

Robert Sandeman {1718-71}

Accomplishments of Christ

Every doctrine, then, which teaches us to do or endeavor anything toward our acceptance with God, stands opposed to the doctrine of the Apostles; which, instead of directing us what to do, sets before us all that the most disquieted conscience can require, in order to acceptance with God, as already done and finished by Jesus Christ. What Christ hath done, is that which pleases God; what he hath done, is that which quiets the guilty conscience of man as soon as he knows it; so that whenever he hears of it, he has no occasion for any other question but this, Is it true or not? If he finds it true, he is happy; if not, he can reap no comfort by it. If then we slight the comfort arising from the bare persuasion of this, it must be owing, at bottom, to our slighting this bare truth, to our slighting the bare work of Christ, and our considering it as too narrow a foundation whereon to rest the whole weight of our acceptance with God. Whereas all Christians of the same stamp with Paul, can never see it in too bare a light, and are ready to say, Far be it; that we should glory, save in the cross, where that work was finished. Robert Sandeman {Letters on Theron and Aspasio Addressed to the Author, 1757}

Conditionalism

They constantly represent faith to us as furnished with hands, feet, wings, &c, or under the notion of some instrument operating our peace with God. Accordingly, they ascribe to it various ideas of motion and action; and though a very simple motion well meant may do the business, yet that which has the greatest activity in it, is commended to us as by far the best. Thus we are taught by Mr. Ralph Erskine, "Though a slow and simple motion, if it be real and upright, is what has the promise. Him that cometh he will in no wise cast out; yet the Scripture speaks of a hasting, striving, running, fighting, and wrestling, that should be aimed at. A man that is running from the greatest misery to the greatest happiness, would endeavor to have his motion such, as would evidence his hatred to the one, and his great liking to the other." {Sermon entitled, 'Christ's Love Suit'} If we deprive their faith of its hands, feet, and every idea of motion, we shall be at the greatest loss to

know what it is; whereas nothing is more easy to be understood than the belief of a truth, or one's being persuaded, that a report is true. - But no stone has been left unturned to intercept the light of the sacred truth, and decoy our attention with an endless variety of the most abominable jargon about faith. The time and pains taken by the Apostles, in holding forth the Gospel concerning Christ, have been employed by thousands of preachers in directing us how to search for farthings in a dunghill. The word 'merit,' as applied to our faith or our endeavors after it, has generally fallen into disrepute among the Protestants, as having been long tarnished by Popish fingers. Instead of it 'condition' is often used with approbation. Yet this has likewise become suspected; and many preachers scruple to use it without clogging it with some explication. 'Instrument,' I think, is now the word least accepted against; and this can serve us for receiving, applying, closing with, and taking hold of the proposed benefit. And this instrument is sometimes a mouth for receiving, and sometimes a hand for taking and giving. We are likewise told, that faith has two hands; one for taking home Christ to ourselves, and another for giving away ourselves to Christ. - We also hear much of terms. If they venture to tell us, that we are justified by a righteousness imputed to us, they must add, upon the terms of the gospel. Accordingly, they warmly exhort to comply with, and accept of the terms, or to receive the benefit on gospel-terms. Thus we are taught to treat the Deity, as free states or sovereign princes do with each other; the one obtaining peace of the other by complying with his terms. In short, these men will make a thousand shifts rather than speak plain truth. Let all the prophets and apostles be consulted upon the question. What is required of us in order to acceptance with God? We will find their unanimous reply to be. Everything or nothing; for no trimming is countenanced among them. If we attempt to do in any sense, we bind ourselves to do all; yea, the least attempt to do in this matter, is shown to be damnably criminal. What, then, is the ground of hope? Christ alone! Where shall we find among the popular preachers that unreserved freedom of speech which so well becomes the declaration of Divine Truth? We shall seldom find them speaking anything like the language of the Gospel, without cautioning, mincing, or clogging it with some exceptive, but, if, only, though, &c. Robert Sandeman {Letters on Theron and Aspasio Addressed to the Author, 1757}

Conditionalism

Though this writer's {Jonathan Edwards} professed design is to support the doctrine of the gospel, I am sorry I cannot recommend him as giving us any just view of the grand point of a sinner's acceptance with God; especially as, in my view, the whole controversy {between Calvinism & Arminianism} is of very little consequence, but in so far as that grand point is concerned. Though he has much occasion to speak of the influence of commands, invitations, &c.; yet, so far as I could perceive, he takes no notice of any difference between the gracious command that freely communicates life and hope to the guilty, and any other command requiring the performance of some duty or good action in order to acceptance with God. Or, to express myself in fewer words, it does not appear to me from that book, that he has duly attended to the grand opposition stated in the New Testament between the law of faith and the law of works. He rather seems in agreement with the bulk of the reputed orthodox to speak of exerting faith in Christ as on a footing; that is, as on a footing with performing other spiritual gospel duties. Robert Sandeman {Letters on Theron and Aspasio Addressed to the Author, 1757}

Conditionalism

Now, readers, after you have heard the orthodox so plainly affirming that justification is an act of God's free grace, and the Scripture so clearly supporting that affirmation, suffer them not to put the change upon you. Beware of their circumlocutions. Whenever they begin to talk to you of any act you are to exert in order to acceptance, and to call it a justifying act, which you are to exert by the help of God's grace, be you ready to reply, Avaunt; none of your tricks. You have already asserted, and we hold you fast by this assertion, that justification is an act of God's free grace. Remember also, that the teachers of orthodoxy call themselves preachers of the gospel, and that the word gospel is allowed to signify good news, or glad tidings; which you know, in every other case, gladden the heart so soon as they are understood and known to be true. Whenever, then, they begin to tell you of any pious act necessary in order to acceptance, you can immediately reply, this is no good news, for Moses long ago told us our duty, assuring us of happiness in our compliance; neither is it glad tidings to us in our present circumstances. If, then, you would preach gospel to us, you must tell us something fit to give us joy, as we presently stand unconscious

of any distinguishing qualification. Robert Sandeman {Letters on Theron and Aspasio Addressed to the Author, 1757}

Contending for the Faith

These men despise you on the account of the likeness your doctrine bears to that of the apostles, or rather judging yours and theirs to be the same. The very sound of imputed sin, or imputed righteousness is disagreeable to their ears; and the subject does not appear to them to be of sufficient importance to draw their serious attention, or to lead them to inquire what the Scripture says or means concerning it. Thus you are vile in their eyes; and it would complete my esteem for you, could I hear you saying, with the man after God's own heart. "And I will yet be more vile than thus." {II Sam.6:22} Robert Sandeman {Letters on Theron and Aspasio Addressed to the Author, 1757}

Contending for the Faith

Under the influence of the prince and god of this world, we find the Roman virtue, the devout zeal of the Pharisees, and the more enlarged sentiments of the Sadducees, all pointed against Christ, who is the ultimate object of the fullness of the Divine good pleasure and delight. Hence we may see, when Paul came to know the dignity of the Person who suffered on the cross, and observed there what aspect the world bore to the source of all his happiness, with how great propriety and majesty he said. "Far be it that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." At the cross of Christ, Paul took his last leave of the world, and all that is admired in it. Hence we see what he was to expect from it in his course of preaching salvation through that cross. - The whole corruption of revelation, with every notion of the Divine character opposite to the gospel, is in the New Testament called the darkness of this world. The adversary and his angels are called the rulers of that darkness. Agreeably to this, Paul speaking of those who with himself knew the grace of God in truth, says, "Giving thanks unto the Father, who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love." {Col.1:12,13} We have seen, then, whence the apostles learned to insist so much as they do in their writings, in declaring what is of the world, and what is of God; or, in other words, what is of the flesh, and what is of the spirit; and in stating the opposition betwixt these in the strongest manner; and to be so diligent in animating Christians

to fight the good fight of faith, and contend earnestly for it; and why they issued so many awful threatenings against all who went about by any kind of trimming, or reconciling methods to quench the fire of that contention which Jesus Christ came to revive in the earth. "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I came not to send peace, but a sword." {Mt.10:34} Those who wanted to make a fair show in the flesh, and sought to make Christianity more palatable to men, or less obnoxious to their hatred, that the offence of the cross might cease, gave the apostles the greatest disquiet. Though nothing is reckoned more idle and foolish by many called Christians, than a controversy about the faith; yet the great effect of the Spirit of the truth on any man in whom he dwells, is to make him zealous in contending for it, and withal ready to bear patiently all the effects of the world's hatred and contempt of it. Thus he labors for the glory of God; thus he shows the greatest good will to men. Paul spent his life in this contention, and he thought it well bestowed therein. Yea, {says he in his Epistle to the Philippians,} "if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all." And he urges these same Christians to zeal in this contention, after his example, as the great purpose for which they were gathered together into church order; yea, as the principal characteristic of a conversation becoming the gospel. "Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ; that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; and in nothing terrified by your adversaries; which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God. For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake; having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me." {1:27-30} Robert Sandeman {Letters on Theron and Aspasio Addressed to the Author, 1757}

