

Entering the Strait Gate by Faith Alone

Edward Fisher

17th Century

THE following treatise is taken from the book— *Marrow Of Modern Divinity*, written by Edward Fisher of Scotland in 1646.

Of the many lives and ministries greatly affected by the *Marrow*, one of note was that of Thomas Boston (1676-1732), a great divine who adorned the ecclesiastical and theological scene in Scotland.

It was while Boston was at Simprin that a copy of Fisher's *Marrow* came into his hands. The book was to have a profound effect upon him. He wrote: "I rejoiced in it as a light which the Lord had seasonably struck up to me in my darkness." Up to this time Boston had felt a certain inhibition in proclaiming the free and universal offer of Christ to men. This inhibition arose from the supposed antinomy between the decree of election and the indiscriminate offer of salvation to all men. But once he had grasped the formula, according to the theology of the *Marrow*, that "Jesus Christ is the Father's deed of gift and grant unto all mankind lost," his inhibition faded away, and he began to preach with a fulness and freeness he had hitherto not known. His parishioners could not fail to recognize the deep transformation in their pastor and his ministrations.

In a letter to Mr. James Hog (a well-respected fellow minister), Thomas Boston wrote, "As to any distinct uptakings of the doctrine of the gospel I have, such as they are, I owe them to that book."

And it was in 1717 that James Hog penned these words in his own form of praise of Fisher's *Marrow*, "This book came into my hand by a merciful and most unexpected disposure of providence, and I read it with great and sweet complacence...Here we have the greatest depths, and most painted delusions of hell, in opposition to the only way of salvation, discovered with marvellous brevity and evidence...When gospel light is clear, and attended with power, Satan's kingdom cannot stand before it; the prince and powers of darkness must fall as lightning from heaven."

Luke 13:2—"Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able."

Romans 9:32—"Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone."

Hebrews 3:19—"So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief."

Hebrews 4:1,2—"Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it."

EVANGELISTA, a Minister of the Gospel.

NOMISTA, a Legalist.

ANTINOMISTA, an Antinomian.

NEOPHYTUS, a Young Christian.

ALAS! there are thousands in the world that make a Christ of their works; and here is their undoing, etc. They look for righteousness and acceptance more in the precept than in the promise, in the law than in the gospel, in working than in believing; and so miscarry. Many poor ignorant souls amongst us, when we bid them obey and do duties, they can think of nothing but working themselves to life; when they are troubled, they must lick themselves whole; when wounded, they must run to the salve of duties, and stream of performances, and neglect Christ. Nay, it is to be feared that there be many who in words are able to distinguish between the law and gospel, and in their judgments hold and maintain that man is justified by faith without the works of the law; and yet in effect and practice, that is to say, in heart and conscience, do otherwise. And there is some touch of this in us all; otherwise we should not be so up and down in our comforts and believing as we are still, and cast down with every weakness as we are. But what say you, neighbour Nomista, are you guilty of these things, think you?

Nom. Truly, sir, I must needs confess, I begin to be somewhat jealous of myself that I am so; and because I desire your judgment touching my condition, I would entreat you to give me leave to relate it unto you.

Evan. With great good will.

Nom. Sir, I having been born and brought up in a country where there was very little preaching, the Lord knoweth I lived a great while in ignorance and blindness; and yet, because I did often repeat the Lord's prayer, the apostles' creed, and the ten commandments, and in that I came sometimes to divine service, as they call it, and at Easter received the communion, I thought my condition to be good. But at last, by means of hearing a zealous and godly minister in this city, not long after my coming hither, I was convinced that my present condition was not good, and therefore I went to the same minister, and told him what I thought of myself; so he told me that I must frequent the hearing of sermons, and keep the Sabbath very strictly, and leave off swearing by my faith and troth, and such like oaths, and beware of lying, and all idle words and communication; yea, and said he, you must get good books to read on, as Mr. Dodd on the *Commandments*, Mr. Bolton's *Directions for Comfortable Walking with God*, Mr. Brinsley's *True Watch*, and such like; and many similar exhortations and directions he gave me, the which I liked very well, and therefore endeavoured myself to follow them. So I fell to the hearing of the most godly, zealous, and powerful preachers that were in the city, and wrote their sermons after them; and when God gave me a family, I prayed with them, and instructed them, and repeated sermons to them, and spent the Lord's day in public and private exercises, and left off my swearing, and lying, and idle talking; and, according to exhortation, in few words, I did so reform myself and my life that whereas before I had been only careful to perform the duties of the second table of the law, and that to the end I might gain favour and respect from civil, honest men, and to avoid the penalties of man's law, or temporal punishment, now I was also careful to perform the duties required in the first table of the law, and that to gain favour and respect from religious, honest men, and to avoid the penalty of God's law, even eternal torments in hell.

Now, when professors of religion observed this change in me, they came to my house, and gave unto me the right hand of fellowship, and counted me one of that number; and then I invited godly ministers to my table, and made much of them; and then, with that same Micah mentioned in the book of Judges, I was persuaded the Lord would be merciful unto me, because I had gotten a Levite to be my priest, Judges 17:13. In a word, I did now yield such an outward obedience and conformity to both tables of the law that all godly ministers and religious, honest men who knew me did think very well of me, counting me to be a very honest man, and a good Christian; and indeed I thought so of myself, especially because I had their approbation. And thus I went on bravely a great while, even until I read in Mr. Bolton's works that the outward righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees was famous in those times; for, besides their forbearing and protesting against gross sins, as murder, theft, adultery, idolatry, and the like, they were frequent and constant in prayer, fasting, and alms-deeds, so that, without question, many of them were persuaded that their doing would purchase heaven and happiness. Whereupon I concluded that I had as yet done no more than they; and withal I considered that our Saviour says, "Except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of God," Matthew 5:20; yea,

and I also considered that the apostle says, "He is not a Jew that is one outwardly; but he that is one inwardly, whose praise is not of men, but of God," Romans 2:28,29. Then did I conclude that I was not yet a true Christian; for, said I in my heart, I have contented myself with the praise of men, and so have lost all my labour and pains in performing duties; for they have been no better than outside performances, and, therefore, they must all fall down in a moment. I have not served God with all my heart; and, therefore, I see I must either go further, or else I shall never be happy.

