Being comfortably, and wonderfully, delivered from the spirit of bondage, the believer goes on his way rejoicing; *looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of his faith.* He is filled with all joy and peace in believing; for *the Lord hath put a new song in his mouth, even praise unto our God,* (Psalm xl. iii.) and he addresses the true worshippers of God, like the Psalmist, *Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul.* (Psalm lxvi. 16.) *He brought me up out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon*

a rock, and established my goings. He hath given me faith in Christ, his dear Son—O precious faith! *I had fainted, unless I had BELIEVED to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.* (Psalm xxvii. 13.) *He is gracious unto me, and hath delivered me from going down to the pit, having found a ransom—the precious Christ, who is the LORD my RIGHTEOUSNESS!* I now disclaim my own righteousness, which is as *filthy rags*, and look entirely to Christ for justification; *for, behold, God is my salvation, I will trust, and not be afraid, for the LORD JEHOVAH is my strength, and my song, he also is become my salvation.* (Isaiah xii. 2.)

Faith looks *to*, and rejoices *in*, the righteousness of Christ. It desires no other. The believer, under its animating influence, breathes out the desires of his soul to God, like an inspired apostle, *I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.*—(Philippians iii. 8. 9.)

Faith puts on the righteousness of Christ as the *best robe, the wedding garment*, the only clothing in which the soul can appear before God! The believer wishes thus to be found in Christ, at all

times ; whenever he waits upon God in the ordinances of his house, or in his more retired and private moments, in his approaches to the Lord in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving ; in the hour of death, and at the day of judgment : assured that he is the only blessed man, *unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works.* (Romans iv. 6.)

He views himself as eternally justified in this spotless righteousness. *Being justified, by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,* (Romans v. 1.) was the triumphant language of Paul, and is the language of every believer. He has peace with God, for his sins are removed, and he stands for ever *complete* in Christ ! The law of God, which stood written against him, is *magnified*, and made *honourable*, in his justification by Christ's righteousness, and, the once frowning justice now smiles upon him : *For CHRIST is the end of the law for RIGHTEOUSNESS TO EVERY ONE THAT BELIEVETH.* (ROMANS X. 4.)

Third, Faith fixes steadfastly upon Christ ; which proves it to be genuine : for it is the nature of faith to be steadfast, as we read in Colossians ii. 5. "*Joying and beholding your order, and the steadfastness of your faith.*" The man who has not faith, *is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed ;* (James i. 6.) while the believer is built up in his *most holy faith* upon

the unmoveable rock of ages! He daily discovers more of the corruptions of his nature, his weakness, and insufficiency to perform any thing truly good; *for without me, saith Christ, ye can do nothing.* (John xv. 5) Knowing this, by experience, he looks to the Almighty Jesus for every thing, and fixes steadfastly upon him, being assured, that none but Christ can do him any good. *For other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.* (1 Corinthians iii. 11.) *This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner: neither is there salvation in any other.* (Acts iv. 11, 12.) *For thus saith the Lord God, behold I lay in Zion for a foundation, a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.* (Isaiah xxviii. 16.) And the reason why he shall not make haste, is obvious: Faith fixes steadfastly on Christ the *sure* foundation, and gives him boldness and courage in the day of trouble! *The wicked flee when no man pursueth; but the righteous are bold as a lion.* (Proverbs xxviii. 1.)

Christ is all in all to the believer: his wishes, desires, affections, hopes, joys, confidence and expectations, all centre in the adorable Redeemer; and he feels, daily, more of the necessity of being saved by his infinitely free grace.

He no longer *halts between two opinions,* (1 Kings xviii. 21.) nor carnally asks with Pilate,

What is truth? The Spirit of truth hath led him into all truth. (John xvi. 13.) That precious promise is made good to his soul, Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. The power and influence of truth have made him free from the dominion of sin, and all slavish fear; and from the erroneous doctrines of the man of sin. He is no more tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lay in wait to deceive: but speaking the truth in love, grows up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ. (Ephesians iv. 14, 15.)

False Christs, and false prophets may cry, *Lo here, or, Lo there is Christ*, he does not believe them; he is better taught, and *knows not the voice of strangers*, so as to be allured by them: he *hears the great Shepherd's voice, and follows him. Leaning upon his Beloved*, he addresses him in this joyful, and affectionate language, *My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed, I will sing and give praise; for in point of justification in the sight of God, I am determined not to know any thing save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory. Whom have I in Heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee.*

In all the vicissitudes and changes which he

must unavoidably experience, in this world of misery and woe, he thus triumphs in Christ: *The Lord liveth, and blessed be my rock: and let the God of my salvation be exalted.* (Psalm xviii. 46.) *Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be on the vines, the labour of the olive shall fail, and the field shall yield no meat; the flocks shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. For Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.*

His faith, which fixes so steadfastly upon Christ, is a soul-supporting assurance, that nothing can ever separate from him; relying upon his invincible grace, he bids defiance to all his enemies ever to cause a separation.

I have a mansion in his heart,
Nor death nor hell shall make us part. WATTS.

The world, with its delusive smiles, entices him, or, by its persecuting frowns, endeavours to deter him from following Christ; but in vain; *for whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world, and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.* (1 John v. 4.)

Satan also makes use of a thousand fraudulent arts, in order to attract him, or by fiery temptations strives violently to separate him from Christ: and this implacable foe certainly would accomplish

his design, did not Christ hold him fast, for he has an heart prone to wander from his God: the *old man* is always ready to yield: but Jesus saith, *none shall pluck him out of my hand.* Faith, in such a precious promise, looks to Christ, its *shield*, *wherewith he is able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked!*

These enticements, and temptations, are overruled for his good; for they have a tendency to endear Christ to his soul. Thereby he has fresh instances of the Almighty power of Jesus, to *deliver the godly out of temptation*; and, being more abundantly convinced of his own inability, to repel the force of the enemy, it causes him to cleave closer to Christ, and to look unto him the Strong for strength.

He trembles at the very thought of departing from the Almighty Saviour! His language is, *Lord! to whom shall I go? thou hast the words of eternal life; and I believe, and am sure, that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*

Thy name, my inmost powers adore,
 Thou art my life, my joy, my care;
 Depart from thee!—'tis death—'tis more,
 'Tis endless ruin, deep despair. STEELE.

Sin, earth and hell united, cannot move him from his steadfastness. They may very much distress him, but cannot destroy him; for he is kept by the power of God; and is likened *unto a wise man that built his house upon a rock; and the*