Contending for the Faith

I shall now close my remarks on the zealous Jews, by taking notice of the reason the Apostle gives why they came short of righteousness, or acceptance with God. He tells us, that while they sought it, as it were, by the works of the law, they stumbled at that stumbling-stone; as it is written, "Behold, I lay in Sion a stumbling-stone and rock of offence; and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed." They considered the bare report concerning Christ crucified, as too weak a bottom to stand on before God; they were disgusted at it, as one would be at the proposal to venture his life

on the water in a basket. They would willingly have followed a Messiah that would have given them some employment in the matter; and they would have given a ready ear to him, teaching them how they might work the works of God; but they could not bear the thought, that all their good notions and desires should be utterly set at nought; so they could neither understand nor believe that Jesus came down from heaven to work the work of God for men, by himself alone. The same disgust is evidently to be seen still among those who have the greatest repute for Christian orthodoxy and piety. But if it be necessary that I should be still more plain, I am very willing to avoid all ambiguity, and freely own, I have nowhere observed the Jewish disgust at the bare truth, or, which is the same thing, the bare work of Christ, more evident than among the admirers of the doctrine of Messrs. Marshall, Boston, Erskines, Whitefield, Wesley, and such like. I am far from denying, that there are some among these, who, not knowing the depths of such doctrine, find all their comfort in the simple truth; even as I am far from denying, that when the Messiah was born, there were some even among the sect of the Pharisees, who waited for the consolation of Israel, and avoided the pernicious maxims of their party. Robert Sandeman {Letters on Theron and Aspasio Addressed to the Author, 1757}

Contending for the Faith

I have used some freedom with the names of several eminent preachers. But I have no occasion to apologize for this to the friends of Paul's gospel; for such will readily perceive that there was no attacking the popular doctrine to any purpose, without making an honest essay towards profaning the divinity of those demi-gods, whose authority supports it, and whose credit must stand or fall together with it. Meanwhile, the votaries of that doctrine may, if they please, rest quietly assured, that the voice of truth will be heard only by a very few in the midst of the more alluring cries of worldly factions, and that Paul's gospel will never pretend to set up for a rival to theirs in this world. Perhaps it will be thought needful, that I should define, with greater precision than I have hitherto done, what I mean by the popular doctrine; especially as I have considered many as preachers thereof who differ remarkably from each other; and particularly as I have ranked amongst them Mr. Wesley, who may justly be reckoned one of the most poisonous reproachers of that God, whose character is drawn by the apostles, that this island has produced. To remove all doubt concerning my meaning, I shall thus explain myself. Throughout these letters, I consider all

those as teachers of the popular doctrine, who seek to have credit and influence among the people, by resting our acceptance with God, not simply on what Christ hath done, but more or less on the use we make of him, the advance we make toward him, or some secret desire, wish, or sigh to do so; or of something we feel or do concerning him, by the assistance of some kind of grace or spirit; or, lastly, on something we employ him to do, and suppose he is yet to do for us. In sum; all who would have us to be conscious of something else than the bare truth of the gospel; {the work of Christ objectivity set forth in the Scriptures,} all who would have us to be conscious of some beginning of a change to the better, or some desire, however faint, toward such change, in order to our acceptance with God; these I call the popular preachers, however much they may differ from each other about faith, and grace, or about anything else. For I am disposed rather to reconcile than widen the various differences among them. - Where there is a real difference from the apostles on the point of acceptance with God, however small and insignificant it may seem, when obscured with a multitude of words, either without meaning, or fitted only to deceive, it will be found in its effects and consequences, wide as the difference betwixt Christ and Belial, light and darkness, heaven and hell. To lead Christians to distinguish with the utmost jealousy and care, upon this point, is the great scope and constant aim of the apostles in all their writings; yea, this is the principal branch of instruction inculcated throughout all the Scriptures; and in nothing more evidently does it appear how cheap the gospel is held by many of its professed friends, than in their want of this jealousy, and their readiness to count differences about faith of small importance. Robert Sandeman {Letters on Theron and Aspasio Addressed to the Author, 1757}

Contending for the Faith

Seeing it is the fashion to recommend religious books, I am willing to comply with it for once. If anyone chooses to go to hell by a devout path, rather than by any other, let him study to form his heart on any one of these four famous treatises: Mr. Guthrie's, "Trial of a Saving Interest in Christ;" Mr. Marshall's, "Gospel Mystery of Sanctification;" Mr. Boston's, "Human Nature in its Fourfold State;" and Mr. Doddridge's, "Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul." If any profane person, who desires to be converted, shall take pains to enter into the spirit of these books, it will be easy to show, from the New Testament, that he thereby becomes twofold more the child of hell than he was before. If none of these four are at hand, he may, without travelling

far, easily read or hear plenty of sermons and books to the same purpose. On the other hand, if anyone has got an ear for the truth of God, and desires to have his mind established therein, let him read the history of Jesus Christ, and the Acts of the Apostles, recorded by the Four Evangelists. Would he be skillful in distinguishing the ancient gospel from all counterfeits, and so expert in fighting the good fight of faith; let him read Paul's Epistles. Would he know what is pure and undefiled religion before God, in distinction from idle talking about it; let him read James. Would he learn sobriety of mind, and patience in suffering for the truth, and have his veneration for the greatest names in the Antichristian world abated; let him read Peter and Jude. Would he be satisfied that his spiritual joys are not the joys of the hypocrite, but that they arise from fellowship with the true God, so are the sure pledges and real beginnings of life eternal; let him read the Epistles of John. Would he know the true state and appearance of the kingdom of God in this world, and the world to come, and so have his mind fortified against all modern dreams, visions, and prophecies; let him read the Revelations of the last mentioned Apostle. Would he have a safe and authentic commentary on the Old Testament, to prevent his being imposed upon by the deceitful glosses of ancient or modern Jews; let him consult all these apostolic writings together. Robert Sandeman {Letters on Theron and Aspasio Addressed to the Author, 1757}

Divine Sovereignty

No doctrine in Scripture wears a more amiable and inviting aspect to the self-condemned, than that of the Divine Sovereignty, as described by Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, especially, chap. ix. This removes every cause of despair to the most wretched of mankind. For who can be led to despair by the view of any deficiency about himself whatever, who knows that none but the utterly deficient are chosen of God to salvation? As no doctrine is more encouraging than this to the miserable, so none is more provoking to the sons of pride, who want to stand upon their distinctions before God, and are not yet reduced so low as to be entirely at mercy for their salvation. Though this doctrine is not yet erased out of the standards of either of our national churches, yet it is generally opposed, and held in great contempt both by clergy and laity, as well as by the Dissenters. Many declaimers about the Divine Benevolence, with open mouth, show their spite against the Divine goodness preached by Paul. Many zealous disputers against Deists and Infidels, with great arrogance renounce the Sovereign of the Universe.

And if we observe the artifices of the popular preachers, we shall find them likewise denying that "the Lord God omnipotent reigneth." Yet this hated article of the Sovereignty of the Divine choice, will ever be held most sacred by all who love the Ancient Gospel. To them it is highly acceptable, because they know that there was no occasion for such Sovereignty to appear, but that grace might be shown to the worthless. They know that otherwise all mankind, without distinction, had perished according to every rule of equity. The popular preachers are greatly disgusted at this doctrine, because, according to their own style, "here is no visible ground for faith to rest upon." Here no man's pride is flattered; no man can find any ground to presume that the Deity regards him more than others. Therefore, while they are busy in stimulating their hearers to the exercise of faith, they are at great pains to keep this doctrine as far removed from their thoughts as possible. But when once the hearers, by their assistance, have prepared some ground for faith to rest upon, then they are freely allowed to solace themselves with the doctrine of election, because they have now acquired some reason why God in his choice should respect them more than others. Robert Sandeman {Letters on Theron and Aspasio Addressed to the Author, 1757}