Whereupon I set about the keeping of the law in good earnest, and laboured to perform duties, not only outwardly, but also inwardly from my heart; I heard, and read, and prayed, and laboured to bring my heart, and forced my soul to every duty; I called upon the Lord in good earnest, and told him that whatsoever he would have me to do, I would do it with all my heart, if he would but save my soul. And then I also took notice of the inward corruptions of my heart, the which I had not formerly done, and was careful to govern my thoughts, to moderate my passions, and to suppress the motions and risings of lust, to banish pride and speculative wantonness and all vain and sinful desires of my heart; and then I thought myself not only an outside Christian, but also an inside Christian, and therefore a true Christian indeed. And so I went on comfortably a good while, till I considered that the law of God requires passive obedience as well as active; and therefore I must be a sufferer as well as a doer, or else I could not be a Christian indeed; whereupon I began to be troubled at my impatience under God's correcting hand, and at those inward murmurings and discontents which I found in my spirit in time of any outward calamity that befell me; and then I laboured to bridle my passions, and to submit myself quietly to the will of God in every condition; and then did I also, as it were, begin to take penance upon myself by abstinence, fasting, and afflicting my soul; and made pitiful lamentations in my prayers, which were sometimes also accompanied with tears, the which I was persuaded the Lord did take notice of, and would reward me for it; and then I was persuaded that I did keep the law in yielding obedience both actively and passively. And then was I confident I was a true Christian until I considered that those Jews of whom the Lord complains, Isaiah 58, did as much as I; and that caused me to fear that all was not right with me as yet.

Whereupon I went to another minister, and told him that though I had done thus and thus, and suffered thus and thus; yet was I persuaded that I was in no better condition than those Jews. O yes! said he; you are in a better condition than they: for they were hypocrites, and served not God with all their hearts as you do. Then I went home contentedly, and so went on in my wonted course of doing and suffering, and thought all was well with me, until I bethought myself that before the time of my conversion, I had been a transgressor from the womb; yea, in the womb, in that I was guilty of Adam's transgression: so that I considered that although I kept even with God for the time present and to come, yet that would not free me from the guiltiness of that which was done before; whereupon I was much troubled and disquieted in my mind.

Then I went to a third minister of God's holy word, and told how the case stood with me, and what I thought of my state and condition. He cheered me up, bidding me be of good comfort: for however my obedience since my conversion would not satisfy for my former sins; yet, inasmuch as at my conversion I had confessed, lamented, deplored, bewailed, and forsaken them, God, according to his rich mercy and gracious promise, had mercifully pardoned and forgiven them. Then I returned home to my house again, and went to God by earnest prayer and supplication, and besought him to give me assurance of the pardon and forgiveness of my guiltiness of Adam's sin, and all my actual transgressions before my conversion; and as I had endeavoured myself to be a good servant before, so I would still continue in doing my duty most exactly; and so, being assured that the Lord had granted this my request, I fell to my business according to my promise; I heard, I read, I prayed, I fasted, I mourned, I sighed, and groaned; and watched over my heart, my tongue, and ways, in all my doings, actions, and dealings, both with God and man. But after a while, I growing better acquainted with the spiritualness of the law, and the inward corruptions of my own heart, I perceived that I had deceived myself in thinking that I had kept the law perfectly; for, do what I could, I found many imperfections in my obedience; for I had been, and was still subject to sleepiness, drowsiness, and heaviness in prayers and hearing, and so in other duties; I failed in the manner of performance of them, and in the end why I performed them, seeking myself in everything I did: and my conscience told me I failed

in my duty to God in this, in my duty to my neighbour in that. And then I was much troubled again: for I considered that the law of God requires, and is not satisfied without, an exact and perfect obedience. And then I went to the same minister again, and told him how I had purposed, promised, striven, and endeavoured, as much as possibly I could, to keep the law of God perfectly; and yet by woeful experience I had found that I had, and did still transgress in many ways; and therefore I feared hell and damnation. "Oh! but," said he, "do not fear; for the best of Christians have their failings, and no man keepeth the law of God perfectly; and therefore go on, and do as you have done, in striving to keep the law perfectly; and in what you cannot do, God will accept the will for the deed; and wherein you come short, Christ will help you out." And this satisfied and contented me very much. So I returned home again, and fell to prayer, and told the Lord that now I saw I could not yield perfect obedience to his law, and yet I would not despair, because I did believe that what I could not do, Christ had done for me: and then I did certainly conclude that I was now a Christian indeed, though I was not so before: and so have I been persuaded ever since. And thus, sir, you see I have declared unto you both how it hath been with me formerly, and how it is with me for the present; wherefore I would entreat you to tell me plainly and truly what you think of my condition.

Evan. Why, truly, I must tell you, it appears to me by this relation that you have gone as far in the way of the covenant of works as the apostle Paul did before his conversion; but yet, for aught I see, you have not gone the right way to the truth of the gospel; and therefore I question whether you be as yet truly come to Christ.

Neo. Good sir, give me leave to speak a few words. By the hearing of your discourse concerning the covenant of works, and the covenant of grace, I was moved to fear that I was out of the right way; but now having heard my neighbour Nomista make such an excellent relation, and yet you to question whether he truly be come to Christ or no, makes me conclude absolutely that I am far from Christ. Surely, if he, upon whom the Lord hath bestowed such excellent gifts and graces, and who hath lived such a godly life as I am sure he hath done, be not right, then woe be unto me!

Evan. Truly, for aught I know, you may be in Christ before him.

Nom. But, I pray you, sir, consider, that though I am now thoroughly convinced that till of late I went on in the way of the covenant of works; yet seeing that I at last come to see my need of Christ, and have verily believed that in what I come short of fulfilling the law, he will help me out, methinks I should be truly come to Christ.

