

Essay I

I believe there are many people who oppose the doctrine of justification by faith, from an honest conviction, that it negates the need for the practice of Christian morals. Such people deserve our respect because they value holiness. They believe they are warranted in rejecting any doctrine, which downplays the obligation of Christians to make every effort to keep God's law. Since they perceive the doctrine of justification by faith alone, to be in opposition to striving after holiness, they reject the doctrine as unscriptural and false. Their views have not always been received courteously, or even given a fair hearing. Their case, at first sight, appears a strong one and they are, at all events, entitled to have their statement of it, candidly received and discussed.

Their first objection is that by making pardon a free gift, irrespective of character, you take away a powerful motive for obedience, and you also give the strange and pernicious impression, that God is indifferent to right and wrong in his intelligent creatures.

Secondly, they object to the propriety of the title Free salvation, which seems to imply that everything to do with salvation is attributed to God. It is in fact, as conditional, and contains as much human effort, as law keeping does. Indeed faith is in the one system, what obedience is in the other, and they are both of them acts of the human mind. Law keepers are blamed for resting their hopes on the obedience that they can discern in their lives, but the faith alone group rests their hopes on the faith that they can discern in their hearts. They defend themselves by claiming that faith is the gift of God, but surely obedience is likewise the gift of God? Thus as far as free goes, the two systems are almost on a par; that is to say, neither of them is gratuitous except in name. As for moral authority, a system that rests salvation on a set of facts hardly compares favorably with one that rests it on faithful exertion and holy obedience.

Thirdly, they object that the faith alone group downplays practical holiness at every turn. For, even when they are compelled to admit that, "without holiness no man shall see the Lord," they do what they can to weaken the force of the admission. They concede only that the value of holiness arises from its being an evidence of the reality of faith, and not from any intrinsic quality of its own.

Fourthly, they object that the faith alone group does not seem able to agree as to what the meaning of faith is. Sometimes they say it consists of trust and confidence in Christ, sometimes in an intelligent assent to the propositions of Christian doctrines, and sometimes it is defined as a prostration of reason before divine authority. Law keepers reason that faith needs to be clearly defined, before anyone can be expected to rest something as important as one's eternal salvation on it. Further they reason that no matter which of these definitions of faith one prefers, it is still only a meager substitute for universal obedience. If one takes the first and second definitions, and makes faith out to consist of trust in Christ, they acknowledge that that is a most necessary feature of Christian character; but it cannot fill the place of all duties. As such, it is only one of the duties that form a part of that universal obedience, which law keepers believe is recompensed by salvation. As for the other description of faith, law keepers think that a man might, as reasonably, rest his hopes before God on his mathematical science, as on his stupid credulity.

Fifthly, law keepers object that although they must acknowledge there are passages of Scriptures, which appear to support the faith alone view of the question, yet many passages unequivocally do not. Indeed the general tendency of the whole Bible, as well as the common sense and common feeling of man, is decidedly with law keeping. It is therefore, they say, with good reason, that they claim the faith alone system is founded on misconstruction, or misinterpretation of Scriptures.

These are the five most common objections to the doctrine of justification by faith alone. I cannot help thinking that they are, to a large extent, the result of the way in which this doctrine is usually presented. It is indeed true that faith is often spoken of, as if it were a substitute for universal obedience. Thus the freeness of the gospel is as much compromised, by such a presentation, as it is by the system of justification by works. It has to be admitted that the importance of obedience is undervalued, by the faith alone group. It is true also, that holiness is sometimes reduced to a mere evidence of the reality of faith, giving rise to the conclusion that it might be dispensed with, if other evidence could be found.

Also true is the fact that the faith alone groups differ considerably, in their definitions of faith, which makes it appear as if they are clinging much more to a word than to a reality.

When we tell someone that salvation is perfectly free, and then at the same time, that unless he believes the gospel he cannot be saved, we appear to be saying free and unfree with one breath. We then compound the problem by adding another

condition: "except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." The freeness of the salvation appears to vanish in the presence of such weighty conditions. And yet, if faith and holiness are not conditions of salvation, what place do they have in the Christian life? If Christian doctrine is not believed, it can be of no use; and if Christian faith does not produce Christian holiness, it can be of no use either. Surely faith and holiness are then conditions of salvation? And if there are any conditions of salvation, can faith alone salvation honestly be termed free?

