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A LETTER

TO THE

REVEREND DR. HORNE.

OCCASIONED BY HIS LATE SERMON, PREACHED BEFORE
THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD, ABOUT 1762.

REVEREND SIR,

WHEN you spoke of "heresies making their periodical revolutions," of "Antinomianism rampant among us," and, immediately after, of "the new lights at the Tabernacle and Foundery," must not your hearers naturally think that Mr. Whitefield and I were reviving those heresies? But do you know the persons of whom you speak? Have you ever conversed with them? Have you read their writings? If not, is it kind, is it just, to pass so severe a censure upon them? Had you only taken the trouble of reading one tract, the "Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion," you would have seen that a great part of what you affirm is what I never denied. To put this beyond dispute, I beg leave to transcribe some passages from that treatise; which will show not only what I teach now, but what I have taught for many years. I will afterward simply and plainly declare wherein I as yet differ from you: And the rather, that if I err therein, you may, by God's assistance, convince me of it.

I. 1. "Justification sometimes means our acquittal at the last day. (Matt. xii. 37.) But this is altogether out of the present question; that justification whereof our Articles and Homilies speak, meaning present forgiveness, pardon of sins, and, consequently, acceptance with God; who therein 'declares his righteousness' (or mercy, by or) 'for the remission of the sins that are past;' saying, 'I will be merciful to thy unrighteousness, and thine iniquities I will remember no more.' (Rom. iii. 25; Heb. viii. 12.)

“I believe the condition of this is faith. (Rom. iv. 5, &c.) I mean, not only, that without faith we cannot be justified; but also, that as soon as any one has true faith, in that moment he is justified.

“Good works follow this faith, but cannot go before it: (Luke vi. 43:) Much less can sanctification, which implies a continued course of good works, springing from holiness of heart. But it is allowed, that entire sanctification goes before our justification at the last day. (Heb. xii. 14.)

“It is allowed, also, that repentance, and ‘fruits meet for repentance,’ go before faith. (Mark i. 15; Matt. iii. 8.) Repentance absolutely must go before faith; fruits meet for it, if there be opportunity. By repentance, I mean conviction of sin, producing real desires and sincere resolutions of amendment; and by ‘fruits meet for repentance,’ forgiving our brother; (Matt. vi. 14, 15;) ceasing from evil, doing good; (Luke iii. 8, 9, &c. ;) using the ordinances of God, and, in general, obeying him according to the measure of grace which we have received. (Matthew vii. 7; xxv. 29.) But these I cannot as yet term good works; because they do not spring from faith and the love of God.” (*Farther Appeal*. Vol. VIII. pp. 46, 47.)

2. “Faith alone is the proximate condition of present justification.”

II. 1. I have shown here, at large, what is the doctrine I teach with regard to justification, and have taught, ever since I was convinced of it myself, by carefully reading the New Testament and the Homilies. In many points, I apprehend, it agrees with yours: In some it does not; these I come now to consider. May God enable me to do it in love and meekness of wisdom.

You say, “Happy times, when faith and a good life were synonymous terms!” (Page 7.) I conceive, they never were. Is not faith the root, a good life the tree springing therefrom?

“That good works are a necessary condition of our justification, may be proved, (1.) From express testimonies of Scripture. So Isaiah i. 16, 17: ‘Cease from evil, learn to do well.’ Then ‘your sins, that were as scarlet, shall be white as snow.’ Here, ceasing from evil, and learning to do well, are the conditions of pardon.” I answer: Without them there is no pardon; yet the immediate condition of it is faith. He that

believeth, and he alone, is justified before God. "So Ezekie. xxxiii. 14-16: If the sinner 'turn from his evil ways,' and 'walk in the statutes of life,' then 'all his sins shall not be once mentioned to him.'" Most sure; that is, if he believe; else, whatever his outward walking be, he cannot be justified.

The next scripture you cite, Matt. xi. 28, (*Sermon*, p. 10,) proves no more than this, that none find "rest to their souls," unless they first come to Christ, (namely, by faith,) and then obey him.

But, "He says, 'Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.'" He does so; but how does it appear, that this relates to justification at all?

"St. Peter also declares, 'In every nation, he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted of him.'" (Acts x. 35.) He is; but none can either fear God, or work righteousness, till he believes according to the dispensation he is under. "And St. John: 'He that doeth righteousness is righteous.'" I do not see that this proves anything. "And again: 'If we walk in the light, as God is in the light, then have we communion with him, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.'" (1 John i. 7.) This would prove something, if it could be proved, that "cleansing us from all sin" meant only justification.