Divine Sovereignty & Justice

Furthermore; from sheer ignorance of Divine Justice, and contempt of Divine Sovereignty, did the ancient Jewish disaffection to the Gospel flow. Therefore Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, for herein he labors to shut up every door of hope but that of grace in Christ alone, making it his business, in an especial manner, to establish and set forth, in the strongest light, these two Divine Perfections, and to repel every objection that can arise in the mind of man against them. The Justice and Sovereignty of God are pretty openly opposed by all our preachers of best fashion, and who are esteemed to be men of the best sense, as speaking most agreeably to what is called Nature; that is, if we attend to the Scripture, most agreeably to human pride. But those who have the greatest ear with the people play with both hands. Their doctrine is double. In formally stating the articles of their creed in opposition to heretics, they seem to acknowledge these Divine Perfections, as held forth in Scripture; but, in their addresses to the people, they effectually overthrow them. So that, whatever way they maintain these perfections, it plainly appears they do not love them; for the main tendency and issue of their doctrine is, to set them aside. - Before we leave this topic,

it may be proper to observe that many noted preachers, pretending to enlarge our ideas of the wisdom and power of God, plainly discover their own ignorance of his justice, while they tell us that God, if he had pleased, might have devised some other method of taking away sin than by the sacrifice of his Son. On this it may suffice to say, that had there been such a possibility in the Deity, it had without all peradventure taken place, in answer to the supplication of Jesus, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." Again, "O my Father, if this cup may not pass from me, except I drink it, thy will be done." {Note: I shall here take notice of this passage, which exhibits the highest view of the unparalleled obedience and submission of Jesus Christ; and the rather, because his behavior on this occasion has been thought by many to stand in need of something very like an apology; as, {Hervey: Dial. vol. 1, p. 135,} "that his sufferings were so great, so terrible, that his nature, being human, could not but recoil a little, and be startled at their approach." These prayers are referred to in Heb.5:7, where it is said of Christ, "Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared;" or rather, "was heard for his reverence or piety." In these prayers, he offered up the perfection of obedience in full confidence of acceptance. The more holy any person is, or the more fervently he loves God, and delights in His favor, so much the greater aversion and reluctance he must have to his displeasure, or the hiding of his face; or, to say the same thing in other words, the less any man loves God, the less disquiet will he feel at the want of the sense of his favor. Jesus Christ loved the Father with a perfect heart, and therefore, he had the utmost insupportable aversion to his displeasure when he felt it. This was death to him. So when he began to be sorrowful, and very heavy, on the hiding of the Father's face from him, he signified to his disciples that he knew this sorrow would kill him; "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death;" yet to that misery, to which he was as averse as he was holy, he submitted, for the glory of his Father and the salvation of his people. Here, then, we see manifested such perfection of love to, or delight in God, and withal such perfect and unparalleled submission to his will, as equally became a Divine Person. And his aversion is expressed in no stronger terms than were necessary to show the greatness of his submission. Both are strongly marked to us in these words, "Not my will, but thine be done." All the words, then, which Jesus uttered in his agony, equally conspire to

manifest a disposition truly Divine, and that he who uttered them was a Divine Person.} Robert Sandeman {Letters on Theron and Aspasio Addressed to the Author, 1757}

Divine Undeniable Truth

Genuine Christianity must always appear as an insult on the taste of the public; yea, the most respectable part of the public, and that in the most important matters. This, it is evident, must be the case, so long as she bears for her motto. "That which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God;" and while, as a proper counterpart to this, her favorite topic is, to show, that the character which was, and still continues to be disallowed of men, is chosen of God, and precious in his sight. On this account, her presence everywhere awakens aversion and disgust. Yet she is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her, and happy is everyone that retaineth her. And though her enemies will always find cause to despise her, yet she will ever be justified of all her children. - She comes not to offer problems to exercise the wit of man, but to declare Divine truth, she boldly, on the part of heaven, denounces her anathema against all who oppose or corrupt that truth. Had she brought less strength of evidence, and affirmed with less assurance, she would have been more acceptable to the wise and prudent; but, then, at the same time, she would have yielded so much the less comfort to the weak, the foolish, and the destitute. For it is well known, that when the heart of man comes to sink under its proper weakness, {and the stoutest heart soon or late grows weak,} nothing less can then support it, than the all-commanding evidence and authority of Divine Undeniable Truth. - Though she concurs not with any of the parties aspiring after the public leading in religion, nor animates any of her children with such emulation; yet she forms a peculiar union among her children, altogether upon the maxims of the kingdom of heaven, teaching them to love one another, and never to dream that their cause can flourish and prevail till the resurrection of the dead. She animates them to maintain, with tenacious and inflexible zeal, that Heavenly Truth, which ascertains the purity of the Divine character, in opposition to all the corruption of the world, even that truth which is the bond of their union, and the source of their common joy; while she teaches them, as to everything human and selfish, or all things within their own disposal, to be flexible, gracious, and yielding both among themselves and toward all men. Well knowing, that the truth which unites them will always expose them to the hatred of the world, she would have

them careful as much as in them lies, not to dishonour their grand controversy, by giving men any other occasion to reproach them. Accordingly, one of her faithful sons, after describing her opposite, who assumes her garb, as earthly, sensual, and devilish, gives her true character thus. "The wisdom that is from above, is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy, and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy." - However much Christian writers differ among themselves, they are generally agreed in being disposed, each in his way, to contribute their utmost that Christianity may flourish and prevail. The reason is obvious. Multitudes not much concerned to know what Christianity is, are easily intoxicated with the fond notion of a flourishing and prevailing cause. What flourishes and prevails in the earth, will always draw the admiration of the world, even as its prevalence must be owing to its coincidence with the taste of the world. - To this observable disposition in mankind, we may, in a great measure, attribute the success which many preachers have had in awakening an occasional fondness for religion among the inhabitants of whole regions, while they have been exerting their eloquence to give them a prelibation of happier times. To the same purpose with what is above noted, it has been observed, that the strain of writing in these letters can never serve to promote the interest of religion. This observation likewise deserves the attention of the reader; and it readily calls to mind the reason why the Jews were so averse to the claim of Jesus to be the Messiah. The whole tenor of his language, temper, and conduct, appeared to them so much the reverse of being fit to promote the interest of religion, that, for the sake of that very interest, they conspired against him; as they did afterward, on the same account, against his apostles. Nor did the 'Christian' cause begin to flourish and prevail in the world till the Christian leaders began to be more concerned about the interest of religion, than about the truth of the gospel in its native simplicity. Robert Sandeman {Letters on Theron and Aspasio Addressed to the Author, 1757}

Faith

Now, I speak not of those who have employed their weapons against the Person and Work of Christ, endeavoring to make us lose sight of Him as a Divine Person, and of his acting as the Substitute and Representative of sinners in the whole of his obedience unto death; such as have got any taste of the good Word of God, are not in the greatest danger of being subverted by these; but I speak of those teachers, who, having largely insisted on the

corruption of human nature, concluded the whole world guilty before God, eloquently set forth the necessity of an atonement, zealously maintained the scriptural doctrine concerning the Person and Work of Christ; yet, after all, leave us as much in the dark as to our comfort, as if Jesus Christ had never appeared; and mark out as insuperable a task for us, as if he had not finished his work; while, with great assiduity and earnestness, they are busied in describing to us, animating us with various encouragements, and furnishing us with manifold instructions, how to perform that strange something which is to make out our connection with Christ, and bring his righteousness home to us; that something which has got many names, and includes divers considerations; all which have been supposed to be comprehended under the scriptural expression 'faith;' as to which, after all they have told us about it, we are at as great a loss to tell distinctly what it is, or what we are doing when we perform it, if not greater, than when they began. Robert Sandeman {Letters on Theron and Aspasio Addressed to the Author, 1757}

