

BIBLICAL CRITICISMS

AND ILLUSTRATIONS OF

EXPERIMENTAL GODLINESS.

No. XVIII.] SATURDAY, MAY 15, 1824. [Price 2d.

Τα πάντα καὶ ἐν παντί Χριστός.—PAUL.

Christ all and in all. COL. III. 11.

QUESTION.

LIMEHOUSE, MONDAY, MAY 10, 1824.

What is that spirituality of worship, insisted on by Christ himself, in John iv. 22. and how is salvation of the Jews?

SOLUTION.

HOW little we know, after every laborious and studious research, of spirituality, or that doctrine, which is scientifically denominated *Pneumatology*: for though we possess immortal spirits; they are, through the fall, so confined to the earth, that our ideas can scarcely extend, farther than to visible and material objects: and indeed, when we are led to make an intellectual effort, to ascend above materiality, in pursuit of the knowledge of *spirit*, as distinct from matter, the wings of our eager imagination soon tire, and we sink again to our centre, the earth, with minds imprisoned in our bodies, and chained to corporeal images, from which we cannot liberate our thoughts: in fact, when we pursue *Pneumatology*, *merely* as a *sublime science*, our comprehension is indebted to material objects, through the figurative medium of which, we discern in our wonderful organization, an infinitely more noble part than that of the body—that we possess an immortal mind, which is “the standard of man;” and are constrained to say, with STERNE, “I know that I have a soul, nor can all the books which

have been written against it, convince me to the contrary." But the acute reasonings, subtle disquisitions, and critical disputations on the doctrine of *spirits*, I shall leave to a WATTS, a LOCKE, or a BACON; while, in answering this Question, I confine myself to the Pneumatology of the Sacred Volume; to the spirituality insisted upon, as necessary to the true worship of God, by the Lord Jesus himself. While they are finely, and very pleasingly distinguishing between *matter* and *spirit*, be it mine "to distinguish between things that differ," as stated and separated descriptively in the word of God. And be it my triumph, and yours, this evening, not only to say, "I know that I have a soul," but I *know* that I have a *redeemed* and an *effectually-called* soul! redeemed by Christ, regenerated by the Holy Spirit, and loved with an ever-asting love!

For this knowledge, we are indebted to the word of the Lord; and for a comprehension of the spiritual things of that word, to the Holy Spirit of amazingly free grace.

1. Spirituality or immateriality. Two of the most natural and obvious ideas, which we can form of a *spirit*, are, that it is incorporeal and invisible. Without bodily parts, and invisible to mortal eyes. Consequently we have no optical nor mensurable assistance in the formation of our judgment on this elevated subject.

2. God is a SPIRIT: whom, not *having seen* we love, and believing rejoice, in him with joy unspeakable and full of glory. He is an Eternal and perfectly Independent Spirit; giving being and life to all creatures; in his own Essence DISTINCT from and INCONCEIVABLY EXALTED ABOVE them all. God OVER or ABOVE all for ever blessed; The only object of worship; and who must be worshipped in *spirit* and in truth. He is *incorporeal*: for though we read of his *arm*, his *hand* his *fingers*, his *eye*, his *ear*, these are but symbols of his power, wisdom, still, omni-presence, and never-ceasing attention to his dear people. In his immensity of Essence he is all eye, and all ear, he beholds the very *minutiae* of every object, and hears every distinct sound, thro' immeasurable space!

He is all wisdom, all strength, all understanding! He not only possesses it, but he is the thing itself, "I am understanding." If you possess a little spiritual knowledge, it was DERIVED from him; but he is unsearchable wisdom itself: Underived, uncreated, eternal! His inconceivable and soul-overwhelming *existence*, called, in our language,

GOD ! And surely no man in his senses, would presume to be his *equal* ; or to be *like him* ! For “ who, (saith an inspired writer) is like unto the Lord our God ! ”

3. The HOLY SPIRIT, as a distinct person in the Divine Essence, is so denominated emphatically and distinctively, because he enters *invisibly* into the hearts of his people to create their *spiritual, new, or divine nature*. But though *invisible* his gracious power is very sensibly felt : as saith the precious Redeemer, John iii. 8. “ The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but cannot tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth : so is every one that is born of the SPIRIT. By the most palpable and undeniable sensations, we know the impressions of his love ; but how it is that he operates we see not, nor can describe. Yet we might as well presume to deny the blowing of the wind, on account of its invisibility as the sin-subduing and Christ exalting work of the Holy Spirit.

4. His work, and covenant office is to create in his people a *spiritual* mind : without which it is impossible to worship God with that *spirituality* which now forms our theme. “ For to be carnally minded is death, but to be *spiritually* minded is life and peace.” (Rom. viii. 6.)

A carnal man cannot *truly* worship the Lord. But in order that they may worship him, his people are born of the Spirit, and possess

1. *Spiritual life*, Rom. viii. 1, 2. They feel the weight and burden of sin, but feel also, that burden removed, by him who bore our sins on his own body on the tree. They are become dead to sin and the world ; to law terrors, and all slavish fear of wrath, by the body of Christ.

2. *Spiritual* understanding, (Col. i. 9.) by which they discern the things of the Spirit, that the natural man cannot receive.

3. The *Spirit* of adoption (Rom. viii. 15.) by which they call God their Father, taste his grace, enjoy his great love, and walk in the light of his countenance ! They know the love which God hath for them, which knowledge casteth out all their former slavish fear.

4. The SPIRIT of liberty. They are made free by Christ who hath brought them out of the prison-house, knocked off their massy chains of unbelief, and led them home to himself, to range at large over the widely extended plains of his bleeding love.

