

A

FREE ENQUIRY

INTO THE SUBJECT OF

OFFERED GRACE & GENERAL INVITATIONS:

IN WHICH,

THE PHRASES ARE EXAMINED--THE SCRIPTURES WHICH ARE THOUGHT TO SUPPORT THE SENTIMENTS FAIRLY SCRUTINIZED--AND OTHERS WHICH OCCUPY HOSTILE GROUND ARE ADVANCED.

THE LEADING FEATURES OF THE SENTIMENT CONTRASTED WITH THE LEADING FEATURES OF JEHOVAH'S ATTRIBUTES, THE DOCTRINES OF THE BIBLE, AND THE COMMON RULES OF REASON, AND SHEWN TO BE CONTRARY THERETO--LOGICAL POSITIONS MET, INVESTIGATED, AND DISPROVED: AND OTHERS, OF AN OPPOSING NATURE BROUGHT FORWARD--ANTICIPATED OBJECTIONS ANSWERED, AND THE ENQUIRING CHRISTIAN AFFECTIONATELY ADDRESSED.

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PREFACE.

IN ages of prevailing darkness and superstition, when monkish craft and despotism brooded over the consciences of men like a dreadful incubus; when popish infallibility stopped the springs of free enquiry,—the bible was withheld from the laity, and the sublime art of printing was unknown; when the press was fettered by chains of lawless power to systems of cruelty and oppression, the rights, the unalienable rights of men were invaded and borne away by the alarming encroachments of darkness and despotism;—when these things, with others of a kindred nature prevailed on certain portions of the globe, the privilege of individual searching, reasoning, and understanding, was not enjoyed. But freedom, the natural and noblest guest of every unrenewed mind, has at length burst her chains, and reigning with pacific sway, have breathed the odour of peace, and repose, liberty, and harmony, over her extending empire. She has wafted the gales of tranquillity across the regions of strife and commotion, and with friendly aid extended the assuaging hand of comfort to the family of misery and woe. She has, at length, succeeded in breaking to pieces the painter's pallet; the colours of which, have been only employed to disguise her amiable features, and conceal her lovely virtues. Like the artist who engaged to take the likeness of Helena, designing men have seldom forgot to surround her with a veil; but a friendly providence has coincided with the struggling wish of thousands, and for some time past has freed her from the hateful envelope; so that she is now unfettered, and exulting with growing triumphs over the hostile powers of bigotry, interest, and pretended infallibility.

British subjects have shook off the trammels of tradition, despised the trickery of popish priestcraft

and abandoned the horrors of a bloody inquisition. Free enquiry has unfolded the all-powerful barriers, commenced her circuitous march, laid prostrate the pride of despotism, and we hope, will continue her operations, till her flag is hoisted in every part of the globe; every man enjoy the privilege of thinking for himself, without any restriction, without any bias. And while the means of information are facilitated, fresh sources of intelligence opened, enlarged, and established, may we not hope that every individual will both employ and enjoy them?

It must be remarked, that truth is generally surrounded and disguised by interest, prejudice, ignorance, and superstition; though sometimes uncommon talent is united with interest and prejudice; and the whole by their united operations conceal the very image of truth. To find out truth, nothing can be better adapted than plain, honest, and impartial enquiries; enquiries free from pride, prejudice, and passion.

To buy the truth, is to be laborious, patient, persevering, honest, and courageous; and it is to assist the thoughts, and promote the peace of those who know the worth of truth, and are seeking for it as for hid treasure; to shew the uniformity, connexion, and dependance of one truth on another; to publish the honour of Jehovah, promote the interest of the Redeemer, and display the covenant agency of the Holy Ghost in the hearts and lives of the high-blest family of God, that these lines were penned and exposed to public inspection.