Evan. Verily, I do conceive that this gives you no surer evidence of your being truly come to Christ than some of your strict Papists have. For it is the doctrine of the Church of Rome that if a man exercise all his power, and do his best to fulfil the law, then God, for Christ's sake, will pardon all his infirmities, and save his soul. And therefore you shall see many of your Papists very strict and zealous in the performance of duties, morning and evening, so many Ave Marias and so many Pater Nosters; yea, and many of them do great deeds of charity, and great works of hospitality; and all upon such grounds, and to such ends as these. The Papists, says Calvin, cannot abide this saying, "By faith alone"; for they think that their own works are in part a cause of their salvation; and so they make a hotch-potch and mingle-mangle, that is neither fish nor flesh, as men say.

Nom. But stay, sir, I pray; you are mistaken in me; for though I hold that God doth accept of my doing my best to fulfil the law, yet I do not hold with the Papists that my doings are meritorious; for I believe that God accepts not what I do, either for the work or worker's sake, but only for Christ's sake.

Evan. Yet do you but still go hand in hand with the Papists; for though they do hold that their works are meritorious, yet they say it is by the merit of Christ that they become meritorious; or, as some of the moderate sort of them say, "Our works, sprinkled with the blood of Christ, become meritorious." But this you are to know, that as the justice of God requires a perfect obedience, so does it require that this perfect obedience be a personal one, viz: it must be the obedience of one person only; the obedience of two must not be put together to make up a perfect obedience; so that, if you desire to be justified before God, you must

either bring to him a perfect righteousness of your own, and wholly renounce Christ; or else you must bring the perfect righteousness of Christ, and wholly renounce your own.

Ant. But believe me, sir, I would advise him to bring Christ's and wholly renounce his own, as, I thank the Lord, I have done.

Evan. You say very well; for, indeed, the covenant of grace terminates itself only on Christ and his righteousness; God will have none to have a hand in the justification and salvation of a sinner, but Christ only. And to say as the thing is, neighbour Nomista, Christ Jesus will either be a whole Saviour, or no Saviour; he will either save you alone, or not save you at all. Acts 4:12: "For among men there is given no other name under heaven, whereby we must be saved," says the apostle Peter; and Jesus Christ himself says, John 14:6: "I am the way, the truth, and the life; and no man cometh to the Father but by me." So that, as Luther truly says, "besides this way Christ, there is no way but wandering, no verity but hypocrisy, no life but eternal death." And verily, says another godly writer, "we can neither come to God the Father, be reconciled unto him, nor have anything to do with him, by any other way or means, but only by Jesus Christ; for we shall not anywhere find the favour of God, true innocency, righteousness, satisfaction for sin, help, comfort, life, or salvation, anywhere but only in Jesus Christ; he is the sum and center of all divine and evangelical truths: and therefore as there is no knowledge or wisdom so excellent, necessary, or heavenly, as the knowledge of Christ, as the apostle plainly gives us to understand, 1 Corinthians 2:2, that he 'determined to know nothing amongst them, but only Jesus Christ and him crucified'; so there is nothing to be preached unto men, as an object of their faith, or necessary element of their salvation, which doth not in some way or other either meet in Christ, or refer unto him."

Neo. But, sir, hath such a one as I any warrant to believe in Christ?

Evan. I beseech you consider, that God the Father, as he is in his Son Jesus Christ, moved with nothing but with his free love to mankind lost, hath made a deed of gift and grant unto them all, that whosoever of them all shall believe in this his Son shall not perish but have eternal life. And hence it was that Jesus Christ himself said unto his disciples, Mark 16:15, "Go and preach the gospel to every creature under heaven": that is, Go and tell every man without exception, that here is good news for him; Christ is dead for him. I say not, "Tell every man Christ died for him"; but, Tell every man "Christ is dead for him"; if he will take him, and accept of his righteousness, he shall have him. Therefore, says a godly writer, "Forasmuch as the holy Scripture speaketh to all in general, none of us ought to distrust himself but believe that it doth belong particularly to himself." "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son" (1 John 5:10,11). And to the end that this point, wherein lies and consists the whole mystery of our holy faith, may be understood the better, let us put the case, that some good and holy king should cause a proclamation to be made through his whole kingdom, by the sound of a trumpet, that all rebels and banished men shall safely return home to their houses: because that, at the suit and desert of some dear friend of theirs, it has pleased the king to pardon them; certainly, none of these rebels ought to doubt but that he shall obtain true pardon for his rebellion; and so return home, and live under the shadow of that gracious king. Even so, our good King, the Lord of heaven and earth, has, for the obedience and desert of our good brother Jesus Christ, pardoned all our sins, and made a proclamation throughout the whole world, that every one of us may safely return to God in Jesus Christ: wherefore I beseech you make no doubt of it, but "draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith," Hebrews 10:22.

Neo. Oh, but, sir, in this similitude the case is not alike. For when the earthly king sends forth such a proclamation, it may be thought that he indeed intends to pardon all; but it cannot be thought that the King of heaven does so: for do not the Scriptures say that "some men are ordained before to condemnation," Jude 4? And does not Christ himself say that "many are called, but few are chosen," Matthew 22:14? And, therefore, it may be I am one of them that are ordained to condemnation; and, therefore, though I be called, I shall never be chosen, and so shall not be saved.

Evan. I beseech you to consider that although some men be ordained to condemnation, yet so long as the Lord has concealed their names, and not set a mark of reprobation upon any man in particular, but offers the pardon generally to all, without having any respect either to election or reprobation, surely it is great folly in any man to say, It may be I am not elected, and therefore shall not have benefit by it; and therefore I will not accept of it, nor come in; for it should rather move every man to give diligence “to make his calling and election sure,” 2 Peter 1:10, by believing it, for fear we come short of it, according to that of the apostle, “Let us, therefore, fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of us should seem to come short of it,” Hebrews 4:1. Wherefore, I beseech you, do not you say, It may be I am not elected, and check your own heart for meddling with God’s secrets, and prying into his hidden counsel, and go no more beyond your bounds, as you have done, in this point: for election and reprobation is a secret; and the Scripture tells us, “The secret things belong unto the Lord our God, but those things that are revealed belong unto us,” Deuteronomy 29:29.