5. **SPIRITUAL holiness.** They are the only holy people in the world: for the Holy Spirit hath created them in *righteousness* and *true holiness*. True, genuine, heaven-descended, and heart-felt holiness; which comes *from* and leads *to* God; which teaches them to ascribe **HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD!** Holiness of heart which looks to Christ for every thing, and trusts wholly in his sacrifice and atonement, his precious blood, and everlasting righteousness!

We are come now to consider the spirituality of worship, homage, adoration, love, praise, prayer, and thanksgiving, in which they most humbly, sincerely, and fervently engage before the throne of God and the Lamb. And let it be observed **FIRST**, that God is the object, the only object, of their worship, as the Spirit leads them through blood divine, into the sacred presence!

On the great object of all worship, how sublimely the Psalmist *exhorts* and *directs* the people of God: Psalm xcix. 5, 9. "Exalt the Lord our God, and worship at his footstool: for he is holy." At his footstool, bow with self-abasement, and let the Lord our God alone, be exalted in your prayer, and praise: in your affections and desires; for he is **HOLY**; and his holiness is exalted and magnified in your salvation. At the 9th verse he says; "Worship at his holy hill;" that is, at Mount Zion, where you are most felicitously brought; and where he has commanded the blessing, even life for evermore!

2. This worship is peculiar to the people of God. For all other professors of religion, worship *ignorantly* and *vainly*. As evidence, hear the faithful address of Paul to the Athenians. "Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things, ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription: **TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.** Whom, therefore, ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you." (Acts xvii. 2, 3.) How applicable this is to numerous professors, I will leave you to determine, who are taught of God to worship him in spirit and in truth. For every man who is *unregenerated*, of whatever name or denomination, is, with respect to the love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in our glorious salvation, equally as ignorant of God as the Athenians, who were in arts and sciences, the most enlightened people then! on the earth! But another convincing and more striking proof of this awful truth, presents itself

to us, in the solemn address of Christ himself to the more religiously enlightened JEWS. "Ye hypocrites! well did Isaias prophecy of you, saying, this people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honour me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. But *in vain do they worship me*, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." (Matt. xv. 7—9.)

All the ordinances of God's house, are attended to zealously, and scrupulously! but alas! they are vainly puffed up in their fleshly minds; and imagine that their external performances are a recommendation to the favor, and will merit the smiles of God, to their admittance into the world of glory! Awful deception! But the work-mongers of our age, love to have it so, because they are at enmity with unmerited grace! They stumble at that stumbling-stone, Christ Jesus, in whom his people are chosen, and by whom they are completely redeemed, and saved with an everlasting salvation!

3. But the true worshippers, who worship the Father in Spirit and in truth, are a people SOUGHT OUT and TAUGHT OF GOD, to draw near to him, through Christ, with the whole heart engaged in prayer for his covenant favors, or in praise for mercies already received, and blessings graciously conferred upon them. The Father gives them an heart to worship him, he inclines them to seek his face, and then graciously takes them into fellowship with himself, (verse 23.) "For the preparation of the heart in man and the answer of the tongue, is from the Lord." (Prov. xvi. 1.) David found it so by blessed experience, and acknowledged the power of God, "When thou saidst, seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face Lord will I seek." (Psalm xxvii. 8.) The Father first "seeks such to worship him," and encourages them to seek his face, or they would *never* worship him. He brings them to his footstool, to his holy hill, to Sion! he administers pardon, and causeth his face to shine upon them, and they are saved from their ignorance, delivered from all legal dependencies, and formality of worship. Whether they engage publicly, socially, or privately in his service, they are not satisfied, except their heart is with God—except they hear their Father's sweet voice of invitation, "Seek my face;" and then they answer in a way peculiar to themselves; not merely with their lips, but their HEART replies, and it is

only the language of the heart, that has the divine regard and attention! The broken and contrite *heart* alone, in every department of his worship, is the acceptable sacrifice of our God!

4. They worship in *spirit* and in *truth*. Hence the absolute impossibility for an unregenerated man to worship God. He is altogether carnal, dead in sin, and alienated from the *life* of God through the ignorance there is in him! The soul that worships in spirit, is born of the Spirit, has received the Spirit of Christ, (Rom. viii. 9) and spiritually enters into the truth, which the natural man cannot receive. (1 Cor. ii. 12—16.)

He worships with the *spirit* of faith, hope, love, and strong confidence in God. The promises are regarded by him, not as those of man, who may violate his word, but of God who cannot lie! Whose exceedingly great and precious promises are yea and amen, in Christ Jesus, to the glory of his covenant Father! And this delightful view of the promises gives him boldness to enter the holiest of all, through the blood of Jesus, where he holds communion with God, and worships him in *spirit*—with his whole heart. All his powers of soul unite to adore his covenant God. The will, the understanding, the affections, wishes, and desires of the *new* man, the *spirit* which opposes the flesh, all aspire after Christ, and in him enjoy and rejoice in the great blessings of Eternal Salvation! Salvation all of grace *unsought*, and never wished for by him, till drawn by the Father, to his dearly beloved Son. (John vi. 44.) He worships in truth; the Spirit of truth has delivered him from error, brought him out of the “*refuge of lies*,” where he was attempting to hide himself from the storm of divine wrath. That is, from his Arminianism, and legal hopes of salvation, and has graciously led him to JESUS, the way, the TRUTH, and the life. He knows the truth of the Scriptures by experience—by what the Lord hath taught him—and rejoices that they testify of Christ, (John v. 39.) which testimony is confirmed in him by the Spirit, who hath led him into all *truth*. Error becomes detestable, in proportion as truth becomes precious; divinely guided, he walks in the truth, leaning on the beloved of his soul; and “draws near with a TRUE HEART, in full assurance of faith.” (Heb. x. 22.)