It is hoped that the reader will find the enquiry conducted in a proper temper and spirit; a thing so little regarded in controversial writings, yet of such general utility. These pages will not be stained by raillery, buffoonery, asperity, nor abuse; the common practice of too many good men; but which can answer no valuable purpose till the wrath of man can work the righteousness of God. In prosecuting the enquiry, I shall first examine those phrases which seem to me highly objectionable: then investigate the principal scriptures in favour of offering Christ and gospel bless-

ings to unrenewed characters; to these I shall oppose certain scriptures which seem to stand in pointed opposition to the subject: I will then contrast the sentiment of offered grace with the attributes of Jehovah and the doctrines of the gospel: when this is done, I will shew that the subject is at war with reason, being entirely contrary thereto. The principal arguments in its favour shall then be investigated; and to them I will oppose arguments, drawn, not from obscure and intricate quarters, but from the most simple sources. The reader will then have the opportunity of weighing the evidence collected on both sides of the question, and be enabled to judge for himself as to what is TRUTH. Some will probably consider a book of this nature, entirely superfluous, seeing so many have wrote on the subject already. To this, it is replied, that there is no book that the author is aware of, possessing the same form and arrangement. Others may object that polemical pieces are seldom profitable, and that it would be much better for the religious public, if there was nothing of the kind. But it ought never to be forgotten, that free enquiry and free discussion are the very life of dissent. The only thing they contain of a disagreeable nature to me, is, when men substitute their own spirit for the spirit of the gospel. Others, again, may think it is but of little consequence what they believe, provided they do but love God. Let me ask such persons, if they are not anxious to gain correct views on civil and commercial subjects? If they are not sensible of the importance of sound understanding in those things, well knowing that an error in judgment may be fatal if reduced to practice? They also seem anxious that the public should entertain consistent views of themselves and their friends, when those views serve to establish their character, raise their reputation, enhance their value, or extend their usefulness. It cannot be thought that the truth of the gospel is of less importance to the believer; nor will it, in my view, be questioned, that right apprehensions of the Redeemer's person, fulness, merit, offices, and relations, together with his character and govern-

ment, is of less importance than the just conception of the conduct, character, relations, &c. of a finite, sinful mortal.

I notice one more objection which is often made, it is this ;—what spiritual benefit can be derived from a knowledge of the subject. To this, I would reply, your own *comfort*: for the more truth a believer knows, the more happy he must be: hence learning and comfort are both united by the apostle, 1 Cor. xiv. 31. that all may *learn*, and all may be *comforted*. Besides, the more truth we know, the more we glorify God. “He shall glorify me,” said the Redeemer. And as a new covenant blessing, the Holy Ghost was promised, in order to lead into all truth. He frequently comforts the mind by his instructions.

I, however, leave it, and entrust it with him that cares for the feeble, feels for the tempted, sustains the oppressed, guides the ignorant, provides for his thoughtless poor, and who has said, “Let mine outcasts dwell with thee, Moab, be thou a covert to them from the face of the spoiler; and who hath gathered the spoiled against the strong, so that the spoiled shall come against the fortress; even him who maketh the seven stars and Orion, and turneth the shadow of death into morning, and maketh the day dark with night, that calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the earth; the Lord is his name.” To whom be glory in the church by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end. Amen and Amen.

*Ebenezer Cottage, Dunstable, Bedfordshire,
Nov. 6, 1827.*

W. P.

A
FREE ENQUIRY,

§c. §c.

PART I.

I BEGIN by noticing the phrases, *offered grace*, *offers of the gospel*, and such like ; as they are commonly employed by modern Calvinists.

Many of my christian brethren in the path of tribulation, and in the kidgdom and patience of Jesus Christ, will probably object to the phrase *modern Calvinists* ; and if I wish it, would present me with a hundred *correct* quotations from Calvin's institutes, sermons, and controversial pieces ; in order to prove that their ideas are purely and rigidly Calvinistic. Let it be observed, that I by no means wish to be understood as using the phrase in a reproachful manner, so as to fix any thing like a stigma on those that may fall within the range of its design ; but use it solely to describe a certain class of people, who profess to believe in discriminating grace, but who never preach it in all its bearings. Modern Calvinists, is the name by which they are generally known, and by which they sometimes choose to describe themselves. I am far, very far, from thinking every person is destitute of grace who cannot come up to Calvin's credenda, or that may rise a head above it : nor am I disposed to fulminate anathemas against an individual who may have the temerity and hardihood to commence hostile operations against what is termed his five points : though I believe if all the ammunition which theological magazines possess, was directed against them, it would produce no more effect, than a volley of green peas would upon St. Paul's Cathedral, or any other building equally strong.

Highly as I think of Calvin, I am, however, far from considering him as infallible. It is true, that in his

disquisitions, decisions, and commentaries, he was often learned, judicious, elegant, and sometimes really sublime; and it is equally true, that sometimes he was coarse, dogmatical, intemperate, and even unargumentative.