Now this is God’s revealed will, for, indeed, it is his express command, “That you should believe on the name of his Son,” 1 John 3:23; and it is his promise, “That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” John 3:16. Wherefore, you having so good a warrant as God’s command, and so great an encouragement as his promise, do your duty; and by the doing thereof you may put it out of question, and be sure that you are also one of God’s elect. Say, then, I beseech you, with a firm faith, The righteousness of Jesus Christ belongs to all that believe, but I believe, and therefore it belongs to me. Yea, say with Paul, “I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me, and gave himself for me,” Galatians 2:20. “He saw in me (says Luther on the text) nothing but wickedness, going astray, and fleeing from him. Yet this good Lord had mercy on me, and of his mere mercy he loved me, yea, so loved me, that he gave himself for me. Who is this *me*? Even I, wretched and damnable sinner, was so dearly beloved of the Son of God that he gave himself for me.”

Oh! print this word “me” in your heart, and apply it to your own self, not doubting but that you are one of those to whom this “me” belongs.

Neo. But may such a vile and sinful wretch as I am be persuaded that God commands me to believe, and that he hath made a promise to me?

Evan. Why do you make a question where there is none to be made? “Go,” says Christ, “and preach the gospel to every creature under heaven,” that is, Go tell every man without exception, whatsoever his sins be, whatsoever his rebellions be, go and tell him these glad tidings, that if he will come in, I will accept of him; his sins shall be forgiven him, and he shall be saved; if he will come in and take me, and receive me, I will be his loving husband, and he shall be mine own dear spouse. Let me, therefore, say unto you, in the words of the apostle, “Now, then, I as an ambassador for Christ, as though God did beseech you by me, I pray you, in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled unto God; for he hath made him to be sin for you, who knew no sin, that ye might be made the righteousness of God in him,” 2 Corinthians 5:20,21.

Neo. But do you say, sir, that if I believe, I shall be espoused unto Christ?

Evan. Yea, indeed, shall you: for faith coupleth the soul with Christ, even as the spouse with her husband; by which means Christ and the soul are made one: for as, in corporal marriage, man and wife are made one flesh, even so in this spiritual and mystical marriage, Christ and his spouse are made one spirit. And this marriage, of all others, is most perfect, and absolutely accomplished between them; for the marriage between man and wife is but a slender figure of this union; wherefore, I beseech you to believe it, and then you shall be sure to enjoy it.

Neo. But, sir, if David said, “Seemeth it to you a light thing to be an *earthly* king’s son-in-law, seeing that I am a poor man and lightly esteemed?” 1 Samuel 18:23; then surely I have much more cause to say, Seemeth it a light thing to be a heavenly King’s daughter-in-law, seeing that I am such a poor sinful wretch? Surely, sir, I cannot be persuaded to believe it.

Evan. Alas! man, how much are you mistaken! for you look upon God, and upon yourself, with the eye of reason; and so as standing in relation to each other according to the tenor of the covenant of works: whereas, you being now in the case of justification and reconciliation, you are to look both upon God and upon yourself with the eye of faith; and so standing in relation to each other according to the tenor of the covenant of grace. For, says the apostle, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their sins unto them," 2 Corinthians 5:19; as if he had said, Because as God stands in relation to man according to the tenor of the covenant of works, and so out of Christ, he could not, without prejudice to his justice, be reconciled unto them, nor have anything to do with them otherwise than in wrath and indignation; therefore to the intent that Justice and Mercy might meet together, and Righteousness and Peace might embrace each other, and so God stand in relation to man according to the tenor of the covenant of grace; he put himself into his Son Jesus Christ, and shrouded himself there, that so he might speak peace to his people, Psalm 85:8-10. Sweetly, says Luther, "Because the nature of God was otherwise higher than that we are able to attain unto it, therefore hath he humbled himself for us, and taken our nature upon him, and so put himself into Christ. Here he looketh for us, here he will receive us; and he that seeketh him here shall find him." "This," says God the Father, "is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," Matthew 3:17; whereupon the same Luther says in another place, "We must not think and persuade ourselves that this voice came from heaven for Christ's own sake, but for our sakes, even as Christ himself says, John 12:30, 'This voice came not because of me, but for your sakes.'"

The truth is, Christ had no need that it should be said unto him, 'This is my beloved Son.' He knew that from all eternity and that he should still so remain, though these words had not been spoken from heaven; therefore, by these words, God the Father, in Christ his Son, cheers the hearts of poor sinners, and greatly delights them with singular comfort and heavenly sweetness, assuring them that whosoever is married unto Christ, and so in him by faith, he is as acceptable to God the Father as Christ himself; according to that of the apostle, "He hath made us acceptable in his beloved," Ephesians 1:6. Wherefore, if you would be acceptable to God, and be made his dear child, then by faith cleave unto his beloved Son Christ, and hang about his neck, yea, and creep into his bosom; and so shall the love and favour of God be as deeply insinuated into you as it is into Christ himself; and so shall God the Father, together with his beloved Son, wholly possess you, and be possessed of you; and so God, and Christ, and you, shall become one entire thing, according to Christ's prayer, "that they may be one in us, as thou and I are one," John 17:21.

And by this means you may have sufficient ground and warrant to say (in the matter of reconciliation with God at any time, whensoever you are disputing with yourself, how God is to be found that justifies and saves sinners), I know no other God, neither will I know any other God, besides this God that came down from heaven, and clothed himself with my flesh, unto "whom all power is given, both in heaven and in earth," who is my judge; "For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment to the Son," John 5:22. So that Christ may do with me whatsoever he liketh, and determine of me according to his own mind; and I am sure he hath said, "I came not to judge the world, but to save the world," John 12:47. And therefore I do believe that he will save me.

Neo. Indeed, sir, if I were so holy and so righteous as some men are, and had such power over my sins and corruptions as some men have, then I could easily believe it; but, alas! I am so sinful and so unworthy a wretch that I dare not presume to believe that Christ will accept of me so as to justify and save me.