Having described the worshippers, I shall now beg your

attention, for a short time, to the spiritual worship in which they are engaged, to their comfort, and God's glory.

TO WORSHIP: what is it? We have the word worship," from the Saxon *worthscipe*, adoration." (Dr. Ash.) The Greek verb employed in this 4th chapter of John, by Christ himself, *προσκυνω*, has at least three acceptations.

1. It is rendered by the Latin, *oscular*, to kiss, to embrace. So the church, when she finds him without, in his public worship, kisses the beloved of her soul, who is as a brother, that sucked the breasts of her mother, the covenant of grace (Solomon's Song, viii. 1.)

2. *Adoro*, To pray unto, to beseech, to adore. They pray with the Spirit and with understanding also. So great is their weakness, and so numerous their necessities, that they have daily need to pray, and not to faint, and when prayer is answered, they can but *adore* the grace, and magnify Christ, out of whose fulness they have received, and grace upon grace.

3. *Veneror*. To honor, to venerate. They ascribe honor and glory, to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, to whom be the honor and glory of our salvation, for ever and ever. To worship God, then is,

1. To ascribe unto him, all honor and *power*, according to the very exalted and spiritually animated exhortation of a writer inspired with love to Jehovah: Psalm xxix. i. 2. "Give unto the Lord, O ye mighty! give unto the Lord glory and strength. Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name; WORSHIP the Lord in the BEAUTY of HOLINESS." With *holiness of heart*, such as the Holy Spirit creates in opposition to the flesh. Let not carnal nature have any thing to do with your worship. Stand adoring before his throne, O ye mighty! clothed in the holiness of Christ. Give unto him, O ye who are strong in his strength, and MIGHTY through God; give unto him the glory due for that strength, and all the glory for your election, predestination to eternal life, redemption, regeneration, justification, and perseverance to the present moment. O may grace enable us to say with affectionate gratitude, and triumphant praise, "Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever, Amen."

2. Divested of all fleshly confidence, to bow before the Divine Throne, with reliance on the blood and righteousness of Christ alone, for acceptance with the Father:—Hence the beautiful description of worship, given by Paul,

“We are the circumcision, which worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.” (Phil. iii. 3.)

Think not, O ye deluded Arminians! that God will accept of you for your prayers or tears: or on account of any merit whatever of your own! Alas! would he, you possess none; for your righteousnesses are as filthy rags: be it known unto you, that sinners are accepted only in Christ, the beloved; and those who worship God in Spirit and in truth, rejoice alone in him, before whom they humbly bow, and ascribe, “Blessing, and honor and glory, and power, to him that sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb for ever!”

3. To love and adore the Lord, approaching him with filial fear, and voluntary submission to his all-wise, unerring and gracious will. Saying, from the sweetest sensations, I will love thee, O Lord my strength!

Before I dismiss the subject, I feel it incumbent on me, to answer the latter part of the Question, which must be done with much brevity; *How is salvation of the JEWS?*

1. The Messiah was promised to God’s favorite nation. “There shall come out of Sion, the deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob.” (Rom. xi. 26.)

2. Thus born of the Jewish race, “He came unto his own, but his own received him not.” He came FIRST unto his own people, the Jews, that prophesy might be fulfilled: Say unto the daughters of Sion, behold your king cometh, meek and lowly, riding upon an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of an ass. Hence his reply to the woman of Cana, “I am not sent, but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” (Matt. xv. 24.)

3. He was the son and seed of Abraham, and of David; hence salvation sprang out of that nation; and blessed be God, extends now, has extended for centuries to the Gentile nations, and will, till the ends of the earth know the salvation of our God!

QUESTION FOR NEXT MONDAY EVENING.

What character is set forth in the parable of the barren fig-tree, LUKE XIII. 6—9.

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No. XIX.] SATURDAY, MAY 22, 1824. [Price 2d.

Τα πάντα και εν παντι Χριστος.—PAUL.

Christ all and in all. COL. III. 11.

QUESTION.

LIMEHOUSE, MONDAY, MAY 17, 1824.

What character is set forth in the parable of the barren fig-tree, LUKE XIII. 6—9.

SOLUTION.

THIS parable is a striking exhibition and declaration, of the just judgments of God against sinners, who despise the riches of his grace, by persecuting his ministering servants, and by opposing and endeavoring to hinder the progress of the gospel, by misrepresentations of, and malignant accusations against its pure, peaceable, and Christ-glorifying doctrines of free grace and bleeding love. The character here primarily designed, and immediately spoken to, by Christ, we may learn from the context; in which he calls upon the posterity of his ancient people the Jews, to *repent* as a rebellious nation, or that the awful consequences would be their final and total destruction. That their city would be destroyed, their house left unto them desolate; and that as a nation, they would be deserted of God, and completely annihilated! But I consider, that **THREE DISTINCT CHARACTERS** are represented by the **BARREN FIG TREE.**

FIRST. The Jews, who rejected and maliciously persecuted their Messiah.

SECOND. A **BARREN** church of Christ; and

THIRD, A BARREN believer, or backslider.

All of which answer very strikingly to this parabolical description in almost every instance.