So, if we are saved by faith, is there a need for works? If holiness is necessary, what is the meaning of salvation by faith alone? We face a dilemma. Since these propositions do not hang well together, there is at least a seeming contradiction here that ought to be addressed.

Happily, there are many Christians who do not wrestle with these difficulties at all, and who, of course, are not bothered by them. The object of their contemplation is not a theological system, but the great being whose nature and relation to us, forms the theme of theology. Their delight is not in the logical cohesion of a theory, but in spiritual communion with him. Such persons are indeed blessed, and instead of presuming to teach them, I desire to learn from them. Still, there are many people who reject Christianity because of these apparent contradictions. There are even many real Christians who have suffered much anxiety as a result of them. To such believers and unbelievers, I humbly offer the solution that has satisfied me.

I think that a lot of the theoretical difficulty on this matter has arisen from the habit of considering heaven merely as a reward, and hell merely as a punishment. Pardon, or forgiveness, is viewed as the deliverance from hell, and the introduction into heaven. Now the Bible tells us that the kingdom of heaven is, "righteousness, and peace, and joy, in the Holy Ghost." It describes our future happiness as consisting in likeness to Christ, "we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." We are told that on the last day, those on the right hand will hear the words, "Enter into the joy of your Lord." This shows that their joy is going to be of the same nature as their Lord's. His joy on earth was to do the will of his Father; it was his meat, as he himself expressed it. Now, in heaven Christ's satisfaction consists in, "seeing of the travail of his soul," that is, in seeing the advancement and accomplishments of those for whom he has suffered. Christ delights in the salvation of sinners, in the increase of holiness and happiness throughout the universe, and in the spread of the knowledge of God's character, as revealed by his own work. Those who enter into this joy must also enter into the Savior's likeness ? for only holy and loving beings can enjoy this joy. Heaven then is the name for a character conformed to the will of God, and hell is the name for a character opposed to the will of God. The idea therefore of having heaven

without holiness, is like the idea of having health without being well; it is a contradiction in terms.

Christianity is like a divinely revealed medical treatment for diseased spirits. Heaven is the name for health in the soul, and hell is the name for disease. The design of Christianity is to produce heaven, and to destroy hell.

But what is the meaning of forgiveness, unless there are rewards and punishments? The very idea of pardon certainly presupposes the existence of law and condemnation. Christianity is a remedial system grafted on to a system of law. When man was originally created, the choices of life and death were set before him, as the consequences of obedience or disobedience to the divine command? that is to say, he was placed under a system of law. He disobeyed, and incurred the penalty. But this was not all, for he found that the principle of self-gratification which had overcome the love of God in his heart, not only produced the act of disobedience, but was in itself a terrible, incurable disease, continually producing innumerable ills. It was then that the mercy of God proclaimed a grace that addressed both the external, judicial penalty that had been incurred, and the spiritual disease from which the offense proceeded. Indeed the view of the divine character, revealed in the gospel plan of salvation, becomes the spiritual remedy, the cure of the spiritual disease. This further produces heaven in the soul.

Forgiveness, or pardon, is not heaven any more than a medicine is health. Pardon is proclaimed freely and universally; it is perfectly gratuitous, unconditional and unlimited. But heaven is limited to those who are sanctified by the belief of the pardon.

It is wrong to think that those who maintain the freeness of forgiveness believe that God is indifferent to right and wrong in his creatures. On the contrary, they maintain that pardon is the spiritual medicine for the removal of sin, and that heaven, or spiritual happiness, is necessarily limited to those whose hearts are healed (sanctified and conformed to the will of God) by the belief of the pardon.

When Adam fell, he was expelled from Eden (the type of the favorable presence of God) and became subject to death, with all its dark retinue of wants and pains. To be excluded from that favor that is better than life, from that smile which gladdens creation, was a heavy sentence. How soon our race became weighed down with sorrow, along the dreary path of our sickly existence. We lost connection with all

good things to which we were attached. They were broken off by an unseen power, which forced us away into a dark and unknown abyss.