Evan. Alas! man, in thus saying, you seem to contradict and gainsay both the apostle Paul and our Lord Jesus Christ himself; and that against your own soul: for whereas the apostle Paul says, "that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," 1 Timothy 1:15, and doth justify the ungodly, Romans 4:5, why, you seem to hold, and do in effect say, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save the righteous, and to justify the godly. And whereas our Saviour says, the whole need not a physician, but the sick; and that he came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance, Matthew 9:12; why, you seem to hold, and do in effect say, that the sick need not a physician, but the whole: and that he came not to call sinners but the righteous to repentance. And indeed, in so saying, you seem to conceive that Christ's spouse must be purified, washed, and cleansed from all her filthiness, and adorned with a rich robe of righteousness, before he will accept of

her; whereas he himself said unto her, Ezekiel 16:4-8, "As for thy nativity, in the day that thou wast born, thy navel was not cut, neither wast thou washed with water to supple thee; thou wast not swaddled at all, nor salted at all. No eye pitied thee to do any of these things unto thee; but when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold thy time was a time of love. And I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness; yea, and I sware unto thee, and entered into covenant with thee, and thou becamest mine."—Hosea 2:19, "And I will marry thee unto me for ever; yea, I will marry thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in mercy, and compassion."

Wherefore, I beseech you, revoke this your erroneous opinion, and contradict the word of truth no longer; but conclude for a certainty that it is not the righteous and godly man, but the sinful and ungodly man that Christ came to call, justify, and save: so that if you were a righteous and godly man, you were neither capable of calling, justifying, or saving by Christ; but being a sinful and ungodly man, I will be bold to say unto you as the people said unto blind Bartimeus, Mark 10:49, "Be of good comfort; arise, he calleth thee," and will justify and save thee. Go then unto him, I beseech you; and if he come and meet thee (as his manner is), then do not you unadvisedly say with Peter, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" Luke 5:8; but say, in plain terms, O come unto me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord! yea, go on further, and say, as Luther bids you, "Most gracious Jesus and sweet Christ, I am a miserable, poor sinner, and, therefore, do judge myself unworthy of thy grace; but yet I, having learned from thy word that thy salvation belongs unto such a one, therefore do I come unto thee to claim that right which, through thy gracious promise, belongs unto me." Assure yourself, man, that Jesus Christ requires no portion with his spouse; no, verily, he requires nothing with her but mere poverty: "The rich he sends empty away," Luke 1:53; but the poor are by him enriched. And, indeed, says Luther, "the more miserable, sinful, and distressed a man doth feel himself, and judge himself to be, the more willing is Christ to receive him and relieve him." So that, says he, in judging thyself unworthy, thou dost thereby become truly worthy; and so, indeed, hast gotten a greater occasion of coming to him. Wherefore, then, in the words of the apostle, I do exhort and beseech you to "come boldly unto the throne of grace, that you may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need," Hebrews 4:16.

Neo. But, truly, sir, my heart, as it were, trembles within me to think of coming to Christ after such a bold manner; and surely, sir, if I should so come unto him, it would argue much pride and presumption in me.

Evan. Indeed, if you should be encouraged to come unto Christ and to speak thus unto him because of any godliness, righteousness, or worthiness, that you conceive to be in you; that, I confess, were proud presumption in you. But to come to Christ by believing that he will accept of you, justify, and save you freely by his grace, according to his gracious promise, this is neither pride nor presumption: for Christ having tendered and offered it to you freely, believe it, it is true humility of heart to take what Christ offers you.

Nom. But, by your favour, sir, I pray you give me leave to speak a word by the way. I know my neighbour, Neophytus, it may be, better than you do; yet I do not intend to charge him with any sin otherwise than by way of supposition: as thus, suppose he has been guilty of the committing of gross and grievous sins, will Christ accept of him, and justify and save him for all that?

Evan. Yes, indeed; for there is no limitation of God's grace in Jesus Christ, except the sin against the Holy Ghost. Christ "stands at the door and knocks," Revelation 3:20. And if any murdering Manasseh, or any persecuting and blaspheming Saul, 1 Timothy 1:13, or any adulterous Mary Magdalene, "will open unto him, he will come in," and bring comfort with him, "and will sup with him." "Seek from the one end of the heavens to the other," says Hooker; "turn all the Bible over, and see if the words of Christ be not true, 'Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out,'" John 6:37.

Nom. Why, then, sir, it seems you hold that the vilest sinner in the world ought not to be discouraged from coming unto Christ, and believing in him, by reason of his sins.

Evan. Surely, if “Christ came into the world to seek, and call, and save sinners, and to justify the ungodly,” as you have heard; and if the more sinful, miserable, and distressed a man judge himself to be, the more willing Christ is to receive him and relieve him; then I see no reason why the vilest sinner should be discouraged from believing on the name of Jesus Christ by reason of his sins. Nay, let me say more; the greater any man’s sins are, either in number or nature, the more haste he should make to come unto Christ, and to say with David, “For thy name’s sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity, for it is great!” Psalm 25:11.

Ant. Surely, sir, if my friend Neophytus did rightly consider these things, and were assuredly persuaded of the truth of them, methinks he should not be so backward from coming to Christ by believing on his name as he is; for if the greatness of his sin should be so far from hindering his coming to Christ that they should further his coming, then I know not what should hinder him.