1. The Jewish nation is principally intended. “*A certain man had a fig tree planted, &c.*” The Eternal Jehovah took a nation to himself, which he placed in his own *αμπελωγ* (*ampelōn*) or under his own peculiar care and government; separated them from all other people on the earth, and loaded them with distinguishing blessings: gave them his word, his worship, his ordinances, and sent unto them his prophets: was a wall around them, their glory in the midst of them, and a sure defence against all their enemies!

But alas! How surprisingly awful their ungrateful, and highly rebellious conduct! Amidst all their distinguishing enjoyments they are “a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil doers!” What a delineation of the human heart, without sin subduing grace! and of what we ourselves should be, dear believers, if not kept by the power of God: if not preserved every moment by his invisible, yet sweetly influential mercy! Are we better than they? No, in no wise! Then glorify *discriminating* grace, and bless the Lord that he has not only given us his word and worship, but also sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, under whose sweet witness, we cry Abba Father!

And though at various times, vast numbers of the Jews were cut off, for their national crimes, by immediate judgments from heaven, or by destructive war, Jehovah had always in the midst of them, an *especially chosen few*; a people within a people, who knew, loved, worshipped, and walked spiritually with the Lord their God: for whose sake that rebellious nation, was spared through succeeding generations, till God had “accomplished the number of his elect” among them, and the appointed time arrived for the gospel to be taken from them, and given to a people, (even to us unworthy Gentiles) who should bring forth the fruits thereof, through grace’s influence, to the glory of distinguishing love.

As indubitable evidence that the Jewish nation is intended in this parable, read Isai. v. 1—7. “*Now will I sing to my well-beloved, a song of my beloved touching his vineyard: my well beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill.*” That is, in Jerusalem.” “*And he fenced it,*

and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a wine press therein, and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes." This is strikingly descriptive of their national privileges.—
 "And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? Wherefore when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?" Jehovah sets forth in this complaint, most gloriously, his distinguishing goodness, and their base ingratitude, as a people who were bound, by all the ties of exalted privileges, to obey the national laws, which the Lord had given them, and the covenant which he had made with them as his own nation. The Lord did not look for the fruits of grace: that he had not given them, or it would unavoidably have produced corresponding obedience.

"He came seeking FRUIT, and found none" You will ask, perhaps, what fruit could they possibly produce without grace? To which I reply, Jehovah had a right to expect that they would most scrupulously attend to his prohibition, and avoid all *idolatry*; that they would most devoutly attend to his divine mandates; and kindly receive, the various messages he sent them by his inspired prophets: he had blessed them with every external advantage above all other nations, and had a right to expect from them every *external* and practical act of obedience to his revealed will.

For the covenant which he had made with them as a people, was, indeed, a *conditional covenant*, that on the ground of their obedience, he engaged to protect, defend, bless, and keep them together as a nation: the tenor of which covenant is as follows: "If ye shall despise my statutes or if your soul abhor my judgments so that ye will not do all my commandments, but that ye **BREAK MY COVENANT**, I also will do this unto you, I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning ague, that shall consume the eyes, and cause sorrow of heart, and ye shall sow your seed in vain for your enemies shall eat it," &c. (Levit. xxvi. 14—20.) Blessed be the name of the Lord, that he hath made "a **BETTER** covenant" with us, (Heb. viii. 6.) a *new, unconditional*, and everlasting covenant of grace, in Christ, confirmed by his oath, and sealed

with Blood Divine ! or, if we may call it a *conditional* covenant, the *conditions* are all on the part of God himself to perform, who worketh all our works *in us*. Who worketh in us, to will and to do, of his own good pleasure ; and who will execute all the purposes of his heart, and council of his will, in bringing many sons to glory.

But the house of Israel violated every precept, and condition of their *national* covenant, and as the **BARREN FIG TREE**, brought forth no fruit : but on the contrary,

1. Made void, and transgressed “ the commandments of God by their traditions,” (Mat. xv. 3.) In like manner the professors of Christianity in this our highly favored nation, are most grievously making void the *doctrines of eternal grace*, by calling them *antinomianism*, and substituting in their stead, the execrable trash of *free-will*, *creature-righteousness*, *fleshly sanctity*, and the *deceptive* appearance of *external piety*, or “ A FAIR SHEW IN THE FLESH.” (Gal. vi. 12.) while their hearts are at enmity with God and sacred truth!

“ Shall I not visit for these things, saith the Lord, shall not my soul be avenged of such a nation as this.” The Lord continue our invaluable privileges ! For like the Jews we have been singularly indulged, and alas ! like the Jews, we have most awfully rebelled, and contemned the riches of his mercy, as a nation, by a *deistical* contempt of his holy word, and an Arminian reprobation of the unalterable council of his will, and the aboundings of his *free* grace, *unmeritedly* free to the chief of sinners !

2. They stoned, and mal-treated, in various ways, the prophets sent unto them. And which of the ministers of Christ, who now faithfully preach the truth of God, and detect error, escape the reproaches and persecutions of the professors of religion, (not of the carnal part of the community) of the **VERY PROFESSORS OF CHRISTIANITY**, in this day of abounding profession ?

3. They turned to idolatry ; as the Lord complains by the mouth of Isaiah : “ Their land is full of idols : they worship the work of their own hands : that which their own fingers had made.” (Isaiah ii. 8.) And that man who now trusts in, and boasts of his own righteousness, in any way, or under any pretence whatever, is equally as much an idolator, as if he devoutly bowed down to a God of wood or stone !