As to what is called *real Calvinism*, I am inclined to think there is no such thing, at least not in Britain; for those who receive his five points so as to bring them into action, both in preaching and conversation, seldom adopt his sentiment of an offered salvation; and I am sorry to say, sometimes neglect the important duty of addressing the unregenerate part of their congregation altogether; while it must be confessed that many, *very many*, who adopt Calvin's method of addressing unregenerate persons, are so much taken up with that theme, that they seem entirely to reject what Calvin chiefly insisted on; viz. predestination, particular redemption, total depravity, effectual calling, and the final perseverance of the saints. Justice, however, obliges me to observe, that he considered redemption to "be particular only as it regarded its *application*; that in other respects it was sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole world." An idea by no means objectionable to the professor of Leyden in the beginning of the seventeenth century, or the founder of the Wesleyan denomination.

By modern Calvinists, I therefore mean such as hold forth *general invitations* and *offered mercy*, without laying before their hearers those points on which Calvin chiefly insisted.

It is hoped these remarks will be sufficient to prevent any brother minister from taking offence at the above form of expression.

Let us now proceed to examine the different meanings of the words *offer* and *tender*. As to their etymology, the word offer is a derivative from the latin word *offero*, and when used as an active-verb signifies:—

1. To present to any one: to exhibit one thing
so that it may be taken or received.....JOHNSON.
2. To sacrifice: to immolateDRYDEN.
3. To bid as a price or reward.....DRYDEN.
4. To attempt, to commenceMAC.
5. To opposeLOCKE.

When it is used in a neutral sense, it signifies:—

1. To be present : to be at hand : to present itself..SIDNEY.
2. To make an attempt.....BACON.

When it is employed in the form of a substantive, it is formed from the French verb *offre* :—

1. Proposal of advantage to anotherPOPE.
2. First advance.....SHAKESPEAR.
3. Proposal madeDANIEL.
4. Price bid : act of bidding a price.....JOHNSON.
5. Attempt, endeavour.....SOUTH.
6. Something given by way of acknowledgment..JOHNSON.

The word *tender*, is derived from the French *tendre*, and is synonymous with offer, when employed by religious persons to denote the dispensations of divine goodness.

The reader has now before him the meaning of the word in its different offices and conjunctions; the question arising from such a view of the word, is, in what sense, or which of those senses is it generally used ?

1. I would ask those that are in the habit of using the word, do you mean to say, that grace is presented, held forth, or exhibited, so as any one may receive it that please—that it is within the reach and power of every one without any pre-requisites, without any restrictions, without any conditions? I expect nobody will contend for this idea, and therefore pass it by.

2. Do you mean to say, salvation is offered as the price or reward of repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ? If so, then those exercises of the mind are meritorious, and the kingdom of heaven is purchased by the sinner's exercises, and cease to be the gift of God, and the result of the good pleasure of his will.

3. You cannot mean to convey the idea of sacrifice, or immolation: though if your sentiment is true God must sacrifice his truth, his desire, his holiness, his dignity, his sincerity, &c. this will be clearly seen in the sequel.

4. When you tell unregenerate men that God offers to save them, do you wish them to understand, that God has made, or is making an *attempt* to save them, that he has made the first advance, and that he cannot

proceed any further in their salvation, till they begin to draw near to him. I am sorry to say, that in my opinion, the language and strain of some public addresses seem to convey such ideas. I most earnestly request such persons seriously to consider, if such ideas are not degrading to the Lord of all worlds, opposed to the positive promises of the gospel, the tenor of truth, and the face of sobriety.

5. If you mean something given by way of acknowledgment, I ask, what have they done for such an acknowledgment? And how can the prophet's description of the best performances be true, when he said they were but as *filthy rags*? Does God make them such an acknowledgment for their filthy rags? Is it possible that the drapery of filthy beggars can be of such essential importance to the monarch of the universe, as to induce him to bestow a crown, by way of acknowledgment, on the proprietors of such impure rags? But, lastly, I ask, do you mean to say that the gospel contains an offer, or proposal of advantage to all mankind. I expect this is the idea generally entertained; I then ask, of what terms is the proposal composed? I shall be told "of repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ; reformation of moral conduct if previously deformed, together with a close and constant attention to the means of grace." On these terms, then, we are to understand peace, pardon, safety, and eternal happiness is offered. Having brought the meaning of the word within this narrow compass, let us now see what the general proposal implies.