Evan. You speak very truly indeed. And therefore I beseech you, neighbour Neophytus, consider seriously of it; and neither let your own accusing conscience, nor Satan the accuser of the brethren, hinder you any longer from Christ. For what though they should accuse you of pride, infidelity, covetousness, lust, anger, envy, and hypocrisy? yea, what though they should accuse you of whoredom, theft, drunkenness, and such like? yea, do what they can, they can make no worse a man of you than a sinner, or chief of sinners, or an ungodly person; and so, consequently, such an one Christ came to justify and save; so that in very deed, if you do rightly consider of it, they do you more good than hurt by their accusations. And therefore, I beseech you, in all such cases or conflicts, take the counsel of Luther, who on the Galatians says, “When thy conscience is thoroughly afraid with the remembrance of thy sins past, and the devil assaileth thee with great violence, going about to overwhelm thee with heaps, floods, and whole seas of sins, to terrify thee, and to draw thee from Christ; then arm thyself with such sentences as these: Christ the Son of God was given, not for the holy, righteous, worthy, and such as were his friends; but for the wicked sinners, for the unworthy, and for his enemies. Wherefore, if the devil say, Thou art a sinner, and therefore must be damned; then answer thou, and say, Because thou sayest I am a sinner, therefore will I be righteous and saved. And if he reply, “Nay, sinners must be damned”; then answer thou, and say, “No, for I flee to Christ, who hath given himself for my sins; and, therefore, Satan, in that thou sayest I am a sinner, thou givest me armour and weapons against thyself, that with thine own sword I may cut thy throat, and tread thee under my feet.” And thus you see it is the counsel of Luther that your sins should rather drive you to Christ than keep you from him.

Nom. But, sir, suppose he hath not as yet truly repented for his many and great sins. Hath he any warrant to come unto Christ by believing till he has done so?

Evan. I tell you truly, that whatsoever a man is, or whatsoever he hath done or not done, he hath warrant enough to come unto Christ by believing, if he can; for Christ makes a *general proclamation*, saying, “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price.” This, you see, is the condition, “buy wine and milk,” that is, grace and salvation, “without money,” that is, without any sufficiency of your own; only “incline your ear and hear, and your souls shall live”; yea, live by hearing that “Christ will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.”

Nom. But yet, sir, you see that Christ requires a thirsting before a man come unto him, the which, I conceive, cannot be without true repentance.

Evan. In the last chapter of the Revelation, verse 17, Christ makes the same general proclamation, saying, “Let him that is athirst come”; and as if the Holy Ghost had so long since answered the same objection that yours is, it follows in the next words, “And whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely,” even without thirsting, if he will; for “him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out,” John 6:37. But because it seems you conceive he ought to repent before he believe, I pray tell me what you do conceive repentance to be, or wherein does it consist?

Nom. Why, I conceive that repentance consists in a man's humbling himself before God, and sorrowing and grieving for offending him by his sins, and in turning from them all to the Lord.

Evan. And would you have a man to do all this truly before he come to Christ by believing?

Nom. Yea, indeed, I think it is very meet he should.

Evan. Why, then, I tell you truly, you would have him to do that which is impossible.

For, first of all, godly humiliation in true penitents proceeds from the love of God their good Father, and so from the hatred of that sin which has displeased him; and this cannot be without faith.

Secondly. Sorrow and grief for displeasing God by sin necessarily argue the love of God; and it is impossible we should ever love God till by faith we know ourselves loved of God.

No man can turn to God except he be first turned of God: and after he is turned, he repents; so Ephraim says, "After I was turned, I repented," Jeremiah 31:19. The truth is, a repentant sinner first believes that God will do that which he promiseth, namely, pardon his sin, and take away his iniquity; then he rests in the hope of it; and from that, and for it, he leaves sin, and will forsake his old course, because it is displeasing to God; and will do that which is pleasing and acceptable to him. So that, first of all, God's favour is apprehended, and remission of sins believed; then upon that cometh alteration of life and conversation.

"That repentance not only always follows faith, but is produced by it, ought to be without controversy. Those who think that repentance precedes faith instead of flowing from, or being produced by it, as the fruit by the tree, have never understood its nature, and are moved to adopt that view on very insufficient grounds. But when we attribute the origin of repentance to faith, we do not dream of some period of time in which faith is to give birth to it: we only wish to show that a man cannot seriously engage in repentance unless he knows that he is of God. But no man is truly persuaded that he is of God until he has embraced his offered favour," says Calvin (INSTIT. Book III, Chap 3, sec.1,2).

The apostle says that "without faith it is impossible to please God," Hebrews 11:6; that is, says Calvin, "Whatsoever a man thinketh, purposeth, or doeth, before he be reconciled to God by faith in Christ, it is accursed, and not only of no value to righteousness, but of certain deserving to damnation." So that, says Luther on Galatians, "Whosoever goeth about to please God with works going before faith, goeth about to please God with sin; which is nothing else but to heap sin upon sin, to mock God, and to provoke him to wrath. Nay (says the same Luther on Galatians again), if thou be without Christ, thy wisdom is double foolishness, thy righteousness is double sin and iniquity." And, therefore, though you have walked very strictly according to the law, and led an honest life, yet if you have rested and put confidence therein, and so come short of Christ, then hath it indeed rather done you hurt than good. For, says a godly writer, "a virtuous life, according to the light of nature, turneth a man further off from God, if he add not thereto the effectual working of his Spirit." And, says Luther, "they which have respect only to an honest life, it were better for them to be adulterers and adulteresses, and to wallow in the mire." And surely for this cause it is that our Saviour tells the strict Scribes and Pharisees, who sought justification by works, and rejected Christ, that "publicans and harlots should enter into the kingdom of God before them" (Matt 21:31), because the Pharisee had more to do before he could come at Christ than the publican had.

"If thou hast not faith in Jesus Christ, all that wisdom in the Scriptures will not save thee, nor have power to save thee. If they save thee, it is through faith on Christ revealed in them. 'Search the Scriptures' (says Christ, John 5:39), 'for ye think therein ye have salvation;' but search them, for they speak of me more than of anything else, and ye ought to know me, or ye shall die in your sins. But you will say, May not a man have love to God the Father upon the thoughts of his free grace alone, and may he not then repent for sin? I say, no; you cannot repent unless you believe on his Son Christ, Romans 1:5. Love to God, and turning to God, will not save you, if you swerve from the means of grace and the way of faith. What says Christ? John 5:42,48, 'But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you. I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive.' I know that you

have not the love of God in you; why? Because you want faith in me. Love to God springs from faith in Christ, and therefore never talk of love to God, if you have not treated concerning salvation by faith in Jesus Christ. Acts 26:17-19, what saith Christ himself from heaven, when he gave Paul his commission? 'I send thee,' saith he, 'to open the eyes of the Gentiles, to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sin, and an inheritance among them that are sanctified.' Will not all this do? Will not turning unto God from self-love, and loving God, and being sanctified, serve to save us under the gospel? No; read the next words: it must all be, says Christ, 'through faith that is in me.' Christ saith it from heaven, this is his commission, and he declares it, that, under the gospel, remission of sins and turning to God, forgiveness of sin and sanctification, were all through faith in him. Be convinced then, that if ever you be saved, there is a necessity that God teach you to come to the Son" (Thomas Goodwin).