4. They “fasted for debate and strife, and to smite with the fist of wickedness.” Their hypocritical fasts; “their new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with, (saith the Lord) it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting.” (Isaiah i. 13, &c.) For in their hateful hypocrisy, they disfigure their faces, that they may be seen of men to fast. Verily (saith a precious Christ, who reads their hypocritical hearts) they have their reward.” For in the first place, they obtain here all they wish; the praises of men. But in the second place, they are treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath! and, if grace prevent not, will obtain for themselves a dismal hell!

5. They **OPPRESSED THE POOR**, whose grievances, not only cried in the ears of the Lord of Hosts for redress, but as loudly cried for vengeance and destruction upon those rich, opulent, proud, and hard hearted professors, that constituted a nation of hypocrites, detestable in the eyes of him, who, in his tender mercy, is the friend of the poor, a father to the fatherless, and a husband to the widow!

“Then said he unto the *Ἀμπελουργός* (*Ampelourgós*) the gatherer of grapes, the vine-dresser, (whose incumbent duty it was, to see that the vineyard brought forth fruit) Behold, these three years, I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none,” &c. How admirably this character illustrates the covenant undertakings of Christ, who was bound to render his own peculiar vineyard, his beloved church, not only *fruitful* in every good word and work, but to present her before the throne of his Father, with all the holiness of his own obedience, and all the odoriferous perfumes of his sacrifice of bleeding love; more grateful and delicious, than the nectareous sweetness and luscious fruits of the most fertile vineyard, when gathered in and presented to its proprietor.

And although the *Jewish nation* at large, was not under his peculiar and gracious care, they were under his government, who had power over all flesh; and who, as the **SECOND** person in the Trinity of Eternal Love! In the increate and boundless Essence, was in the council of Jehovah, (to speak humanly) consulted as to the rebellious and wretched state of the *Jews*: when justice indignantly cried, “Cut it down, Why cumbereth it the ground?” Saith love divine, we will plant another fig-tree in its place; the *Gentiles* shall live a life of faith on Christ, “I will call them my

people, who were not my people ; and her beloved which was not beloved." (Rom. ix. 25.) But the *vine dresser*, yet intercedes in behalf of the *barren fig tree* ; or Christ, the blessed Messiah, in behalf of that rebellious nation, and this he does, that the purposes of Jehovah may be accomplished. He must make his appearance in the flesh, prior to their destruction. Let it be remarked, that he intercedes for them as a nation ; as if he had said, they certainly have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine altars, mutilated thy word and ordinances ; but send thy Son : it may be " they will reverence thy son." I will go down, according to covenant-determination, and in their flesh, as the Great Prophet, thou, O Father ! hast promised them, will rebuke, and call upon them to repent of their superstition, hypocrisy, malice against thy prophets, and their every *national* iniquity : and to this *repentance alone*, and not to that individual and secret repentance, which is the Spirit's peculiar work without the aid of the creature, did Christ exhort the Jewish nation. To *repent* as *Ninevah* repented at the preaching of *Jonah* ; which was evidently a *national* contrition, and concerning whom Christ told them, " It will be more tolerable for them at the day of judgment than for you ; for they repented at the preaching of *Jonah*, and behold, a greater than *Jonah*, is here ;" God sent a prophet, a *minor* prophet to them, but to you, he has sent his own Son, whom you represent as *Beetzebub*, and seek to destroy ! you go about to kill me, because I have told you the truth !

" *These three years,*" &c. By which we must evidently see the long-suffering of Jehovah, toward his select nation, Three distinct *dispensations*, or rather *economies* of worship, we are here to understand.

1. That which we may denominate the *Mosaic economy*. The giving of the laws, statutes, and judgments ; the delivery of the decalogue, and the making of their national covenant. The offerings and sacrifices, all typical of Christ, and who was discerned in them, by those who were blessed with especial faith. Under this economy he led them through the wilderness, and wrought signs and wonders by the hand of Moses : but, notwithstanding all, they fell into idolatry ; nay, even Aaron himself, prepared for them an image, to which they bowed. How just is the complaint of Jehovah, " Forty years long, was I grieved in

the wilderness, with this sinful generation."—The **FIRST** year, and no fruit!

2. He comes the *second* year—the year of their worship and government from their entering into Canaan, throughout their temple worship, under their kings. And though, during this long period, some of the most eminent and graciously distinguished characters, existed in the *true* church, who were useful, undoubtedly, to thousands more, of whom we never heard, the nation at large were still *unfruitful*, and God-provoking in their conduct: and even the greater part of their **KINGS**, “did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord.” The *second* year expires without fruit!

3. The prophetic economy, or *third* year, glorious as it was to the regenerated people among them, and richly as it abounds with the most elegant, gracious and sublime prophesies of the advent and humility, the sufferings and death, and the eternal power and Godhead of the ever-blessed Messiah, does but *exhibit* in the conduct of the Jewish nation, increased, and still increasing crimes, of the most aggravating nature! “Which of the prophets did not your fathers stone?” was the condemning interrogative put home to their consciences, by the all-wise Redeemer. As in a vicious individual, so in the conduct of a nation, sin has an hardening influence; and the commission of one crime, but paves a way for the more facilitous perpetration of another, till they drink down iniquity as water! (Job xv. 16.). The *third* year expires, and the fig tree is still barren! “*Cut it down*” is the just command of incensed justice, and insulted holiness. But the *ampelourgos* still pleads, “*Lord, let it be alone THIS year also.*”—The year of Christ; the gospel dispensation, “*till I shall dig about it and dung it.*”

1. “*Dig about it*” To break up, and overturn their superstitious and traditions, and to cut up the weeds of hypocrisy, by his faithful and *detecting* ministry. While some of our smooth professors, with the pretendedly sanctified tone of universal charity, cry out for the children of the bond-woman, and say, “preach the truth, but let error, and all other people alone—exercise not such *condemning* spirit,” (as they are pleased to term a holy spirit of indignation against error) they ought to take, at least a cursory view, of Christ’s ministry. Was it not one perpetual contention with the religious world? one perpetual detec-

tion of their deceptions, and exposure of their errors and hypocrisies? And can we have a better sampler for our ministry than that of the glorious pattern of all perfection?