And here, let it be observed, in the first place, on the part of those to whom the offer is made, it supposes that they all have an equal *right* to the blessings contained in the offer. If a monarch offers to all his subjects invaluable advantages on certain conditions, it of course supposes that all his subjects have a right to those advantages, except the right is vested in the conditions, and all his subjects do not fulfil those conditions. And if a general proposal is made, all mankind ought to have a *right* to the benefits contained therein,

or else their right must be couched in their performance, which will make heaven obtainable only on the ground of creature doing, by which it is thought no flesh living can ever obtain it. If I mistake not, a right to heaven, and all the blessings of the well ordered covenant, arises out of *relation interest*, and the glorious work of the Prince of the kings of the earth, the husband and surety of his church; seeing it stands recorded, God hath *given* to us eternal life, and this life is *in his Son*. I John v. 11.

2. *It supposes that every individual has an opportunity of being saved, at least as many as live where the proposals are published.* And indeed, the congregation are generally entertained, or perhaps rather *detained* in some instances, by being assured of a *season of salvation, a day of grace, an opportunity of being saved*, which seem to me very much unlike the glorious gospel of the blessed God, and quite dissimilar to the doctrine taught by our Lord and his apostles.

3. *It supposes that they all possess the ability to exercise repentance, faith, and every other grace.* This seems to me a very erroneous idea, seeing the bible represents mankind as *without strength, nay, dead in trespasses and sins*, and therefore very unable to perform such laborious work. Sinners naturally suppose, that by such an offer, they are possessed of sufficient strength to perform the conditions, or else the proposals would never be made.

4. *It implies that repentance and faith are not new covenant blessings.* If they are new covenant blessings it seems strange, unaccountably strange, that God should convert them into duties. A *blessing* and a *duty* must for ever remain distinct. They may be connected, but they can never be *but one* thing. The exercise of faith and love may become a duty, but the things themselves never can. Should it be said that a condition is not always a duty, I answer, in some cases it may not: but when a person offers the provision of the gospel to unregenerated sinners, he seldom fails to inform them it is their duty to repent savingly, and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

5. *It supposes that salvation is entirely optional on the part of the sinner.* If the proposition is made to all, it must suppose that they have the same liberty to reject the offer as to receive it; the same liberty to thrust it from them as to stretch forth their hand and bring it to their bosom.

6. *It supposes that the creature first elects God, and then God elects him.* For, if their salvation depend upon such conditions, and those conditions proposed equally to all men, it becomes a clear case, that they must first *choose* to perform the conditions before they do perform them, and that they must previous to this choose God for their portion, parent, and happiness, or they would never perform the conditions by which the offer is so ponderously clogged. I cannot conceive, if this is true, how our Lord could be right when he said, "ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." And the language of the apostle Paul seems to me equally erroneous, or at least, mysterious, when he blessed God that the Ephesians were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world.

On the part of the offerer it supposes,

1. *That his heart is equally affected towards all to whom the offer or proposals are made.* If this is not the case, I call upon the defenders of the scheme I am enquiring into, to vindicate the most high God from mockery and deceit. If he represents his desire to save sinners as generally extending to all, and on those representations make a general proposal or overture of mercy, on certain conditions, sinners must conclude that he is equally inclined to shew mercy and kindness to one as much as another: that he loves his church no more than he loves the world, and that the elect and non-elect have an equal share in his good wishes and merciful dispensations: which seem to me entirely repugnant to Isaiah xliii. 4. "Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life." And equally hostile to Paul, when he quoted the prophet Malachi to convince the Romans of the contrary fact.

2. *It supposes that God is as desirous of saving one as much as another.* If a general proposal is made, God must either desire men to embrace the proposal or not; if the latter, why are the proposals made? If it is said, he only desires the salvation of the elect, why then are the proposals made to others? Is it from an apprehension that if some of the elect refuse compliance with the proposals, some of the unchosen part of mankind will not; and thus their ranks will be filled up by those who were called, but not chosen? If the former, then he desired to save the son of perdition as much as that disciple whom Jesus loved. And if so, was not the Arabian patient quite beside the mark, when he said, God was of one mind and none could turn him, and that whatsoever his soul desireth even that he doeth? Job xxiii. 13.