Some might suppose that if man were relieved from this punishment, while in other respects he remained unchanged, he would be happy. Does the misery of man, at this hour, arise simply from death, and pain, and absence from Eden? Would a healthy immortality, in a beautiful garden, make him happy? Would the presence of God make him happy? Alas, life itself, even abstracted from pain or sickness, is often a heavy burden, and the presence of the holy God, far from being sought as a blessing, is shunned as a curse, by unholy man.

Since the misery of man, then, does not arise entirely from punishment, it could not be relieved by the mere removal of judicial penalties. What is the misery of man? His mind is diseased. He was made to look up to and enjoy God, as his chief delight, and his faculties will not work healthfully in the absence of this relationship. Sadly he has left God, and wearies himself in seeking good from created things. The love of God is to our minds, what the keystone is to the arch, and it falls to ruin without it. We now know that man's reason bewilders him, his conscience harasses him, and his imagination deceives him. His passions and emotions agitate and torture him. He has a misery at work in the very elements of his being, independent altogether of just punishment. This misery is rarely felt in all its force here, and sometimes it is scarcely felt at all, because of the distractions which the mind finds in external things. Yet, when these things are removed, the unhappiness is felt, giving rise to the horror of a situation such as solitary confinement, without the distraction of business.

Sometimes the misery of the spirit is actually alleviated by external miseries, because they draw attention away from the real misery. When I can lay the blame of my misery on something outside of me, I have hope of deliverance, because I can then distinguish between my sorrow and myself. How terrible is the discovery that I am myself my own misery. I had hoped that the source of the evil was somewhere else. I retreated, as I thought, within myself. Then I found that the more I retreated in that direction, the more intense and intolerable the pain became. My own mind is the furnace and how am I to escape from myself? We carry hell within us, and were we to walk through Eden, we should wither its sweetest flowers. But we dare not walk there; we are afraid of the presence of the holy one. And conscience, like the flaming sword of the cherubim, keeps our souls from God.

Well, how is pardon to cure this misery? We can understand how a pardon can remove an external punishment, but how is it to remove this internal disease? The

great cause of the disorder and misery that distracts the human mind is aversion, or indifference, to God. The love of God, the keystone of the arch, is fallen from its place and all has, in consequence, gone to wreck. The sense of sin continually increases this aversion of the heart from God, because pollution hates and fears holiness, and an accusing conscience dreads avenging justice. The only medicine which can cure this dreadful and wide-spread disorder, must be something which will replace the key-stone in the arch, something which will rekindle love towards God, and which will do away with fear, and inspire confidence.

Now, the revelation of the cost of the pardon shows us the character of God, and is exactly fitted for this purpose. It is not merely a deliverance from penalties that we see here. Indeed the penalties are not canceled? death still remains, and man toils and sweats still on the outside of Eden. The pardon in the gospel meets the penalties of the law, not by canceling them, but by associating them with gifts and promises which disarm them of their terrors. Death remains, but there is a promise of a new and endless life beyond the grave. Eden is still barred, and man still eats his bread at the price of labor, but the access into the real presence of God is thrown open, and all are invited and urged to come in that they may ask and receive every blessing which God can grant. But these gifts and promises, though great, do not constitute the most striking feature of the gospel. The love of God is better than all these gifts. He loved us, and gave himself for us. This revelation is the medicinal virtue of the gospel that heals the disease of the soul. It destroys the enmity. It wakes in us a holy love, which does away with the fear of punishment, and at the same time plants in us a fear of sinning. This medicine is a discovery of the love of God. This medicine is the profound heart-felt realization that I am the object of God's love and affection. This is the holy love with which God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son as atonement for its sins. I am included in a love so extravagant and undeserved that it "passes knowledge." God loves me.

Holy love is the great principle developed in the gospel. It is the union of an infinite abhorrence towards sin, and an infinite love towards the sinner. This mysterious history is the mighty instrument with which the Spirit of God breaks the power of sin in the heart, and establishes holy gratitude and filial dependence.

To realize that God took our nature changes us. Without violating justice, he restored our forfeited life, and removed the barrier that the offended law had placed between us and God. It gives us a new view of the malignity of sin and of its fearful antagonism to the holy character and government of God. Above all it gives us an overpowering realization of the compassion of God. It breaks our hard hearts, to think of having rebelled against such a God, and such a Father.