Faith & Believing

Many, despising disputes about faith, take a pleasure in saying, "if we do as we would be done by, we hope God will not condemn us, or make any inquiry about what was our faith." Agreed; do this, and you shall live. If you hope then to live by doing your duty, take care henceforth to do it perfectly. If you have already sinned, hope to live by your repentance, take care that your repentance be sincere, uniform, effectual, and permanent. Let your repentance be such an effectual turning away from all sin, as to admit of no return in any one instance. Let it be such a turning to righteousness as to admit of no failure. For the moment you fail in any one instance, all your former righteousness goes for nothing. Hearken not to the teachers, who would persuade you to compromise or abridge your duty into one or more acts of faith, contrition, or repentance. This would be making void; yea, mocking both the Law and the Gospel, for neither of these acknowledge that for righteousness which comes short of perfection. Do not then imagine that God will accept of any righteousness short of perfection, be it called sincerity or by any other name. If you pretend then to do anything less or more in order to acceptance with God, you must do everything. God is not mocked. Go not about to impose on yourselves, by substituting, instead of the perfect obedience that God's Law requires, any ambiguous, equivocal acts or motions of the heart. For you cannot do your duty to purpose, unless in plain

terms, and in good earnest, you obey every Divine precept, performing everything required, and avoiding everything forbidden by the Divine Law. On the other hand, if there be any of you who, after many repeated trials, have found all your most serious endeavors to do your duty to prove in the issue both unsuccessful and deceitful, and have accordingly been brought to despair of so much as thinking one good thought, if it could save your souls forever, then certainly you have great reason to bless God for that Gospel, which evinces, with the highest kind of demonstration, that all is already done; {accomplished by Christ, for that which Christ did long before we were born is alone sufficient to justify us as we presently stand;} for - the Gospel is called the ministration of righteousness, as it brings the glad tidings that a perfect righteousness is already wrought for the ungodly. The Law came demanding righteousness; the Gospel brings you the good news, that its demand is fully answered. Are you persuaded of this; or does this stand true in your consciences? Then you have found an answer to that most pinching of all questions, "wherewith shall I come before the Lord?" And now you can understand the nature of the command to believe, that it is not a command calling you to do anything, or any new law of works, but the gracious voice of God willing you to know, that everything required is already done, even a gracious proclamation, stamped with the highest proofs of Divine Authority, approaching you with all the force of a Divine Law, and carrying in itself evidence all sufficient to command the belief or persuasion of your hearts. For how vain, how absurd is it to talk of a command to believe, that carries not along with it evidence sufficient to command persuasion, or to produce belief in the heart. Robert Sandeman {Essay on Preaching, 1763}

Faith & Truth

As Jesus Christ and the apostles often speak of faith and the truth interchangeably, or to the same purpose, we may just point at a few instances. "TRUTH came by Jesus Christ." {Jn.1:17} "But before FAITH came." {Gal.3:23} "After that FAITH is come." {vs.25} "That they also might be sanctified through the TRUTH." {Jn.17:19} "Which are sanctified by FAITH." {Acts 26:18} "The Spirit of TRUTH." {Jn.16:13} "The Spirit of FAITH." {II Cor.4:13} "Every one that is of the TRUTH." {Jn.18:37} "They which be of FAITH." {Gal.3:9} "Obedient to the FAITH." {Acts 6:7} "In obeying the TRUTH." {I Pet.1:22} "The unfeigned FAITH that is in thee." {II Tim.1:5} "For the TRUTH'S sake, which dwelleth in us." {II Jn.1:2} "The TRUTH that is in thee." {III Jn.1:3} I might likewise take notice of many

other phrases, where the style is somewhat varied, but which still carry the same meaning; as where Paul, speaks of being justified by faith, and justified by his blood; by both which it is plain, he means the same thing. {Rom.5:1 & 9} Everyone who believes the same truth which the apostles believed, has equally precious faith with them. - The saving truth which the apostles believed was that Jesus is the Christ. The apostles had one uniform fixed sense to these words, and the whole New Testament is writ to ascertain to us in what sense they understood them. Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ in a different sense from the apostles, or who maintains anything in connection with these words subversive of their real meaning, believes a falsehood. - In the days of the apostles many affirmed along with them, that Jesus is the Christ, who yet meant very differently from them. The far greater part of Christendom will affirm in like manner; yet we shall not easily find many who, when they come to explain themselves, have the same meaning with the apostles. Let us then, lay aside all questions about faith, or how a man believes; and let the only question be. What does he believe? What sense does he put on the apostolic doctrine about the way of salvation? Robert Sandeman {Letters on Theron and Aspasio Addressed to the Author, 1757}

Gospel of Christ

The gospel, which declares the accomplishment of Christ, does not save men by instructing them what to do, and stimulating their emulation, but by declaring what God himself hath wrought; even as the prophet Isaiah taught men to expect, when he said, "Lord, thou wilt ordain peace for us; for thou hast wrought all our works for us." Christian teachers generally set the righteousness of the Messiah in the same position toward men, as the Jews did the righteousness of the Law; and the self-justifying labor marked out for the hearers is made to consist in their serious endeavors to come within reach of that righteousness. Let us hear the Divine address, by the prophet Isaiah, to Israel, who followed after righteousness, "Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the LORD; look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged. Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you; for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him." {Is.51:1,2} - All Abraham's true children, in a manner answerable to the pattern of his faith, perceiving nothing about themselves that can in the least promote their justification; yea, nothing but what, on the contrary, serves to condemn them, do yet find

all that is needful to justify them in the Divine word, testifying of Christ as delivered for the offences of sinners, and raised again for their justification. Robert Sandeman {Letters on Theron and Aspasio Addressed to the Author, 1757}

Gospel of the Grace of Christ

Happy is it for men that God does not consider our condition in the manner that we commonly do. Perhaps the world never made a finer appearance as to all that is admired in it, than {at that particular time in history} when the Lord "appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." The Roman power and laws had civilized the world; the Greeks had enlightened it with learning and wisdom; and the Jews diffused piety everywhere. Peace, with her many advantages prevailed, to render the life of men more agreeable. But how did it then appear in the eye of the LORD? Isaiah informs us: "For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people; but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee." {Is.60:2} Were we to take a summary view of the images used to describe the state of the world then, we should find it now considered under the notion of a great infirmary of sick, maimed, and bruised; than under that of a vast and darksome dungeon, filled with criminals in chains, ready for execution, &c. Moreover, those to whom mercy was shown, are represented as extremely insensible of their real condition as past feeling; yea, dead in trespasses and sins. But, says the messengers of glad tidings to the heathen, "God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us; even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ." {Eph.2:4,5} The Lord's mercy is not narrow and limited; nor, like that of man, backward to interpose, till some inviting and amiable requisite appear in the object. No; it prevents the most hardened rebels, and brings every requisite along with it; or rather Divine Grace operates all its effects by the sole requisite, the Righteousness of Christ which it brings to view. It reigns among the insensible and the dead through that righteousness unto eternal life. If we inquire of Paul, why the gospel is called the power of God unto salvation, he tells us, "For therein is the righteousness of God, revealed." If we ask again, how the righteousness it reveals appears to be Divine, he adds, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness." {Rom.1:18} In the death of Christ, where wrath was evidently revealed from heaven, we have the broadest view of the Divine

displeasure against all unrighteousness of men, as well as a high proof illustrated by his resurrection, how differently God judges of righteousness from what men do; that which was highly esteemed among men, being found to be an abomination in his sight; and that which was disallowed of men, found to be chosen of God and precious. In the death of Christ, then, is held forth the broadest view of human guilt and misery, and the clearest discovery of the all-sufficient remedy. There Divine judgment itself is made to rest for a light to the nations. There is no occasion, then, for popular preachers to lead men through their idle process of a law-work, before they will condescend to display the glad tidings before them. If Christian teachers would imitate the Apostles in preaching, let them hold forth the sacred truth, Christ crucified, the Divine wisdom and power of God to salvation; and so leave it wholly to God to make converts. Gospel Truth is all-sufficient. It needs no requisite, no preparative from man to produce a relish for it. It creates a relish for itself; it answers to the majesty of him whose voice it is, and who framed the conscience of man for hearing his voice; it wounds and it heals; it kills and it makes alive; it blocks up and darkens all the resources of the pride of man, in the light of which he formerly walked and lived; and it brings him light and life from an unexpected quarter, by opening, as it were, a window in Heaven. No lecture about any law can affect the conscience of man like this truth, which shows the Divine law magnified and honored in the most eminent manner; which demonstrates God to be inflexibly in earnest as to every word spoken in his perfect law, and so demolishes all the subterfuges of human pride. What preparative, what requisite, had Paul when the sword of truth surprised him on the road to Damascus? And if we inquire what effect it had upon him, we find it made such a revolution in his sentiments, and all the springs of his life, as if we should see the course of a mighty torrent changed from east to west by the shock of an earthquake. The extraordinary signs affecting his body, showed what befell his mind. The miraculous shutting, and the miraculous opening of his eyes were signs of that turning from darkness to light, which Jesus told him his ministry was to operate among the Gentiles; and he tells us himself, he was designed for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe to life everlasting. Robert Sandeman {Letters on Theron and Aspasio Addressed to the Author, 1757}