"The Scriptures insist upon the necessity of repentance, in particular, for that purpose. But repentance comprehends compunction, humiliation, hatred of sin, confession of it, prayer for mercy, ceasing from evil, a firm purpose to do well, restitution of ill-got goods, forgiveness of all who have done us wrong, and works of beneficence." (Pages 11, 12.) I believe it does comprehend all these, either as parts or as fruits of it: And it comprehends "the fear" but not "the love of God;" that flows from a higher principle. And he who loves God is not barely in the right way to justification: He is actually justified. The rest of the paragraph asserts just the same thing which was asserted in those words: "Previous to justifying faith must be repentance, and, if opportunity permits, 'fruits meet for repentance.'" But still I must observe, that "neither the one nor the other is necessary, either in the same sense, or in the same degree, with faith." No scripture testimony can be produced, which any way contradicts this.

2. "That works are a necessary condition of our justification,

may be proved, Secondly, from scripture examples; particularly those recited in the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews. These all "through faith wrought righteousness; without working righteousness, they had never obtained the promises." (Page 13.) I say the same thing: None are finally saved, but those whose faith "worketh by love."

"Even in the thief upon the cross, faith was attended by repentance, piety, and charity." It was; repentance went before his faith; piety and charity accompanied it. "Therefore, he was not justified by faith alone." Our Church, adopting the words of St. Chrysostom, expressly affirms, in the passage above cited, he was justified by faith alone. And her authority ought to weigh more than even that of Bishop Bull, or of any single man whatever. Authority, be pleased to observe, I plead against authority; reason against reason.

It is no objection, that the faith whereby he was justified immediately produced good works.

3. How we are justified by faith alone, and yet by such a faith as is not alone, it may be proper to explain. And this also I choose to do, not in my own words, but in those of our Church:—

"Faith does not shut out repentance, hope, love, and the fear of God, to be joined with faith in every man that is justified: But it shutteth them out from the office of justifying. So that although they be all present together in him that is justified, yet they justify not all together. Neither doth faith shut out good works, necessarily to be done afterwards, of duty towards God.

"That we are justified only by this faith in Christ, speak all the ancient authors; specially Origen, St. Cyprian, St. Chrysostom, Hilary, Basil, St. Ambrose, and St. Augustine." (*Homily on the Salvation of Man.*)

4. You go on: "Thirdly, if we consider the nature of faith, it will appear impossible that a man should be justified by that alone. Faith is either an assent to the gospel truths, or a reliance on the gospel promises. I know of no other notion of faith." (*Sermon*, p. 15.) I do; an *ελεγχος* of things not seen; which is far more than a bare assent, and yet *toto genere* different from a reliance. Therefore, if you prove that neither an assent nor a reliance justifies, nor both of them together, still you do not prove that we are not justified by faith, even by faith

alone. But how do you prove, that we cannot be justified by faith as a reliance on the promises? Thus: "Such a reliance must be founded on a consciousness of having performed the conditions. And a reliance so founded is the result of works wrought through faith." No; of works wrought without faith, else the argument implies a contradiction. For it runs thus. (On the supposition that faith and reliance were synonymous terms :) Such a reliance is the result of works wrought through such a reliance.

5. Your Fourth argument against justification by faith alone, is drawn from the nature of justification. This, you observe, "implies a prisoner at the bar, and a law by which he is to be tried; and this is not the law of Moses, but that of Christ, requiring repentance and faith, with their proper fruits;" (page 16;) which now, through the blood of Christ, are accepted and "counted for righteousness." St. Paul affirms this concerning faith, in the fourth chapter of his Epistle to the Romans. But where does he say, that either repentance or its fruits are counted for righteousness? Nevertheless, I allow that the law of Christ requires such repentance and faith before justification, as, if there be opportunity, will bring forth the "fruits of righteousness." But if there be not, he that repents and believes is justified notwithstanding. Consequently, these alone are necessary, indispensably necessary, conditions of our justification.

6. Your Last argument against justification by faith alone "is drawn from the method of God's proceeding at the last day. He will then judge every man 'according to his works.' If, therefore, works wrought through faith are the ground of the sentence passed upon us in that day, then are they a necessary condition of our justification;" (page 19;) in other words, "if they are a condition of our final, they are a condition of our present, justification." I cannot allow the consequence. All holiness must precede our entering into glory. But no holiness can exist, till, "being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ."

7. You next attempt to reconcile the writings of St. Paul with justification by works. In order to this you say, "In the three first chapters of his Epistle to the Romans, he proves that both Jews and Gentiles must have recourse to the gospel of Christ. To this end he convicts the whole world of sin; and having stopped every mouth, he makes his inference, 'Therefore, by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified.'

We conclude,' then, says he, 'a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the law.' But here arise two questions: First, What are the works excluded from justifying? Secondly, What is the faith which justifies? " (Pages 20, 21, 22.)