The distinction which I have noted between the judicial penalty attached to sin, and the spiritual disease produced in the mind by sin, and the way removal of the one and healing of the other comes about, appears to me of very great importance in the scheme of Christianity. The perpetual controversy between faith and works has arisen, in great measure, from the neglect of this distinction. I beg the reader's particular attention, while I explain this. Those who oppose the doctrine of justification by faith without works, suppose that pardon, or as they see it heaven, is given as a reward for believing the gospel, or even perhaps as a reward for surrendering their own reason to the authority of the divine revelation. I am persuaded that there is not the slightest foundation for such a notion, in any scriptural statement of the doctrine. Christianity holds out no reward for faith at all, except what is consistent with believing something good to be true. If I find a mother weeping over the news of the death of her son, but I know the news is false, am I to be considered a prophet if, when I give her proof of his being in perfect health, I expect the news to change her? Do I need to declare beforehand, that if she believes my news, she will be saved from her sorrow, and her heart will rejoice? Why, this is exactly what any sane person would expect, as the necessary consequence of believing my news. It is certainly true that she is saved from her anguish by faith in my story. But her joy is not a gift bestowed on her to reward her belief; it flows naturally out of her belief. Her grief for the supposed death of her child, and her belief that he is alive again, cannot coexist in her mind. Such a faith necessarily heals such a sorrow. Her faith does not restore her son to life ? he is alive whether she believes it or not ? but his life is no joy to her, unless she believes it. Without faith in my story, she could not be saved from her distress.

Take another example: A son hurts the feelings of his father in a most outrageous way. His father banishes him from his house with threats and curses. The son hears of his father's death soon afterwards, and feels his spirit burdened with the curse. He cannot shake himself free of it; he is a miserable wretch. A friend of his father comes to him, and tells him that he had seen his father a few hours before his death, and that he had heard him express the warmest affection for his son, and the deepest regret for what had taken place between them. He went on to charge the friend, to tell the son that he had withdrawn his curse, and had prayed a blessing on him. The son receives the good news with grateful joy, and his burden drops from him. He is saved by faith. Believing the news that has been given to him heals his mind. His father's forgiveness is not given to him as a reward for believing this news, but unless he believes it, the forgiveness is quite useless to him, and he will continue to feel his father's curse clinging to him.

But let me suppose for a moment, that the friend, instead of simply relating to him the fact of his father's forgiveness, had put the news into the form in which the gospel is very often preached. Suppose he had said to him, "Your father has forgiven you, if you believe in my testimony of his forgiveness, but if you cannot do this, there

is no forgiveness for you." One can easily imagine the perplexity into which the son would be thrown by such an announcement. It would appear to him, as if the truth of a past fact depended on the state of his feeling, with regard to it. It would be impossible for him, in such circumstances to believe, because his informant was actually telling him that his belief of the pardon must precede the existence of the pardon.

Up to this point I have been considering forgiveness as the means of relieving a mental distress. In my view it is only common sense to suppose that faith in the forgiveness is necessary to give it any efficacy. A person has to believe in the forgiveness, to live in the peace of the forgiveness. However if the situation involved legal punishment, such as disinheritance, the situation could be reversed with or without the belief of the son. Thus, had the father disinherited his son, and then canceled the deed, the son's right of succession would not have been affected by his belief, or unbelief, of his father's forgiveness.

In the same way, had the evils under which man labors consisted merely in external penalties, his faith in the forgiveness that removed them would never have been required. Faith gives no efficacy to such a pardon. But if a great part of the misery of sin consists in the diseased condition of the mind, producing evil thoughts and feelings, then a cure for this misery has to be found. The cure must address the thoughts and feelings, it must be understood, felt and believed, to be of any value. When a messenger from heaven made known to the shepherds of Bethlehem, that the Savior was born, and that through him peace was proclaimed on earth, and goodwill from God to man, faith in this message did not alter the attitude of God to man. The truth of the message, and the sincerity of the creator's goodwill towards his creatures, did not depend at all on the shepherds. Yet, their own spiritual healing, as far as it was connected with joy, and gratitude, and hope, depended entirely on their belief of the message.