3. *It includes the idea of a general atonement, or rather, that there is no proper atonement at all.* A general proposal can only be made upon the ground of a general satisfaction. To make such a proposal without such a satisfaction, seems very much unlike the wisdom of God; and if true, must be an egregious anomaly in the dispensations of him, who is "excellent in power, and in judgment, and in plenty of justice." Job xxxvii. 23.

4. *It supposes that if all mankind are not saved, it is a matter of indifference to God who is saved.* We must either admit this, or charge the proposition with odious absurdity. To make a general proposal to all, when at the same time the author of the proposition is rigidly partial to some, seem to me attended with irremovable difficulties. For suppose some of those to whom he is not favourably inclined, should, by fulfilling the conditions, claim his right to dwell with God for ever; I ask, what is to reconcile God to such an individual? If it is said, their agreeing to the terms mentioned in the proposal will induce God to love them—unsatisfied with such an answer, I enquire, is our obedience the cause of Jehovah's love? God's love is from everlasting; and previous to their compliance with the proposal, they must be either objects of love or hatred. If the latter, will it not follow by the rule of opposition, that

those whom he loved eternally he may eternally hate? And then, how alarmingly incorrect was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, when he said, "I am the Lord, I change not: therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." Mal. iii. 6.

5. *It supposes the divine agency of the offerer, if any divine agency is required at least, to be entirely under the control of his creatures.* "Without me," said the generous deliverer of his church, "ye can do nothing." Admitting the words were spoken to the disciples, who were true believers, the argument gains additional strength; for if believers can do nothing without Christ, much more unbelievers, who are "without hope and without God in the world." Now, if divine influence is necessary to produce the new birth, and the sinner have it in his power to believe when he please, it follows, by irresistible consequence, that he "who stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in,"—he "who weigheth the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance;" he who setteth up one and putteth down another at pleasure, is under the government of carnal caprice; and that whenever the sinner shall think proper to believe, he has the necessary influence within in his reach. What are we to think of the third verse of the 110th Psalm? I have only to add, that if salvation is proposed or offered to all, on conditions which are to be accomplished by the exercise of free-will, then their conversion, and the time of their conversion, must rest entirely with themselves; and if divine influence is at all necessary, it must be under creature government and command. Divine communications must be regulated by human dispositions!

I have closely examined the scriptures where the word *offer* is used, and I can no where find it associated with spiritual blessings laid before, or presented to, the creature. It is principally used in a *sacrificial* sense. It occurs nearly an hundred and forty times in the bible, and is used nearly one hundred times in the above sense. In Hebrews, the apostle employs it fourteen times, and not less than twelve times it retains the above signification. Sometimes, however, it is used in a *devotional*

sense, Heb. xiii. 15. 1 Pet. ii. 5. *i. e.* Let your hearts and affections, kindled by celestial fire, rise to God from the person of the Redeemer, like the ascending smoke in majestic columns from the Jewish sacrifice. Sometimes, a *dedicational* meaning is attached to the word—thus, “Amasa willingly offered himself unto the Lord.” 2 Chron. xvii. 16. *i. e.* he dedicated himself unto the work of the Lord. At other times, it signifies, to *consecrate*. We find, Aaron was to *offer* the Levites before the Lord, for an offering of the children of Israel, that they might execute the service of the Lord. Numb. viii. 11. Or, as the Hebrew, more agreeably to the apostle’s idea, in Romans xii. 1. “And Aaron shall *wave* the Levites before the Lord for a *wave-offering* of the children of Israel, that they may be to execute the service of the Lord.” Most probably on this occasion there was some significant action, analogous to the primitive rite of waving the sacrifices before the Lord. The apostle’s ideas in the place referred to, are indescribably beautiful.