Gospel Obedience

When once the saving truth {that men are justified by a righteousness finished in the days of Tiberius} is admitted in the conscience of any man, it becomes, as it were, a new instinct in him, encouraging him to draw near to God, providing him with an answer to the condemning voice of the law, which haunted his conscience before, and opposing the natural pride of his heart, in the exercise of which he formerly lived. By this instinct, he is led to desire the sincere milk of the word, that he may grow thereby; and he arrives at the proper consciousness and enjoyment of life, when he comes to full age, and by reason of use, has his senses exercised to discern both good and evil. All the exhortations, commands, and institutions of the gospel, are directed to consciences endued with this instinct, and are, in a peculiar manner, adapted for the service thereof. So the Apostle John, recommending the new commandment of mutual love among Christians, says, "I have not written unto you, because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth." The whole Christian church order was framed for cherishing this instinct. By this Christians know and love one another. And it is their business, in all their assemblies, to fortify one another in the knowledge and love of the truth, in opposition to every lie, or lest any of them be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. The truth of the gospel is always the great argument on which every call to working and doing proceeds. Here, then let all the passages of Scripture which call for any activity on our part, have their force. And let us no more be blindfolded with the notion of some ambiguous endeavoring and working, or laboring to exert acts, which are denied to be proper works required by the Divine Law, {which Christ had impeccably fulfilled.} Here, I say, let all these commands have their full and proper force; "Strive to enter in at the straight gate, &c." "Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest, &c." "Work out your own salvation, &c." The apostles deduce every motive to obedience from the truth. If they call men to liberality in almsgiving, they remind them of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, who though he was rich, became poor, that we through his poverty might be enriched. If they exhort them to mutual forgiveness, they remind them of the Divine forgiveness for Christ's sake &c. In short, they enforce their exhortations to every deed of self-denied love, by some consideration drawn from the Divine love as manifested in Christ Jesus. - Every man's own conscience is best judge of the secret spring of his actions. Now, the Apostle John, speaking of obedience to the new commandment of love, says, "Beloved, if our heart

condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God;" that is, if, notwithstanding our natural bias against the gospel, with its remaining effects giving us daily disquiet, our heart condemn us not as destitute of love to that truth which the world hates, then have we confidence toward God, even as much confidence as the testimony of our own conscience can give us. For we are here supposed to judge of ourselves, not by the good opinion others have of us, but by the sober verdict of our own conscience in the sight of God. Such a testimony of one's own conscience must give no small confidence. Yet this is but one witness, and needs to be supported. For in this case one may be liable to doubts, lest even his own conscience should be partial in his favor. Here, then, the Spirit of the truth, who never fails to bear witness to the genuine effects thereof, gives his testimony as a second witness supporting the former. Thus Paul, after he had said, "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God;" adds, "the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." Robert Sandeman {Letters on Theron and Aspasio Addressed to the Author, 1757}

Holy Spirit of Truth

However, then, the matter be brought about, one thing is plain, that {according to their claims} the mysterious work ascribed by the Spirit, issues in this, to turn the dead letter of the Scripture into a living principle, and to persuade a man, though he be not mentioned in the Scripture, either by name or surname, that Christ died for him. And it is no less plain, that if this assisting spirit be the Spirit who speaks in the Scriptures, he must, in this case, whisper something privately to the ear or the heart of the sinner, beside what he publicly speaks in the Scriptures. But will any lover of the Scriptures allow the possibility of this? Will he allow, that the Spirit who breathes in the Scriptures, ever speaks a word or syllable to any man, beside what he publicly speaks there? Or will he bear to hear the living and powerful Word of God on any pretense, or under color of any distinction whatsoever, called a dead letter? No; he will abhor the thought; and, without being overawed by the weight of any man's character, he will be ready to say, "Let God be true, and every man a liar." - The Holy Spirit, in applying Truth, acts a twofold part, as he breathes in the Gospel. He reconciles enemies, and he comforts friends. And in either case, he speaks not of himself, but he glorifies Christ. It may also be added, that he never speaks one word or sentence to any particular person, beyond what is written in the Scripture. Nor does he ever apply to any person's case, any

written sentence, unsuitably to the genuine scope of all the Scriptures. And who can think it incredible, that God should thus correspond with men? May not the Deity correspond with men by means of the words of a written book now, as well as he did by various other signs of old? Yea, nothing is more common, than for men to communicate their temper and spirit to each other by speech or writing. - There is no separating the agency of the Holy Spirit from the knowledge of the truth. To know the truth is life eternal; and this life is begun and supported by the Spirit of Christ. On the other hand, all who resist the truth, and do not admit its evidence, are expressly said to resist the Holy Ghost. We ought not, then, to imagine, with the popular preachers, that the gospel can in any respect be considered as a dead letter, or destitute of Divine power. For being the voice of God, it is unchangeably powerful to save all who believe it, and to destroy all who oppose it. Believers are said to grieve the Holy Spirit, when they neglect to hearken to the words of the gospel, and their consciences are answerably grieved, when they are brought to repentance. Robert Sandeman {Letters on Theron and Aspasio Addressed to the Author, 1757}

Justification by Christ Alone

The doctrine of justification by the works of Christ alone, did indeed lead many to fellowship with the apostles in the same sufferings and joy. But zeal for this doctrine was soon cooled in the minds of many who professed it, by being joined together with another kind of zeal, very different from it. Some eminent teachers of this doctrine, led by such mistakes about the kingdom of God as Jesus timeously checked in his disciples, grew fond of drawing some form of their doctrine over kingdoms and states. And we know, that all zeal for national reformation, if successful, naturally tends to the worldly advantage and honor of the chief promoters thereof; and so to dazzle their eyes with the prospect of something else, than fellowship with Christ in reward of his sufferings. By the time that the famous controversy with Arminius arose, it appears, that many were in readiness to take part with that learned opposer of the truth. And it would seem, there were but few who opposed him on the same footing with Gomarus, {Franciscus Gomarus, 1563 - 1641, Dutch theologian, a strict Calvinist and opponent of the teaching of Jacobus Arminius, which was formally judged at the Synod of Dort in 1619} who was chiefly concerned about the ground of acceptance with God, as he understood it to be affected by that controversy. The greater part of disputants chose to make the controversy turn upon another

hinge, contending about grace and freewill, and what influence these had in the conversion of a sinner. It may be maintained by some, that conversion is carried on by grace assisting nature, and by others, that this matter is conducted wholly by irresistible grace; and yet both sides may be equally disaffected to that doctrine, which maintains the work finished by Christ on the cross to be the only requisite to justification. The controversy about grace and freewill, as managed by many on both sides, has as little to do with the revealed ground of acceptance with God, as the philosophical dispute about liberty and necessity. The consequence of this change in the Arminian controversy, from that way wherein Gomarus held it was a great alteration in the strain of preaching amongst the most zealous Calvinists. For in place of free justification by God's grace, through the redemption that is in Christ's blood, much insisted on by the Reformers against the Roman Church, even as it had been before by the Apostles against the Jews and Judaizing Christians, laboring more in setting forth the revealed righteousness to be believed against everything opposed to it, than in any descriptions of the exercise of the mind and heart in believing; they now began to insist much more in their sermons on free electing grace, but especially on the efficacious power of that Grace in the conversion of the elect, working unfeigned faith in them, and turning them to God in a sincere repentance; and then this took the place of the answer of a good conscience toward God by Christ's resurrection, {justified by his resurrection; not as the matter, or cause, of the remission of our sins in the sight of God; but as a full demonstrative evidence, that his life was an adequate ransom; and that "the Lord is well pleased for his righteousness sake;" a manifest declaration, or irrefutable proof that the work was finished, and that the Son by his "one offering had perfected forever them that are sanctified,"} as the spring of Christian religion. This was attended with large descriptions, how a man should find himself under the operation of that free and efficacious grace, calling him effectually, regenerating, and converting him to receive Christ by a true faith, and to repentance unto life; while the things set forth in these descriptions were often not things accompanying salvation. The effect of this strain of doctrine, upon them that hearkened to it, was, their seeking peace with God, and rest to their consciences, by what they might feel in themselves, the motions of their hearts, and the exercises of their souls, in compliance with the call to faith and repentance, under that efficacious operation of grace, which they hoped to find in using those means, whereby they supposed it to be conveyed; or if they could persuade themselves that