"The works excluded are heathen and Jewish works, set up as meritorious. This is evident from hence,—that Heathens and carnal Jews are the persons against whom he is arguing." Not so: He is arguing against all mankind: He is convicting the whole world of sin. His concern is to stop every mouth, by proving that no flesh, none born of a woman, no child of man, can be justified by his own works. Consequently, he speaks of all the works of all mankind, antecedent to justification, whether Jewish or any other, whether supposed meritorious or not, of which the text says not one word. Therefore, all works antecedent to justification are excluded, and faith is set in flat opposition to them. "Unto him that worketh not, but believeth, his faith is counted to him for righteousness."

"But what is the faith to which he attributes justification? That 'which worketh by love;' which is the same with the 'new creature,' and implies in it the keeping the commandments of God."

It is undoubtedly true, that nothing avails for our final salvation without *καινη κτισις*, "a new creation," and consequent thereon, a sincere, uniform keeping of the commandments of God. This St. Paul constantly declares. But where does he say, this is the condition of our justification? In the Epistles to the Romans and Galatians particularly, he vehemently asserts the contrary; earnestly maintaining, that nothing is absolutely necessary to this, but "believing in Him that justifieth the ungodly;" not the godly, not him that is already a "new creature," that previously keeps all the commandments of God. He does this afterward; when he is justified by faith, then his faith "worketh by love."

"Therefore, there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus," justified by faith in him, provided they "walk in Him whom they have received, not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." (Page 23.) But should they turn back, and walk again after the flesh, they would again be under condemnation. But this no way proves that "walking after the Spirit" was the condition of their justification.

Neither will anything like this follow from the Apostle's.

saying to the Corinthians, "Though I had all faith, so as to remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing." This only proves that *miracle-working* faith may be where *saving* faith is not.

8. To the argument, "St. Paul says, 'Abraham was justified by faith,'" you answer, "St. James says, 'Abraham was justified by works.'" (Page 24.) True: But he neither speaks of the same justification, nor the same faith, nor the same works. Not of the same justification; for St. Paul speaks of that justification which was five-and-twenty years before Isaac was born; (Genesis;) St. James, of that wherewith he was justified when he offered up Isaac on the altar. It is *living* faith whereby St. Paul affirms we are justified: It is *dead* faith whereby St. James affirms we are not justified. St. Paul speaks of works antecedent to justification; St. James, of works consequent upon it. This is the plain, easy, natural way of reconciling the two Apostles.

The fact was manifestly this: (1.) When Abraham dwelt in Haran, being then seventy-five years old, God called him thence: He "believed God," and He "counted it to him for righteousness;" that is, "he was justified by faith," as St. Paul strenuously asserts. (2.) Many years after Isaac was born, (some of the ancients thought three-and-thirty,) Abraham, showing his faith by his works, offered him up upon the altar. (3.) Here the "faith" by which, in St. Paul's sense, he was justified long before, "wrought together with his works;" and he was justified in St. James's sense, that is, (as the Apostle explains his own meaning,) "by works his faith was made perfect." God confirmed, increased, and perfected the principle from which those works sprang.

9. Drawing to a conclusion, you say, "What pity, so many volumes should have been written upon the question,—whether a man be justified by faith or works, seeing they are two essential parts of the same thing!" (Page 25.) If by *works* you understand inward and outward holiness, both faith and works are essential parts of Christianity; and yet they are essentially different, and by God himself contradistinguished from each other; and that in the very question before us: "Him that *worketh* not, but *believeth*." Therefore, whether a man be justified by faith or works, is a point of the last importance; otherwise, our Reformers could not have answered to God their spend-

ing so much time upon it. Indeed, they were both too wise and too good men to have wrote so many volumes on a trifling or needless question.

10. If in speaking on this important point, (such at least it appears to me,) I have said any thing offensive, any that implies the least degree of anger or disrespect, it was entirely foreign to my intention; nor indeed have I any provocation: I have no room to be angry at your maintaining what you believe to be the truth of the gospel; even though I might wish you had omitted a few expressions,

*Quas aut incuria fudit,
Aut humana parum cavit natura.**

In the general, from all I have heard concerning you, I cannot but very highly esteem you in love. And that God may give you both "a right judgment in all things, and evermore to rejoice in his holy comfort," is the prayer of,

Reverend Sir,

Your affectionate brother and servant,
JOHN WESLEY.

A LETTER

TO THE RIGHT REVEREND

THE LORD BISHOP OF GLOUCESTER:

OCCASIONED BY HIS TRACT

"ON THE OFFICE AND OPERATIONS OF THE
HOLY SPIRIT."

MY LORD,

YOUR Lordship well observes, "To employ buffoonery in the service of religion is to violate the majesty of truth, and to deprive it of a fair hearing. To examine, men must be serious."

* Such as escaped my notice; or such as may be placed to the account of human infirmity.