Men are not, according to the gospel, pardoned on account of their belief of the pardon, but they are sanctified by a belief of the pardon. Unless the belief of it produces this effect, neither the pardon nor the belief is of any use. The use of a medicine is to restore health; if it does not accomplish this, it is useless. The pardon of the gospel is a spiritual medicine; faith is nothing more than the taking of that medicine. If spiritual health or sanctification is not produced, neither the spiritual medicine nor the taking of the medicine is of any avail; they have failed in their objective.

The freeness of the gospel, then, consists in the unrestricted freeness of the pardon, which it proclaims. Its terms are without condition and without exception. The form of its announcement is, "peace on earth and goodwill towards men." It proceeds from that love with which God so loved the world, as to give his only begotten Son for it. And the dispenser of the pardon said that he came to seek and to save the lost. It is to sinners, as sinners, that he speaks, not to believing sinners, nor repenting sinners, nor amending sinners, but to sinners. But pardon is not heaven? heaven is not proclaimed to sinners; it belongs only to those who hate sin. Heaven is the joy of God, and we cannot enter into the joy of God without entering into the character of God.

Some people think it would be more prudent to reserve pardon as an enticement to good works, instead of its being lavished upon the mass of the guilty without any discrimination. The answer to this is that Christian obedience does not consist in doing certain things, or abstaining from other things. Christian obedience is simply holy love for God in habitual exercise. It is quite evident that no hope of reward could ever produce this motive for obedience. The heart cannot be bribed to love. Real love is moved only by the desirability of its object. A man might indeed do or suffer many things to obtain pardon of sin, but this is not the obedience that the law of God requires. It requires the disinterested love of the heart, which longs to express itself in every possible act of devotedness, and then counts them all nothing in comparison to the worthiness of him whom they desire to please. The obedience that God asks for is the free obedience of a child, not a mercenary negotiation for a deliverance from punishment. True obedience can only be paid by a spirit which rejoices that God requires its love, both because it recognizes in this demand a Father's heart, and because it feels that in spite of all its failures and all its weaknesses, it yet has love to give. It is impossible for such love to exist in a heart that feels the weight of unpardoned sin, and regards God as an offended, condemning judge. An assurance of forgiveness must precede confidence, and love cannot exist without confidence. It is only reasonable then, to think that he who demands the love of the heart, begins by removing any fear of punishment that would prevent that love.

But the gospel is much more than a pardon; it is nothing less than a manifestation of God in relation to sinners. If our hearts are attracted by any thing other than God (even by a pardon) we should still be out of our place in the spiritual system. For God is the center of that system, and nothing but God. The pardon of the gospel amply reveals the compassionate character of God in relation to sinners. In relation to his sinless and happy creatures, his character is holy complacency; but in relation to those who are sinful, and weak, and miserable, it is holy compassion. This is the most prominent feature of revelation, but it contains everything else, for God reveals himself in Christ reconciling the world to himself. This pardon, then, is an unchangeable thing, like God himself. Man neither makes it, nor merits it. God

reveals it, or rather reveals himself in it. God, manifest in the flesh, becomes the representative of sinners. He takes upon himself their nature and the consequences of their rebellion, that he might show himself just, even when justifying the ungodly; and that he might show himself gracious, even when punishing sin. His sufferings and death show both the solemn and appalling weight of the divine condemnation of sin, and of the divine compassion for the sinner.

When the Spirit of God reveals this to the heart, all self-pleasing thoughts of personal merit are extinguished. What have we done for him who has done this for us? We have repaid him by preferring the least of his gifts to himself. We have turned away invitations of fatherly kindness, and we have offered him only the base and reluctant service of our hands, and the ceremonial wagging of our tongues. This is no adequate return for his heart's love. If we know this love, we shall feel annihilated by it, for we have nothing to give in return, which could be considered a payment. But he asks no payment of us but the love of the spirit that he has made, and in which he delights. He delights in the good and the happiness of the creatures he has made. Our gratitude and our confidence are dearly earned. These feelings of the heart lead us to affectionate dependence on God. Affectionate dependence is the spiritual health of the creature, while independence is the spiritual disease of the creature.