Sometimes, the word is used in a *contributitional* sense, see 1 Chron. xxix. where we have an account of a royal address, on the subject of Solomon’s imbecility and inexperience, who was heir presumptive to the throne. This is contrasted with the extensive project of building a magnificent temple to the Deity. The speaker glances at his own conduct with reference to that object, and concludes the address by a pathetic interrogation. The whole speech shews great sensibility of mind, displays great talent, and effectually secures the end proposed by the speaker. For we find the chief of the fathers and princes of Israel, together with the captains and rulers, offered (*contributed*) willingly and liberally. Those contributions produced involuntary joy in the hearts of both king and people. Extatic pleasure wrapt in adoration the lofty mind of David, and dilated his adoring spirit, beyond the circle common to mankind. In holy reverence and gratitude, he stretches his aspiring soul towards the inconceivable courts of invisible Godhead, and vented his elevated feelings in the highest acts of adoration. The superior sentiments of David were de-

livered in language the most simple and sublime; while ardour and uprightness marked alike his contribution and his adoration.

I wish to observe, that in two cases, and in two *only*, the word is used in an *optional* sense. The first case refers to David's numbering the people, by which he incurred the displeasure of God. A despatch was sent, in which three things were referred to the choice of David, the sword, the famine, or the pestilence. His displeased and jealous Sovereign, offered him which of the three he preferred. But such a proposal was wholly unlike that which some persons tell us the gospel reveals: for this was not an offer of mercy, but of *different* sorts of judgment. It was an offer without any conditions, and an offer that had no reference to the salvation of his soul. See 2 Sam. xxiv. 12. The other case is that of Simon Magus, when he *offered* the apostle *money* to purchase the Holy Ghost. But as this can have nothing to do with offering Christ, I pass it by without any further notice. It will, perhaps, be said, 'true, the very words themselves are not used, but language is employed throughout the whole bible, which have a meaning quite equivalent, and establish by fair implication the sentiment of offered grace and general invitations.' If this is true, I will most cheerfully submit to the sentiment, believing it to be a doctrine wrote by the finger of God, and taught in the pages of revelation.

PART II.

CONTAINS AN EXAMINATION OF THE PRINCIPAL SCRIPTURES
WHICH ARE THOUGHT TO INCLUDE AN OFFER OF SALVA-
TION.

It has been observed, that though the exact phrases have not been employed by inspired writers, yet the tenor of their doctrine, and the mode of their address, most permanently justify the use of such phraseology. I am, however, of a contrary opinion, and cannot help thinking, that a patient and impartial investigation, of their doctrine and mode of address, will be attended with evidence sufficient to establish my opinion. But should the issue be different to my expectations, and end in the final establishment of the sentiment I am examining, as truth is more dear to me than a thousand prejudices and systems, I shall think myself amply remunerated, though I suffer the overthrow and loss of my whole scheme of religious thinking. Truth is my object, and truth I will embrace wherever I find it, though it should be among never so much rubbish. A diamond is a diamond, though it may be concealed in a dunghill.

The first passage I shall examine is Gen. iv. 7. "*If thou doest well, shalt not thou be accepted? and if thou doest not well sin lieth at thy door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.*" These words are frequently quoted in support of the doctrine under notice, and are thought to possess considerable evidence in its favour. The arguments generally drawn from it are:—Cain had an *opportunity* of being saved—salvation was placed within his reach—and the language fairly implies the notion of an *offer* of grace. I question the correctness of these consequences, for the following reasons.

1. *It is not clear that Cain's salvation is at all intended.* The nature of the case will not admit of any

positive proof; and no person can be sure that to make such an assertion would not imply a mistake. The evidence, therefore, either for or against, can only be accidental or presumptive.

2. *Since all the evidence which can be accumulated is only presumptive, and we can only determine its real signification by a balance of argument, I am inclined to think there will be found a preponderance of conjectural evidence in disfavour of such an interpretation.*

The evidence I collect shall be drawn,

1. *From the meaning of the word rendered ACCEPTANCE or ACCEPTED.*

I submit that the word properly signifies *excellency, dignity, elevation*. In support of this idea, I have the pleasure of quoting the testimony of some of the most learned men.

Dr. Gill, whose profound erudition and deep researches, are too notorious to be questioned, observes, ‘there is but one word in the original text which our translators render *shall not thou be accepted*, and that word signifies, EXCELLENCY or ELEVATION.’ In proof whereof, the Doctor refers to Psalm lxii. 4. “‘They only consult to cast him down from his *excellency*.’” The same word that our translators have rendered *accepted* in the passage under consideration. In Psalm lxii. 4. it signifies the excellency of dignity and government; and is a parallel passage with Gen. xlix. 3. “‘Reuben, thou art my first-born, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power.’” On this passage, a learned commentator thus paraphrases, ‘As my first-born, thou hast the right of precedency before all thy brethren, in point of dignity and power, or privileges, the double portion, the priesthood or *dominion* over thy brethren were thine.’