they had found it, then they looked on themselves as already converted, and in a state of favor with God; comforting themselves against the fears of losing the Divine Favor again, by the inamissibility of grace, or the perseverance of the saints. But, however different this be from the doctrine of the Arminians, concerning electing and converting grace and perseverance; yet it comes to the very same thing with him at last, as to the grand point of the justification of a sinner before God. For whether the Pharisee in the parable, opposing himself to the Publican, as more fit for acceptance, did thank God in whole, or in part, for what he was in distinction from him and other sinners; yet his confidence in coming before him for acceptance, was in what he found himself to be, and in what he did, by the efficacious operation of God's special grace, working all in him irresistibly. How opposite to this is the Publican's way of coming before God, finding nothing about himself but what makes him the object of Divine Abhorrence, and having no better thing to say of himself, than that he is a sinner, and so a meet object for Divine mercy and grace, justifying freely through the Propitiation for sin, set forth to declare the Divine Justice in justifying the ungodly? He has no other ground of confidence but that, in appearing before God, nor anything else to encourage him to hope for his favor and acceptance with him. And so his address to God is in these words, "God be propitious to me a sinner." Now, he went down to his house justified rather than the other! - Hence it is, that in leading their hearers to faith, they constantly instruct them how to qualify themselves, so as they may be in a condition to advance some claim upon the Deity, and treat with him on some rule of equity; or so as they may find some reason why he should regard them more than others, and, accordingly, grant the favors they desire of him. They maintain, indeed, that men can obtain no benefit from the Deity but in the way of grace; yet, it is evident, that grace obtained in the way they direct is improperly so called, at least it is very different from the apostolic notion of Divine Grace. Paul, when speaking of the Sovereignty of the Divine choice of men to salvation, as proceeding upon grace, in opposition to every notion of desert in those who are chosen, distinguishes that grace in the following manner, "And if by grace, then is it no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace; but if it be of works, then is it no more grace; otherwise work is no work." If this one text were well understood, the whole body of the popular doctrine would fall to the ground at once. Here we see how different the Divine choice is from that of men, who choose what is best and reject what is worst. God in blessing men, or

choosing them to blessedness, has no regard to any distinction among them. All the objects of his favor are such as deserved equally to be rejected. According to the Apostle's reasoning, when God blesses any man with grace, he has no regard to any work, requisite, or motion of his will, by which he excels another; for if he had, then the grace thus said to be bestowed would be no more grace, but rather the respect due to worth, or the reward belonging to the work. - "Much more then being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him." Whatever doctrine then teaches us to think, that our friendly correspondence or acceptance with God is begun by our own good endeavors, seconded by the Divine aid, or even first prompted by the Divine influence, leads us to look for acceptance with God by our own righteousness; for whatever I do, however assisted or prompted, is still my own work; otherwise the most common actions of life could not be called our own, seeing in all these we must still acknowledge our dependence on God, "in whom we live, move, and have our being." Agreeably to what is now said, we may find Philosophers and Pharisees, both ancient and modern, in the height of their self-applause, acknowledging Divine assistance, and ready to agree in using language like this, "God, I thank thee for my excellency above other men." We must begin our religion then as we would end it. Our acceptance with God, first and last, must rest entirely on the work finished by Jesus Christ on the cross; or we must betake ourselves to what many call the religion of nature, and what God warrants us to call the religion of pride, as being no less opposite to the law of nature, than to the Gospel. Robert Sandeman {Letters on Theron and Aspasio Addressed to the Author, 1757}

Love of the Truth

The blessedness of God consists in the consciousness of his own boundless perfections. These are fully displayed only in the atonement. The fulness of the Divine good-pleasure and delight, then, can only be manifested there. If we speak then of God as made manifest to his creatures, we must say that the atonement is the center of his delight. This is also the center of the joy of charity. Charity, then, is fellowship with the true God in his blessedness. The sufferings of Christ, with the glory by which they were crowned, are known to us only by report. Charity then is the love of that report. So Peter speaking of Christ says, "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." Charity delights in the character of the true God drawn in the

truth, and has no regard for any other though drawn by the wisest men, and applauded by multitudes. Charity does not respect men for any of those things, on account of which one man glories over another; but it delights in all who are of the truth, for the truth's sake dwelling in them. - The profession of charity must proceed on some profession of the faith. Anciently men were acknowledged as Christians, or objects of charity, on what they had to say of Christ, or on their calling Jesus Lord. The Ethiopian Eunuch was acknowledged for a Christian, when he said that he believed that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. - Modern charity is not so much concerned about what character is drawn for the Deity, or what God one worships, as that everyone worship his own god decently, seriously, or with piety, without speaking disrespectfully of that of his neighbor. This charity, as far as it has hitherto taken place is much disaffected to the ancient Gospel. - What I presently think strange is, that one who avows the sentiments of our modern scribes, should join in the friendly and affectionate alliance of charity, with such as he himself perceives opposing the imputed righteousness, and with the most open and determined enemies of the Divine sovereignty. Robert Sandeman {Letters on Theron and Aspasio Addressed to the Author, 1757}

Mystery, Babylon the Great

The places most noted in Scripture for impiety, uncleanness, and idolatry, are only the figures or shadows of this grand and religious establishment, which is the mystery of them; so "spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified;" namely, Jerusalem. In opposition to the true church, whose children are begotten by the power of Christ's word, it is set forth under the notion of an unchaste woman, pretending to be the spouse of Christ, yet committing fornication with the kings of the earth, and having, by their concurrence, multitudes of children, not begotten by his power. We are left at no loss to know what state of things is pointed forth by this woman; for the angel says to John, "I will tell thee the mystery of the woman;" {Rev.17:7;} "the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth." {Rev.17:18} She was prefigured by that great nursery of idolatry, Babylon, the lady of kingdoms; so has this name written on her forehead, "Mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of harlots, and abominations of the earth." Against this establishment, the vials of the wrath of God are directed. Some people have imagined, that Antichrist is to be destroyed by armies raised by Protestant

princes for that purpose. The New Testament, pointing both to his decay and utter ruin, speaks thus, "whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming." {II Thes.2:8} And what we have already seen of the fact, corresponds best with this; for if, by the spirit of his mouth, we understand his word, we shall find that the Scriptures, which some ages ago began to be published in the vulgar tongues of Europe, have been the chief means of consuming or weakening that monstrous power, after which the world has so long wondered. Robert Sandeman {Letters on Theron and Aspasio Addressed to the Author, 1757}

Natural Righteousness

The history of the Jewish people abounds with various manifest interpositions of the Deity; and though these were not so remarkable and frequent after the captivity as before, yet the theocracy still subsisted until the destruction of Jerusalem; which, taking place by virtue of the Divine word on account of their impiety or disloyalty, showed at once, in a most signal manner, that God had been their King, and that they were now abandoned by him. This people, among whom the power of the Divine word was so remarkably manifest, served as a standing memorial in the earth of that power by which all things are made and upheld; and to show, that as God takes cognizance of the actions of men, so he will at last give judgment according to truth. But they also served for another purpose, no less momentous; for they were trustees for the oracles of God, containing the promise and various pledges of salvation to mankind by the Messiah, with such previous descriptions of his person, character, and work, as that, when he should appear, the fulfillment of the grand promise might shine forth with the clearest and most unexceptionable evidence. - Christ appeared at the time when it was presumed that the national righteousness was carried to as high a pitch as could well be hoped for, till the grand complete reformation expected from the Messiah should take place. They were now thoroughly weaned from the gross idolatry of the neighboring nations; they were zealous for the worship of one God; they were ardent in their wishes and hopes for the sudden appearance of the Messiah, and as it were prepared to meet him. The expectation was general. They were full of fond thoughts {like those which possess the minds of modern 'Christians' concerning some future calling of the Jews and Gentiles} that the time was at hand, when piety and integrity, worldly peace and prosperity, issuing forth from their capital city, should overspread the earth. - Yet in these very circumstances

was the whole revelation made to the Jews, with their whole national constitution formed upon it, so corrupted, as to be pointed by them in the strongest opposition to him who was the great end and scope of it, Jesus the Son of God, the King of Israel. - The pride of their national righteousness made them despise the Divine; yea, the very zeal they had for their law, made them oppose the end of it. Their table or altar, which was instituted for their feasting with God on his sacrifices, became a snare before them; and their happy national constitution, which should have been for their welfare, a trap to entangle them. In comparison with any other people, they had the advantage much every way; yet every advantageous circumstance in their favor they themselves industriously made use of to their own utter ruin. But, not to multiply reflections where they occur so readily, what should hinder us Gentiles, who have now got the advantage on our side, to lay our hand to our heart, and frankly return the acknowledgement once made in the name of the Jews by one of the fore-most of them? "What then; are we better than they? No, in no wise; for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin." Robert Sandeman {Letters on Theron and Aspasio Addressed to the Author, 1757}