He *dug* about the barren fig-tree, the Jewish church, so deeply that the *spade* of truth cut to the very roots of their lies, and deceptive pretensions to free-will, human goodness, and creature-sanctification. But all to no purpose! They maddened against him with the enmity of fleshly religion, and cried, "*Away with this fellow from the earth, it is not fit that he should live.*"

2. "And dung it." Dung, or manure, is applied after digging, after laying the roots open, to enrich the earth, that the tree may produce fruit. Thus did Christ prove his Messiah-ship in their presence.

1. By *miracles*, through which the Godhead shone; and yet they maliciously attribute the performance of them to the prince of devils!

2. By doctrines, and elucidations of scripture, so wonderful that many of them were led to acknowledge "never man spake like this man;" they were astonished at his doctrines, for he spake with authority, and not as the scribes.

3. He applies to them the *manure* of exhortations to *national repentance*, the very first sentence of his ministry among them was, "*repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" This, as I before observed, was a *national* repentance; agreeing with the exhortation of the apostle, "repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out"—that your *national* sins may be blotted out, and that you may yet be kept together as a people. But their hearts were hardened, and their eyes blinded; that prophesy might be fulfilled, "seeing they shall see, and not perceive; and hearing they shall hear, and shall not understand."

4. Thus was their guilt proved, and the justice of their condemnation confirmed. They put the word of God from them, and like all persecutors, maliciously ascribed through the indignation of their hearts against Christ, those miracles to Beelzebub which they knew were performed by the finger of God! Thus, Jehovah *justly* cut down this barren fig-tree, the *Jews*; that the Gentiles might be planted in his vineyard. Then as we stand by faith, God grant that we may not be high minded but fear! And glorify him, that he has blessed OUR NATION with his word, and his worship!

ADJOURNED TO NEXT MONDAY EVENING.

BIBLICAL CRITICISMS

AND ILLUSTRATIONS OF
EXPERIMENTAL GODLINESS.

No. XX.] SATURDAY, MAY 29, 1824. [Price 2d.

Τα πάντα καὶ ἐν παντί Χριστός.—PAUL.

Christ all and in all. COL. III. 11.

ADJOURNED QUESTION,

LIMEHOUSE, MONDAY, MAY 24, 1824.

What character is set forth in the parable of the barren fig-tree, LUKE XIII. 6—9.

SOLUTION.

THE close of the parable as it represents the Jewish nation is remarkable and serves as additional evidence that our Dear Lord had that people primarily in view; for we are not informed of the fate of the fig tree: it is left standing in the vine-yard, which might lead us to conclude that the parable is unfinished and incomplete: Was the tree cut down? Or did it, after the promised attention of the VINE-DRESSER, bring forth fruit? The parable does not inform us.

But very frequently, to our contracted view, that which seems an incompleteness in scriptural detail, is its greatest excellency; and those things which we are ready to denominate blemishes, are Divine Beauties that shine too bright to be fully inspected by our limited understanding. The appropriation of this parable to the Jews, as well as its invention, and composition is truly admirable and in which heavenly wisdom shines! The fig tree is descriptively left standing yet in the vineyard; for the Jews were not yet *cut off*. Christ, the true vine-dresser, was then in the very act of digging about it and dunging it—He was then very expressively describing their wretched condition, into which they had plunged themselves by their *irreligion* amidst the highest pretensions to religion, and their pro-

fane enormities amidst the most splendid professions of holiness and devout worship!

But that barren fig-tree was, eventually, cut down. The Gospel was taken from them, and, O miracle of mercy! we poor Gentiles succeed them, in the vineyard of grace's glorious dispensations!

Think, O ye Christians! of the unspeakable excellency and worth of the gospel dispensation! It enters a nation, a town, or a village, teeming with a thousand *external* advantages and blessings. God, sometimes, for the gospel's sake, even confers *earthly favours* on the inhabitants where it is preached: the people receive those favours, who are wise enough to attend to the solemn caution, given them by the Lord of the vineyard: "Touch not my anointed, do my prophets no harm." Men cannot, in their natural condition, "*get grace*" as the *Arminians* unwisely say; but it is a mercy, when instead of persecuting, they are led to assist with their *external* aid, in carrying on the cause of Christ in the neighbourhood where they reside: that instead of a Jew-like putting the word of God from them with a proud *rejection*, it meets with every attention they can outwardly give; or at least, they take no opposing steps to hinder its promulgation. The Jews **RESISTED** the Holy Spirit; not in an *Arminian sense*; not the *operations* of the Spirit in the heart of a sinner; as if he would have regenerated them, but they prevented him, and thwarted his gracious design! for when **HE** will work, who can hinder him? but they *resisted* the **GREAT WORK** which the Holy Spirit was carrying on by the instrumentality of the apostles.

They persecuted the gospel, despised the ministry of God's holy word, and blasphemed the name of Jesus!—Wilfully and maliciously, by wicked misrepresentations, and diabolical imputations, *externally* opposed, persecuted, and **RESISTED** that powerful preaching, which emanated from hearts under the immediate influence of the Holy Spirit, (knowing it to be so) and thereby most awfully committed the unpardonable sin!