The Rev. *Dr. Henry Ainsworth*, in his Annotations, ‘is there no *forgiveness?*’ or, ‘shalt thou not *receive?*’ or, ‘shalt thou not have the *excellency?*’ or, ‘a *lifting up?*’

Mr. Poole, whose ingenious criticisms have benefited the religious public for a great length of time, points out the same thing in his marginal reference; and

displays much useful learning, and sensible criticisms on the passage. Next to him is

Mr. Brown, a Scotch divine, and eminent for his great learning and laborious study, marks the same thought in his *Self-interpreting Bible*. In what is not improperly termed the *Comprehensive Bible*, the same thing is noted by the editor.

From these testimonies, to which many more might be united, it is a clear case that the word, has at *least* the signification of *excellency*, dignity, elevation; as well as accepted, pardoned, &c. And if the nature of the case, and the circumstances by which it is accompanied, best agree with such a signification, such a signification, I think, ought to be preferred. The reader will remark, that all these authors, with the exception of *Dr. Gill*, were strenuous for the sentiment of offered grace, which makes their testimony of double importance; for we may be sure they would not without absolute necessity allow a sense, which when admitted, destroy all the nerves of their argument taken from this place in favour of conditional mercy.

2. *Evidence of a strong presumptive cast, is to be gathered from the different constructions of the passage.* I shall here present the reader with some different forms in which the passage is construed. In *Thompson's* translation, 1593, the words are thus construed, 'if thou doest well shalt thou not be accepted, and if thou doest not well sin lieth at thy door: also unto thee his desire *shall be subject*, and thou shalt rule over him. The note is, *the dignity of the first-born was given to Cain over Abel.*' — *Poole*, 'if thou doest well shall not thou have the *excellency*? And, *subject to thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.*' The note on the phrase 'shalt not thou be accepted,' is, 'shalt thou not be *pardoned, received into favour.*' Or, '*exalted*, and either preserved in, or restored unto, those rights of the first-born, which thou art conscious to thyself thou hast forfeited.' Or, '*elevated*, in thy looks, *i. e.* would not or should not thy countenance have been upright and pleasant, which now is sad and dejected.'

Mr. *Brown*. ‘ If thou doest well shalt thou not have the *excellency*? And if thou doest not well *punishment* lieth at the door. And subject to thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.’ *Dr. Gill*, and most critics, construe the passage in much the same manner. To this may be added, that most of the concordances that notice any marginal readings refer to Gen. iv. 7. rendering the words “ shalt not thou have the *excellency* ?” The evidence arising from such a variety and similarity of constructions, are manifestly in opposition to the inference drawn from the passage by the patrons of offered grace.

3. *I argue against the consequence in favour of general invitations and tendered mercy, from the circumstances by which the fact is involved.*

The evidence collected from this quarter, will be to show, that Cain was not distressed concerning his soul, but was apprehensive of being subjected to Abel who was younger than himself. There were several things which gave Cain the ascendancy over his brother Abel, such as *his age*, to which much more attention and respect seemed to be paid in the early ages of mankind, than at the present day; particularly among Europeans. *His birth*—he was the first-born, by which he seemed entitled to the right of primogeniture, which involved privileges of very extensive latitude. *His name*—which signifies *possession*. And hence, Eve said, I have gotten, or have in my possession, a man, *from*, or *by*, or *with* the Lord. Or, I have gotten a man, the Lord. Meaning, no doubt, the promised Messiah. Abel’s or Hebel’s name, signified *vanity*, or *breath*, or *vapour*, or *emptiness*. This may suggest another circumstance, that Cain being the first child that was ever born into the world, he probably possessed a larger share of paternal regard than what Abel did. *His office or employment*,—this was of a superior nature; Abel was a shepherd, which was esteemed a much less honourable calling than that of an agriculturist; and Cain being the eldest he naturally chose the most honourable calling. These are circumstances which would easily operate on the mind of an evil and ambitious person like Cain,