Offer of the Gospel

Many popular preachers have considered themselves as a kind of factors or rather ambassadors for God, commissioned and empowered by him to make offers of Christ and all his benefits unto men, upon certain terms, and to assure them of the benefits on their complying with the terms. Accordingly, they have not been negligent in setting forth the dignity of their character in this view, and they have plumed themselves not a little upon the offer they had to make, making frequent repetition of this their offer with great parade. But anyone who reads the New Testament with tolerable attention may see that there is as little foundation for any such offer, as there is for bestowing the title of God's ambassador on any man since the days of the apostles. The apostles were witnesses for God concerning Jesus of Nazareth; they laid before men the infallible proofs, arising from their own knowledge, and from the prophecies of the Old Testament, showing that Jesus is the Christ. The effect of this was that some believed and confessed Christ with the apostles; and some disbelieved, and opposed them. The apostles then proclaimed a truth openly in the hearing of all men. And if it be still pled that they made offers we shall very willingly say, that they offered evidence for all that they testified; yea, that they not only offered, but freely produced it, let men

make what use of it they would. They were witnesses for God to men, but they never bargained for God with men, however much some scriptural metaphors have been strained to that purpose. They never taught men to put forth any act, or to make one step of advance towards God, on the prospect that God would condescend and come down the rest of the infinite distance to meet them. This was neither suitable to their office, nor to the honor of that God whose character they drew. As to ordinary teachers, or ministers of the gospel, it is well if they be able to declare the simple truth, as contained in the writings of the apostles, and maintain it in opposition to every lie that men would endeavor to mix with it, in order to undermine it. This will procure honor enough to them in the minds of those who love that truth; and such teachers will be far from assuming an air of importance over others, as if they had anything to offer to them more than the meanest lover of the truth has, who will be ready, as occasion requires, to offer any man an account of the evidence by which he himself is convinced of the truth. The preachers, whose honor is concerned in what they call the gospel offer, commonly take hold of the promises of the gospel, which it is easy to show are made only to believers, and by the dint of their authority, with the help of a little art, extend them to all their hearers, without distinction. But how shall I know that the promise is to me, or that Christ died for me? They address their hearers in this manner. "We are the ambassadors of God, to us the word of reconciliation is committed; we are sent and commissioned to bring Christ near to sinners, and sinners near to Christ; we make an offer of Christ and all his benefits to you, and you, and you; in the name of the great God we declare, that the promise is to thee, and thee, O man, woman, whosoever thou art; in his name we call you this moment to stretch forth the withered hand and the withered heart, and take hold of Christ, saying, He is mine, and I am his." I give here only a short specimen of what is to be found at large interwoven in almost all their sermons; and I am sensible they would as soon allow any article of the Christian doctrine to be attacked, as suffer this their offer to be called into question. We may find them busy moving questions, and warmly disputing with one another about the nature and extent of Christ's death, trying which of them shall lay the most convenient foundation for their universal offer, and the particular application or appropriation connected with it; but this same offer, so highly serviceable to their extravagant pride, is like to be one of the last things they will entertain a doubt of. These men, it must be owned, receive no small encouragement to their spiritual pride from their public standards of

doctrine, affirming, that, "the Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the word, an effectual means unto salvation;" that is, that God concurs with the preaching of the apostles, which can only be heard now by the reading of their writings, but especially with the preaching of our modern ministers. And thus far I am disposed to agree with their public standards for once, that I frankly acknowledge, that their sermons are, by far, better adapted to the purpose of setting the minds of the people in motion to do something toward their peace with God, than the writings of the Apostles, which in this respect, must appear extremely insipid. Accordingly, I find our most popular preachers, after they have given various motives and directions for stretching forth the withered hand, commonly enforcing them with this earnest and pressing call, "Up therefore and be doing." Agreeably to what has been said, we find that the gospel offer, or the universal offer, or, as it is sometimes called with great propriety, the ministerial offer, has been admitted as fixed and uncontroverted style, in place of the ancient apostolic style, the Record, the Witness, or the Testimony of God; and the embracing or accepting of an offer, with all the formalities and requisites necessary to constitute a genuine acceptance, has come in place of believing the Record or crediting the Testimony of God. The preachers I speak of, seem to be sensible of the difficulty there is in laying a sure foundation for everyone of their hearers to conclude, that Christ died for him; and they suppose that the same difficulty must press the minds of their hearers, as is evident from the many objections which they put in their mouths, not easy to be answered; however, after they have labored the point sufficiently, and done their best to set the minds of the people in motion, they boldly declare, by virtue of all the titles and all the authority with which they are clothed, that they are bound to believe this, otherwise they shall perish eternally. Such a declaration must be of considerable weight with people who are used to have their hearts affected, and their religious conduct influenced, more by the preaching of their minister, than by the words of God in the Scriptures. Robert Sandeman {Letters on Theron and Aspasio Addressed to the Author, 1757}

Preaching the Gospel of Christ

Thus far the preacher of Paul's Gospel; who, were he to preach never so often, hath no other weapon to handle, nothing else to insist on in regards to justification, but the simple truth, even the Divine Testimony concerning a

righteousness already wrought for those who have none of their own. He appears not in the character of a director, but rather as a herald; he comes not to impose upon his hearers by changing the Gospel into some new Law of works; he comes not proposing new regulations or refinements about duty, teaching men how to exert or exercise themselves to better purpose than formally, but simply declaring and evidencing, from the Scriptures, what God hath already done for the relief of those who are in desperate circumstances. Thus employed was Paul, who gives this account of his ministry; "we have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." In the book of the Acts, we have Paul's constant manner of preaching often described to us, particularly; "and Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ." {Acts 17:2,3} Yea, when he had occasion to preach at Rome a whole day, from morning unto evening, we are told what he insisted on all the time, in this manner; "and when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening." {Acts 28:23} Nor did he change his subject, though he many times preached at Rome. "And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him." {Acts 28:30,31} And he himself says to the Corinthians, "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God; for I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." {I Cor.2:1,2} And from many other passages, such as Acts 9:20, 20:24, and II Tim.4:6,7, it appears, that this was the topic he never wearied of, from his conversion to his death. What a poor figure that clergyman will make, who had no other topic to insist on, nothing else to attach his Parish to him, but this {one thing needful!} Robert Sandeman {Essay on Preaching, 1763}

Protestant Judaism

We may easily see their appropriation imitated in its several degrees in our own age. Is there any sentiment more commonly indulged among us, than, when we think on the wide extent of Pagan darkness, Jewish obstinacy, the delusions of Mahomet, and superstitions of Popery, to reflect with no small self-applause that we are Christians and Protestants so at least in some better terms with the Deity than multitudes of our deluded fellow-creatures, whom we look down upon with a sort of contemptuous pity? Moreover, what an important sound do we hear, when one acquaints us, that he has the honor to be a member or minister of the Church of England, by law established, or of some other church reformed after the best pattern? - But perhaps some will contend, that the Jewish appropriation was not so well founded as our modern imitations of it; and that there is a great difference betwixt reformed orthodox Christians and presumptuous stiff necked Jews. Yet, if we will attend to the Scriptures, particularly Paul's epistles, we shall find, that the Jewish plea had the advantage much every way. And we shall likewise find, that the sad effect it had upon them, is often set before professors of Christianity for their admonition. Their appropriation was the great spring of all their pride, of all their disaffection to the true gospel, and all their ruin. In like manner, the great corruption of Christianity took place by its professors zealously imitating the Jews. The same Apostle likewise reads an awful lesson to the Corinthians, from the more ancient history of his nation. "Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink; for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them; and that Rock was Christ. But with many of them God was not well pleased; for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things were our examples." {I Cor.10:1-6} Then, after narrating several of their provocations and punishments, he adds, "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples; and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." {vs.11-12} If any fond of nice distinctions shall still insist, that this way of reasoning, from the case of ancient Jews to that of zealous Christians, is not conclusive, and that the cases are not parallel; I shall only say that the reasoning is Paul's, that the parallel is of his drawing, and that it is solemnly urged home on the consciences of those who had at least as good a title to

the Christian name as any can now pretend to. Robert Sandeman {Letters on Theron and Aspasio Addressed to the Author, 1757}

Protestant Romanism

We Protestants have laid aside the crucifix; we reserve no fragments of the wood of the cross. But what have we got instead of these? We have got a perverted gospel. We have got some insipid sentiment about the cross of Christ, that, like the law of works, can do us no good, till it be reduced to practice. As for the bare work finished on the cross, or the bare report about it, however true we think it, so far have we mistaken it, that setting aside our active operations about it, we do not see what comfort or benefit can be derived from it; we see no form nor comeliness about it, why we should desire it; no manner of advantage that can result from it. We consider the gospel as furnishing us with so many good and excellent materials to work upon; and our whole comfort and benefit arises from the proper performance and success of our labor. Robert Sandeman {Letters on Theron and Aspasio Addressed to the Author, 1757}