But above all, how thankful ought we to be, who are not only blessed with the ministry of the gospel, but feel its power, and can experimentally pronounce it to be "the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth."

It hath come unto us, not in word only, but also in power, and in much assurance, and in the Holy Spirit. O blessings for ever on that Eternal Spirit, who has led us to Jesus, and always causeth us to triumph in him! For my own part, I cannot but acknowledge, this evening, with gratitude to God, that my privileges are incalculable, my blessings are all divine! Christ has washed me in his blood! and I know it assuredly! He has fulfilled the law in my stead—his obedience is as much mine, as if I had completely fulfilled the law myself; neither has justice any more charge against me, as I stand arrayed in immanuel's righteousness, than against infinite purity itself! I am a *vile sinner*; but accepted in the BELOVED, and my unutterable consolation is, that though I am *mortal*, and there is but a step between me and death, when heart and flesh fail, my God will be the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever! And, O when I arrive in the world of light, love, and unfading pleasures, the raptures which will then employ my disembodied and immortal powers, are inconceivable to me while imprisoned here: but of this I am assured, that JESUS is the glory of the place; his love, the song of the glorified inhabitants—and I am equally as well assured that it is glory which awaits *me* at the hour of my corporeal dissolution: when the animated lines of SWAIN will be realized by my unworthy, but glorified soul; when I shall receive that affectionate welcome from my altogether lovely Jesus;

"Come in thou happy spirit, come
Thou now shalt dwell with me at home;
Ye blissful mansions make him room,
For he must stay *for ever!*

Without apologizing for this digression, I must now, like the *Shulamite*, (Sol. Song vi. 13.) return from my triumphant ascension of faith, and come down to the *barren fig tree*. And what will ye see in the *Shulamite*? The company of two armies; grace and nature, the Spirit and the flesh. Faith and unbelief, obedience, and disobedience, love and hatred, submission to the Lord, and rebellion against him, occupying the same immortal soul! I must come down to the barrenness of a church of Christ, and the barrenness of believers in a backsliding state; and I have scarcely a doubt, but we shall, if not immediately

now, by a remembrance of past days, find ourselves numbered with the latter, and highly implicated in the complaint against them.

We consider the parable descriptive of a *barren* gospel church. By a gospel church, we understand a *society* of men and women, who, convinced of sin, and brought to Jesus, have enlisted under the banner of his cross, to serve and worship him in spirit and in truth. They renounce the world, mortify the deeds of the body, resist the devil in the strength of grace: and in this holy contention, are made more than conquerors through him who hath loved them. Their grand concern is to promote his cause on earth, who has done so much for them! To accomplish which, they are zealously “*striving TOGETHER* for the faith of the gospel,” and the glory of their God and King; who is their beauty and strength. For the beauty of their Lord is upon them, and they are mighty through God, to the pulling down of strong holds; but their *external* beauty and strength, consist in brotherly love, concord, unity, and peace. A church so constituted, may bid defiance to sin, earth, and hell, ever to injure it eventually. It has the promise of Christ, that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it!

But as in the Jewish, so in a gospel church, they are not all Israel who profess to be Israelites; for many be called, to unite under the standard of the gospel, but few are chosen, to keep the unity of the Spirit, and to worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. There is, most commonly, a church within a church, a little select number amidst the multitude of professors, whom God himself has taught, and made wise unto salvation. Consequently, nominal churches, when God has called out of them his jewels, will become as the barren fig tree; bringing forth no fruit unto God. As a proof that a gospel church is implied in the parable, read Matt. xx. i. 15. the very vineyard of which Solomon sings in his Song of Songs, “*Solomon had a vineyard at Baathamon, he let it out unto keepers: (or as in the parable, vinedressers) every one for the fruit thereof, was to bring a thousand pieces of silver.*” (chap. viii. 11.) this no doubt, is God’s extensive vineyard among the Gentiles: *Baalhamon* signifying, literally, a *populous place*, answers to the Father’s declaration, in covenant, to the blessed Mes-

siah : " It is a light thing that thou shouldst be my servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel, I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation, unto the end of the earth." (Isaiah xlix. 6.) The *keepers* are the gospel ministers, and the thousand pieces of silver, the respective number of sinners to be brought to God, according to divine appointment, through their labour in the vineyard ; which accords with Christ's own account : " What woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it?" (Luke xv. 8.) So God, with the light of his ministry, and of his word and Spirit comes, and with the besom of his law, sweeps away the refuge of lies ; and pointing to his bleeding cross, gives the sinner repentance unto life ; for thus Christ himself explains it, by adding - " There is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth."

Thus a church of Christ is planted, laborers are sent into the vineyard, who delight in their master's service, and study the promotion of his interest, as if it were their own. Indeed, it is their own, as they are made partakers of the fruit, and feel their happiness increase, in proportion to Sion's prosperity. The trumpet of the gospel sounds charmingly ; the Holy Spirit circumcises the ears and hearts of sinners, to hear and "*know the JOYFUL SOUND ;*" the glad tidings of great joy ; salvation from sin, earth, and hell, in so glorious and wonderful a way, that our God is **JUST** in the **JUSTIFICATION** of the **UNGODLY** ! Salvation alone by the atonement, obedience, and perfect satisfaction of Christ for all the elect family, as a complete body, and for every one of them especially and individually ; which the Lord, the Spirit, makes manifest in their effectual calling. Such a spiritual church, cannot but bring forth fruits unto God ; which fruits I might enumerate, by shewing you from the sacred volume ;

1. That they produce the *fruit* of faith ; cleaving to the Lord with full purpose of heart ; and are enabled to trust in him, and rely on his word of grace and promise, with an unshaking confidence and integrity, peculiar to themselves.