Before a man believe God's love to him in Christ, though he may have a kind of love to God, as he is his Creator and Preserver, and gives him many good things for this present life, yet if God do but open his eyes to see what condition his soul is in, that is, if he do but let him see that relation that is betwixt God and him according to the tenor of the covenant of works, then he conceives of him as an angry Judge, armed with justice against him, and must be pacified by the works of the law, whereunto he finds his nature opposite and contrary; and therefore he hates both God and his law, and doth secretly wish and desire there were neither God nor law. And though God should now give unto him ever so many temporal blessings, yet could he not love him; for what malefactor could love that judge or his law from whom he expected the sentence of condemnation, though he should feast him at his table with ever so many dainties? "But after that the kindness and love of God his Saviour hath appeared, not by works of righteousness that he hath done, but according to his mercy he saved him," Titus 3:4,5; that is, when as by the eye of faith, he sees himself to stand in relation to God according to the tenor of the covenant of grace, then he conceives of God as a most merciful and loving Father to him in Christ, that hath freely pardoned and forgiven him all his sins, and quite released him from the covenant of works; and by this means "the love of God is shed abroad in his heart, through the Holy Ghost which is given to him," and then "he loves God because he first loved him," Romans 5:5; 1 John 4:19. For as a man seeth and feeleth by faith the love and favour of God towards him in Christ his Son, so doth he love again both God and his law; and indeed it is impossible for any man to love God till by faith he know himself beloved of God.

Though a man, before he believe God's love to him in Christ, may have a great measure of legal humiliation, compunction, sorrow, and grief, and be brought down, as it were, to the very gate of hell, and feel the very flashing of hell fire in his conscience for his sins, yet it is not because he hath thereby offended God, but rather because he hath thereby offended himself, that is, because he hath thereby brought himself into the danger of eternal death and condemnation. But when once he believes the love of God to him in Christ in pardoning his iniquity and passing by his transgressions, then he sorrows and grieves for the offence of God by sin; reasoning thus with himself: And is it so indeed? Hath the Lord given his own Son to death for me who have been such a vile sinful wretch? And hath Christ borne all thy sins? and was he wounded for thy transgressions? Oh then, the working of his bowels, the stirring of his affections, the melting and relenting of his repenting heart! "Then he remembers his own evil ways, and his doings that were not good, and loathes himself in his own eyes for all his abominations"; and looking upon Christ, "whom he hath pierced, he mourns bitterly for him, as one mourneth for his only son," Ezekiel 36:31; Zechariah 12:10. Thus, when faith has bathed a man's heart in the blood of Christ, it is so mollified that it quickly dissolves into tears of godly sorrow; so that if Christ do but turn and look upon him, oh then, with Peter, he goes out and weeps bitterly! And this is true gospel mourning; and this is right evangelical repenting.

Though, before a man do truly believe in Christ, he may so reform his life and amend his ways that as "touching the righteousness which is of the law" he may be, with the apostle, blameless, Philippians 3:6; yet, being under the covenant of works, all the obedience that he yields to the law, all his leaving off of sin, and performance of duties, all his avoiding what the law forbids, and all his doing what the law commands, is

begotten by the law of works, of Hagar the bond-woman, by the force of self-love; and so, indeed, they are the fruit and works of a bond-servant that is moved and constrained to do all that he doth for fear of punishment and hope of reward. "For," says Luther on Galatians, "the law given on Mount Sinai, which the Arabians call Agar, begetteth none but servants." And so indeed all that such a man doth is but hypocrisy; for he pretends the serving of God, whereas, indeed, he intends the serving of himself. And how can he do otherwise? for whilst he wants faith, he wants all things: he is an empty vine, and therefore must needs bring forth fruit unto himself, Hosea 10:1. Till a man be served himself, he will not serve the Lord Christ. Nay, while he wants faith, he wants the love of Christ, and therefore he lives not to Christ, but to himself, because he loves himself. And hence, surely, we may conceive it is that Dr. Preston says, "All that a man doeth, not out of love, is out of hypocrisy. Wheresoever love is not, there is nothing but hypocrisy in such a man's heart."

But when a man, through the "hearing of faith, receives the Spirit of Christ," Galatians 3:2, that Spirit, according to the measure of faith, writes the lively law of love in his heart (as Tindal sweetly says), whereby he is enabled to work freely and of his own accord, without the co-action or compulsion of the law. For that love wherewith Christ, or God in Christ, hath loved him, and which by faith is apprehended of him, will constrain him to do so; according to that of the apostle, 2 Corinthians 5:14, "The love of Christ constraineth us." That is, it will make him do so, whether he will or no; he cannot choose but do it. I tell you truly, answerably as the love of Christ is shed abroad in the heart of any man, it is such a strong impulsion that it carries him on to serve and please the Lord in all things, according to the saying of an evangelical man: "The will and affection of a believer, according to the measure of faith and the spirit received, sweetly quickens and bends to choose, affect, and delight in whatever is good and acceptable to God, or a good man; the Spirit freely and cheerfully moving and inclining him to keep the law without fear of hell or hope of heaven." For a Christian man, says sweet Tindal, worketh only because it is the will of his Father; for after that he is overcome with love and kindness, he seeks to do the will of God, which is indeed a Christian man's nature; and what he doth, he doth it freely after the example of Christ. As a natural son, ask him why he does such a thing. Why, says he, it is the will of my Father, and I do it that I may please him; for, indeed, love desireth no wages; it is wages enough to itself; it hath sweetness enough in itself; it desires no addition; it pays its own wages. And therefore it is the true child-like obedience, being begotten by faith, of Sarah the free-woman, by the force of God's love. And so it is indeed the only true and sincere obedience: for, says Dr. Preston, "To do a thing in love is to do it in sincerity; and, indeed, there is no other definition of sincerity; that is the best way to know it by."

