

Salvation in Christ

by

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Letters on Theron and Aspasio Addressed to the Author, 1757

As for us Christians, generally speaking, we seek acceptance with God as it were by the obedience of Christ, but in reality by our own works; as it were by faith, but in reality by the actings of something called by that name. We speak of God as already well pleased in Jesus Christ, or placated by what he hath done; yet we hold it necessary, that some advance should be made on our part, and some good endeavors exerted in order to begin our friendly correspondence with him. At bottom we consider the gospel, as presenting to us a God almost placated, and requiring something of us to make him fully so; yet very ready to help us out with that something, provided we set about it in good earnest. Or, to vary the expression, we look on God as become fully well pleased, through the atonement, to assist our feeblest effort to attain the qualifications necessary to gain his favor. But alas; what a poor use is this for the atonement? At this rate, all our concern about the gospel must turn out to much ado about nothing. For, what great benefit do we reap from it? I think it

must amount to this, that we have now an authentic divine revelation assuring us, that the divine character is such, as the pride of man, in all ages, has imagined it to be; namely, that God is disposed to assist and favor those who are presumed to be the well-disposed. And none of us will readily admit the thought of himself, that he is altogether ill-disposed. We Protestants have indeed renounced the gross idolatry of our Popish fathers, even as the Jews returned from Babylon did that of their forefathers; yet, we have closely imitated the Jews contemporary with Christ and his Apostles, in their notions of the Divine character, and in their connecting their temporal interest with their religion, or their zeal for a worldly kingdom to the Messiah. Human wisdom has been employed in all ages to shorten the distance betwixt God and man. All the various methods that have been tried, agree in one respect. They all serve more or less to lower the Divine character, and more or less to exalt that of man. And thus it has been thought the distance might be removed, and friendship restored between God and man. Here the gospel differs from all the devices of human wisdom. It shows us the living and true God coming down the whole of the infinite distance himself, not to meet returning man, but to overtake and prevent him, when hastening to utter ruin; to seek and to save them that were lost. It shows us God come down to men, Immanuel, God with us. The great truth for which we are indebted to the gospel is, that God was made manifest in the flesh. In the person of Jesus Christ, the distance between God and man is entirely removed. There appeared man in his lowest misery that he can either feel or fear. There appeared the just God in his highest majesty of character. The fullness of the Divine good pleasure rests on Him, who became exceeding sorrowful even unto death. There we see Divine vengeance executed against sin to the utmost, yet the eternal God become the refuge of the guilty. There God appears, not working deliverance by halves, not co-operating with sinful

man, not restoring his depraved faculties, and assisting him less or more to deliver himself; but working complete deliverance for man without his concurrence in the least. So that, according to this time, it may well be said. What hath God wrought? When Paul gloried only in the work finished by him who died on the cross, he was not afraid of being guilty of any degree of idolatry, or of derogating in the least from the honor of the true God. He was confident, that he was well kept in countenance by the words of the Prophet Isaiah, "In the LORD {Jehovah} shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory." {Is.45:25} So he restricts the blessing to as many as walk according to this rule, as being the only true Israel, saying, "peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God." {Gal.6:16} And to the Philippians, he says, "Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision. For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh." {Phil.3:2,3} He was in no fear of incurring the curse, or forfeiting the blessing pronounced in these words, "Thus saith the LORD; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD." {Jer.17:5} - Thus; he who finds nothing that can give him any importance, but the work of Christ, rejoices in knowing that the Divine good pleasure rests there. So his happiness arises wholly from that which God hath provided, without his concurrence in any respect; and the grateful sense of his happiness always terminates in that work. - Righteousness being only found in Jesus Christ, the substitute for the guilty, to him alone the blessing has respect; in him alone God declares himself well pleased. The blessing rests only on his righteousness, and follows it wherever it goes. To whomsoever it extends, the blessing is also conveyed. In vain shall any sinner expect to find about himself any reason why God should be well pleased with him, or even better pleased with him than with others. In vain shall he pray to God for grace to enable

him to find any such reason. In vain shall he expect to hear one syllable more from God, to encourage him to draw nigh to him, than that he is well pleased in his beloved Son; that Jehovah is well pleased for his righteousness sake. He who is persuaded, that Christ hath done enough to procure the Divine good pleasure for the guiltiest of mankind, loves that truth, and counts all things loss for the excellent knowledge conveyed by it. He who is not satisfied with this, is disaffected to that wherein the fulness of the Divine delight rests; for he says in his heart, "I do not believe that Christ hath done enough; I do not believe that God is fully placated by what he hath done, unless I also can find some reason why the Divine favor should bear a more peculiar direction to me than to others." Thus it is that men give the lie to God, while they believe not the record that God gave of his Son. And must not God's jealousy burn in favor of His sole delight, and against all dissatisfaction to Him? For, says the apostle, "our God is a consuming fire."