2. Of love, to Father, Son, and Spirit ; to the word and

ways of their covenant God; and to the brethren, who have given testimony to the truth, by the declaration of their faith and love. The *fruit* of love is delightful to the Lord of the vineyard, as an immediate fulfilment of the **NEW COMMANDMENT** which he has given to his people, that they **SHOULD LOVE ONE ANOTHER.**

3. This **NEW COMMANDMENT**, or **NEW LAW**, is productive of a great variety of the most precious fruits; for if the **LOVE** of God is once shed abroad in the heart, all other graces, and acts of cheerful obedience will freely issue from it, like so many chrystal streams from a perpetually overflowing fountain.

Hear the apostle's beautiful description; "The fruit of the Spirit is love, (then the blissful emanation of) joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law." (Gal. v. 22, 23.)

But when God has gathered in his precious fruit, thro' the labors of his vine-dressers: the fruit of Christ's atonement; the travail of his soul; his beloved people; and *nominal* members principally form the church, who are destitute of the life of godliness, no fruit *can*, or *will* be brought forth to God. And when a church is thus become the *barren fig tree*, the following signs may be expected,

1. A departure from the truth, in its simplicity and purity, and the introduction of some egregious error, or errors, which are pleasing to the flesh; this will not diminish, but, perhaps, increase a congregation, because the offence of the cross ceases, but there is no *spiritual* fruit. Souls are not born again, free grace in its especial discrimination of the elect, is not preached; and above all other omissions, observe particularly, the **HOLY SPIRIT'S gracious work**, that invaluable jewel, in the gospel ministry, as it respects a description of it, is entirely omitted! But how can a man preach the Spirit's work, except he himself is born from above?

2. Mutilating the ordinances of God, in conformity to the world, attempting to make Christianity as agreeable to the carnal mind as possible, and a total neglect of the most precious doctrines of the gospel, as stated in the word of God, lest they should offend the **MOST RESPECTABLE!** that is, commonly, in their sense of the term, the *most gay* and

carnal members of the church! Concerning such *fruitless* church, God says, "Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?" He does not *break them up*, as a body of worshipping people, but he *gives them up* to their own *devices*, to the "*strong delusions*," which they love, "*that they should believe a lie: that they may all be damned who believe not the truth, but have pleasure in unrighteousness:*" which unrighteousness consists, not so much in gross immoralities, according to the connection of the passage, as in the Christ opposing, and unrighteous doctrines of *free-will, self-sanctification*, self-righteousness and self-exaltation, (read attentively, the whole of the 2nd chapter of 2 Thess.) which lead to the highest rebellion against the Lord, and against his Christ! Against his truth, and the experimental preachers of his eternal and infinitely free grace.

But even for such a church, Christ intercedes, where a few names are among them who have not defiled their garments—or where persons are assembled, out of whose loins shall spring a SEED to serve the Lord.

Hence his intercession for the Jews, who are yet spared as a DISTINCT people; "Destroy it not for a blessing is in it!" A race shall yet issue from the Jews, which shall say, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."—(Matt. xxiii. 29.)

But a real church of the Lord Jesus, sometimes becomes BARREN. When the members leave their FIRST love, and become cold and lukewarm: and this frequently proceeds, (alas! what ungrateful wretches we are!) from losing a sense of the magnitude and worth of the blessings of the everlasting gospel. The *abundance* and *continuation* of those choice blessings seem to invalidate them in our estimation! How shocking! "Jeshurun waxed fat—then he forsook God that made him, and lightly esteemed the rock of HIS salvation!" Deut. xxxii. 15.) Truly descriptive of many of God's own children now, who make light of the ministry, and gospel-worship of a precious Christ! Hear the language of Jehovah to such a church, "Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent." To those churches blessed with sound, experi-

mental, and laborious ministers of Christ, "I would say, "esteem them highly in love for their works sake," for they watch for your souls, as those who must give an account. Study their comfort, their happiness, and let them partake of your CARNAL things, to the amount of a competency, that they may honorably pass through the world, and have good report, as well as evil report. You may not always be blessed with them. But Christ pleads, and his people are spared as a church. He DIGS about it, and MANURES it with his reviving love; and it again bears fruit to the glory of his holy name!

We come now to the BACKSLIDER—the THIRD CHARACTER implied in the parable, and on which, time demands brevity.

1. He is a tree of the Lord's planting, and has brought forth fruit to God.

2. But he is become barren; for he is a backslider in HEART: the world has attracted him, and he has seemingly, now, no heart for God—he is turned unto IDOLS, that have his affections and ardent pursuits—he restraineth prayer before God, for he has forsaken him, the fountain of living waters!—He is fallen asleep; the Holy Spirit suspends his gracious influence, and the corruptions of his nature lead him far from his Father's house!

3. But Christ intercedes; and again exerts his saving power; sends forth the Blessed Spirit, who effects his restoration, and melts him down, in the deepest contrition, at the foot of Calvary; where he ascribes all the power and glory of his return to the Lord alone; saying, "Surely after I was turned, I repented," &c. Glory to the Lord, that he is still proclaiming his grace and love, "RETURN ye backsliding children, for I am married unto you." He who invites, attends the invitation with power, heals their backslidings, receives them graciously, and loves them freely!

QUESTION FOR NEXT MONDAY EVENING.

"Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you"—thus the apostle exhorts—but how am I, who am WEAKNESS itself, to resist so powerful an adversary?