Nom. Well, sir, I am answered.

Neo. And truly, sir, you have so declared and set forth Christ's disposition towards poor sinners, and so answered all my doubts and objections, that I am now verily persuaded that Christ is willing to entertain me; and surely I am willing to come unto him, and receive him; but, alas! I want power.

Evan. But tell me truly, are you resolved to put forth all your power to believe, and so to take Christ?

Neo. Truly, sir, methinks my resolution is much like the resolution of the four lepers, who sat at the gate of Samaria; for as they said, "If we enter into the city, the famine is in the city, and we shall die there; and if we sit still here, we die also; now, therefore, let us fall unto the host of the Syrians; if they save us, we shall live, and if they kill us, we shall but die," 2 Kings 7:4; even so say I in mine heart, If I go back to the covenant of works to seek justification thereby, I shall die there; and if I sit still and seek it no way, I shall die also; now, therefore, though I be somewhat fearful, yet am I resolved to go unto Christ; and if I perish, I perish.

Evan. Why, now I tell you the match is made; Christ is yours, and you are his; "this day is salvation come to your house," (your soul, I mean): for, what though you have not that power to come so fast to Christ, and lay such firm hold on him, as you desire; yet coming with such a resolution to take Christ, as you do, you need not care for power to do it, inasmuch as Christ will enable you to do it; for is it not said, John 1:12, "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that

believe on his name”? O therefore, I beseech you, stand no longer disputing; but be preemptory and resolute in your faith, and in casting yourself upon God in Christ for mercy; and let the issue be what it will. Yet let me tell you, to your comfort, that such a resolution shall never go to hell. Nay, I will say more; if any soul have room in heaven, such a soul shall; for God cannot find in his heart to damn such a one. I might, then, with as much true confidence say unto you, as John Careless said to John Bradford in a letter to him, “Hearken, O heavens, and thou O earth, give ear, and bear me witness at the great day, that I do here faithfully and truly declare the Lord’s message unto his dear servant and singularly beloved John Bradford, saying, ‘John Bradford, thou man so specially beloved of God, I do pronounce and testify unto thee, in the word and name of the Lord Jehovah, that all thy sins whatsoever they be, though never so many, grievous, or great, be fully and freely pardoned, released, and forgiven thee, by the mercy of God in Jesus Christ, the only Lord and sweet Saviour, in whom thou dost undoubtedly believe; as truly as the Lord liveth, he will not have thee die the death; but hath verily purposed, determined, and decreed, that thou shalt live with him for ever.’”

Neo. O, sir, if I have as good warrant to apply this saying to myself as Mr. Bradford had to himself, then I am a happy man!

Evan. I tell you from Christ, and under the hand of the Spirit, that your person is accepted, your sins are done away, and you shall be saved; and if an angel from heaven should tell you otherwise, let him be accursed. Therefore, you may (without doubt) conclude that you are a happy man; for by means of this your matching with Christ, you are become one with him, and one in him; you “dwell in him, and he in you,” 1 John 4:13. He is “your well-beloved, and you are his,” Canticles 2:16. So that the marriage union betwixt Christ and you is more than a bare notion or apprehension of your mind; for it is a special, spiritual, and real union: it is an union betwixt the nature of Christ, God and man, and you; it is a knitting and closing, not only of your apprehension with a Saviour, but also of your soul with a Saviour. Whence it must needs follow that you cannot be condemned except Christ be condemned with you; neither can Christ be saved except you be saved with him. And as by means of corporal marriage all things become common betwixt man and wife; even so, by means of this spiritual marriage, all things become common betwixt Christ and you; for when Christ hath married his spouse unto himself, he passeth over all his estate unto her; so that whatsoever Christ is or hath, you may boldly challenge as your own. “He is made unto you of God wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption,” 1 Corinthians 1:30. And surely, by virtue of this near union, it is that as Christ is called “the Lord our righteousness,” Jeremiah 23:6, even so is the church called, “the Lord our righteousness,” (33:16). I tell you, you may, by virtue of this union, boldly take upon yourself, as your own, Christ’s watching, abstinence, travails, prayers, persecutions, and slanders; yea, his tears, his sweat, his blood, and all that ever he did and suffered in the space of three and thirty years, with his passion, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension; for they are all yours.

And as Christ passes over all his estate unto his spouse, so does he require that she should pass over all unto him. Wherefore, you being now married unto Christ, you must give all that you have of your own unto him; and truly you have nothing of your own but sin, and, therefore, you must give him that. I beseech you, then, say unto Christ with bold confidence, I give unto thee, my dear husband, my unbelief, my mistrust, my pride, my arrogance, my ambition, my wrath, and anger, my envy, my covetousness, my evil thoughts, affections, and desires; I make one bundle of these and all my other offenses, and give them unto thee. And thus was Christ made “sin for us, that knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him,” 2 Corinthians 5:21. “Now then,” says Luther, “let us compare these things together, and we shall find inestimable treasure. Christ is full of grace, life, and saving health; and the soul is freight-full of all sin, death, and damnation; but let faith come betwixt these two, and it shall come to pass that Christ shall be laden with sin, death, and hell; and unto the soul shall be imputed grace, life, and salvation. Who then is able to value the royalty of this marriage accordingly? Who is able to comprehend the glorious riches of his grace, where this rich and righteous husband, Christ, doth take unto wife this poor and wicked harlot, redeeming her from all devils, and garnishing her with all his own jewels?—so that you, through the assuredness of your faith in Christ, your husband, are delivered from all sins, made safe from death, guarded

from hell, and endowed with the everlasting righteousness, life, and saving health of this your husband Christ.” And, therefore, you are now under the covenant of grace, and freed from the law, as it is the covenant of works; for (as Mr. Ball truly says) at one and the same time a man cannot be under the covenant of works and the covenant of grace.