People are apt to consider sin as consisting merely in this or that particular action. The old philosophers taught that virtue is the mean between two extremes. Thus, the virtue of generosity is the mean between prodigality and avarice, courage is the mean between rashness and timidity, and so on. In this system, the difference between virtue and vice lies merely in the degree, not in the kind. But the word of God teaches another sort of morals. According to it, sin consists in the absence of the love of God from the heart, as the dominant principle. So sin is not so much an action as a manner of existence. It is not necessary to go to the expense of an action, in order to sin. The habitual state of most minds, indeed even of the most naturally meek mind, is sin if the love of God is not dominant in them. The centripetal force constitutes an element in every orbit in which a planet moves. Were the influence of this force to be suspended, we should not think of reckoning the number of aberrations that the planet might make in its ungoverned career. We should say that it was itself, severed from the solar influence, in a continual and radical aberration. In the same way, the soul ought to feel the love of God governing the whole course of its existence. Every thought, feeling, and desire ought to be governed by the love of God as an essential part of its nature. And when this principle is lacking, we need not bother counting the moral aberrations which the spirit makes. Its whole existence is an aberration; it is an outlaw from the spiritual system of the universe, having lost its gravitation.

Such being the case, it is evident that a pardon that does not bring back the wanderer, and restore his lost gravitation, is of no use to him. Until his gravitation is restored, he is a blot on the creation. Love for God is the gravitation of the soul, and it is restored by the operation of the Spirit, who takes of the things of Christ and shows them to the soul. Faith is the receiving of the Spirit's instruction. A faith that does not restore spiritual gravitation is useless; and the only true gravitation is that which keeps the soul in its orbit.

The movement of the soul along the path of duty, under the influence of holy love for God, constitutes what is called good works. Good works are works that proceed from good principles. The external form of an action cannot alone determine whether it is a good work or not. Its external form may determine its usefulness to others, but its moral worth depends on the spring from which it flows. Good works, then, are properly healthy works, or works of a healthy mind. Healthy bodily actions can only proceed from a healthy body, and healthy spiritual actions can only proceed from healthy spiritual attitudes. A person who is sick does not recover health again by performing healthy bodily actions, because his bad health makes such actions impossible. Indeed, his bad health consists in his body being unable to perform healthily. Only as health returns, do proper and natural actions return along with it. His health is not produced by these actions, but it is followed by them, and strengthened by them. The enjoyment of the body consists in healthy actions; it is the spontaneous language of health. It is the same thing with the actions of the soul. Spiritual health is not acquired by good actions; it is followed by them, and strengthened by them. Were these spirits of ours, with their thousand strings but rightly tuned, what a swell of high and lovely song would issue from them ? a song of holy joy and praise, commencing here and rising ever upwards, until it mixed with the full harmony of the choir which surrounds the throne of God.

Good works, then, are not undervalued by those who hold the doctrine of unconditional forgiveness in its highest sense. On the contrary, works have a more elevated place in their system of theology, than in the system of those who regard them as the price paid for pardon. According to the unconditional system, good works are the perfection and expression of holy principles, the very end and object of all religion, the very substance of happiness, and the very elements of heaven. On the conditional system, they are only the way to happiness; or rather the price paid for it. There is surely more honor paid to good works by attributing to them an intrinsic, rather than a conventional value.

Good works are holiness in action ? and an essential element of heaven. Some moralists have thought that the hope of heaven taints the purity of virtue, by destroying its disinterestedness. They do not know what heaven is. It is the sense of

spiritual corruption, rather than the sense of sorrow, which makes the Christian long after heaven. The holiness of heaven is more attractive to him than its happiness. In heaven also our emotions are forever united to their proper object. Christians are filled and satisfied with the presence of God; this is what they thirst after. They desire his favorable presence above everything else. But could it be a selfish interest? Does the desire of a son, to see once more the face of his father, after a few years of absence seem selfish? No, nor can the desire of a spirit long exiled from its true home, to return to its Father and its God, the center of its being, the fountain of light, and life, and love, be called selfish. No, it is a pure desire, which is sent down into the spirit from the heart of God; and it remains unsatisfied, until it has again mingled with its source. It is indeed a noble desire, and speaks a noble origin. Even the fear connected with the idea of missing this pleasure, is not a base fear, but is the horror a pure spirit feels at the thought of mixing with pollution, and of being tainted by it. The desire of doing whatever is right for its own sake is in truth, a part of the Christian's desire after heaven.