Protestant Romanism

We Protestants have generally been ashamed of the extravagant height to which our Roman Catholic fathers carried their imitation of the Jewish worship and hierarchy. We have found it proper to Judaize more moderately in several instances; and for this moderation we are indebted to the Divine Providence, and the wisdom of our rulers, who have taught and obliged us in many respects to lower our style, and to contract within narrower bounds the meaning of several words and titles which we choose still to retain. Yet it must be owned that it is with great reluctance that we learn any lesson of sobriety; for even the meanest preacher, in the poorest dissenting congregation, still affects to be called The Reverend; from the same principle which leads the first clergyman in Europe to take the title of His Holiness. The bulk of the Christian leaders, from the highest to the lowest, have showed an inclination to share more or less of the worship due to Him whom we praise, saying, Holy and reverend is his name. I may seem to be sometimes nice in taking notice of these titles, which are sometimes very big with meaning, and sometimes explained away to a very subordinate sense, as occasion requires; yet I cannot appear to any reasonable man to be nicer than he who said. "Why callest thou me good; there is none good but one,

God." Robert Sandeman {Letters on Theron and Aspasio Addressed to the Author, 1757}

Repentance

The change made upon a man by the gospel is called repentance unto life. The gospel is always held forth as the great persuasive argument to lead men to repentance. So the Evangelist Matthew informs us that John the Baptist, and Jesus Christ, began to preach, saying, "Repent; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Mark declares the same thing in fewer words, "Repent ye, and, believe the gospel." Peter, preaching the gospel to the Jews, says, "Repent ye therefore." And Paul declares, that "God now commandeth all men everywhere to repent" by the same argument. And he tells us, that the scope of all his preaching was, "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." Repentance, then, is the change of a man's mind to love the truth, which always carries in it a sense of shame and regret at his former opposition to it. And he who knows the truth, so as to love it, will daily find occasion for repentance, and so of having his attachment to the truth increased, as finding his daily comfort depending upon it. Robert Sandeman {Letters on Theron and Aspasio Addressed to the Author, 1757}

Sacrifice of Christ

Though the cause of the disallowed Messiah will never prevail in this mortal state, but remain as a bruised reed, and smoking flax; yet all its numerous and powerful enemies shall never be able utterly to break or extinguish it. In the midst of weakness, poverty, and disgrace, it will continue to be supported by the sacred aid of heaven, till the grand revolution shall take place, when the bruised reed shall become an iron rod, and the smoking flax a flaming fire. Then the cause, hitherto just not crushed, shall flourish and prevail effectually, and all its enemies be confounded with everlasting shame and contempt. It may not be improper here to take some notice of a memorable saying used by Christ for the instruction of his disciples, when they were anxious about how and where his kingdom was to appear, and after he had given them various cautions against imposition on that head. The saying runs thus, "Wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together." Nothing could be more fitly chosen, than this similitude, to show his disciples, how he would always be disallowed of men, yet precious to them that believe. What more nauseous to men, and what more inviting to eagles, than an exposed carcass? The latter are led, by the rich

savor of the most delicious food, to resort with pleasure to that wherein the former can perceive nothing but what is dispiriting and disgusting. Wherever Christ's disciples, united by His Word & Spirit, meet together to remember his death, as their only recommendation to the Divine favor, {Note: The Lord's supper shows the unity of Christ's people, and serves as a notable occasion for their enjoying the comfort of love. A company of Christ's disciples must come together to this ordinance, finding nothing, in any of them, to recommend them to God, but the sacrifice of Christ alone,} there the power of his kingdom is manifest to them that believe; and wherever he shall at last descend from heaven, there all his redeemed will be gathered together, and there the majesty and power of his kingdom will be visible to all. Let the sacrifice of Christ be divested of all the foreign considerations that have been added, in order to remove the disgust of men, and it will be found, that to talk of living by that alone, will prove as disagreeable to the religious world now as of old, and to provoke even many of the most serious to turn away, with something like the old complaint in their mouth, "This is an hard saying, who can hear it?" Yea, we are assured, that, with this same complaint in their mouth, many of those expressly called his disciples went back, and, what is still more striking, walked no more with him. The aforementioned memorable saying, likewise sets before us, in a very striking view, what a sovereign contempt Christ had for the applause of the world, and how careful he was to inspire his disciples with the same contempt, even while showing his concern for their welfare in the most tender manner. Robert Sandeman {Letters on Theron and Aspasio Addressed to the Author, 1757}

Salvation in Christ Alone

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} Robert Sandeman {Letters on Theron and Aspasio Addressed to the Author, 1757}

Salvation in Christ Alone

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." Robert Sandeman {Letters on Theron and Aspasio Addressed to the Author, 1757}

Self-Righteous Conditionalism

The first Christians were indeed taught to serve God by having the same Spirit of faith that was in Christ; that is, believing the same truth which he believed. They were persuaded of the dignity and excellent state of Christ, not their own. The worthiness of the Lamb that was slain, was the sole ground of all their confidence toward God, the sole spring of all their obedience and all their consolation. But if we hearken to this author, {Marshall - "Gospel Mystery of Sanctification"} we must set out in the service of God from the confidence of our being in a better state than other men. We must set out from the bare persuasion, that God hath assisted us in producing certain good motions in our hearts, by which we have acquired an excellency above others. Thus our obedience is not influenced by what God hath testified concerning his Son, but by a persuasion that we are better than other people. Thus, he makes no account of the grand things testified of Christ, as any way sufficient to lead us to holiness, without a good opinion of our own state. - Thus the ancient gospel, which from the beginning turned many from idols to serve the living God, is now set aside, to give place to human artifice, dressed out with many swelling words of vanity. Thus all the grand things testified concerning Jesus Christ the Son of God, are made to serve only as a footstool for human pride. Yet, however many maybe blinded, the election shall obtain. - If any consideration, beside or along with the sacrifice of Christ, be admitted into one's faith, or held requisite for his justification before God, that consideration, whatever it be, is his righteousness, that is the center and spring of his charity and hope, so the leading principle of his life. As the most holy faith, or one thing needful, refuses all mixture, or to be joined with anything else; so he who goes about to add anything to it, must be influenced to do so by disaffection to the one thing needful, and by love to that which he adds. His favorite addition, then, is the great spring of his life, and the hinge of his passions. And what he knows of the gospel is wholly subservient to this. Perhaps there is nothing in Christianity less attended to by its professors, than the real character of Jesus Christ. - As to the ends of Christ's death, many think he died to purchase grace and spirit, to help men to establish their own righteousness,

or acquire some requisite to justification and accordingly their zeal is directed. It is common with people of this class to show their zeal in longing and praying for the down-pouring on all ranks, of some other spirit than that which speaks in the Scripture, that serious religion may be brought into repute. And thus many satisfy themselves in their present neglect of the written mind of the Holy Ghost, regarding the Scriptures no farther than they find them impressed on their hearts in a certain way, and without such impressions, professing they want light about the clearest passages of Scripture. Robert Sandeman {Letters on Theron and Aspasio Addressed to the Author, 1757}

Self-Righteous Conditionalism

The popular preachers reverse the apostolic method; they ply their hearers with the various exhortations by which the apostles nourished and confirmed the faith of believers. And thus they would animate men to work out their own justification before God by diligently following after righteousness. And, then, what else can that faith be which they are thus wrought up to, but the persuasion, that they are much more righteous and worthy of the Divine favor than others? I know some people are ready to say, that this breach of order is of no great moment; that it matters not whether faith or works take place first, provided a connection in any shape be still maintained betwixt them. But these are people who have seldom or never thought seriously on the matter, and who content themselves with sounds instead of things. Robert Sandeman {Letters on Theron and Aspasio Addressed to the Author, 1757}

Self-Righteous Conditionalism

Their way of speaking does indeed proceed from a very natural principle in man's heart. They cannot understand how a guilty person can be justified without contributing something thereto. Paul supposes, that men professing Christianity with their mouths, would be apt to say in their hearts, "Who shall ascend into Heaven?" {that is, to bring Christ down from above;} or, "Who shall descend into the deep?" {that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead;} that they would be apt to say in their hearts something importing, that Christ had not already come down from Heaven to fulfill all righteousness, or that he has not already ascended, in testimony of his having finished his work; and so be ready still to cry for powers from above to help them to do something in this matter, be it called closing with Christ,

or by any other name. In opposition to all this, the Apostle in the same place declares, that the word by which men are saved is very nigh to everyone who holds it true; yea, so nigh, that it is in the heart of him who believes it, and in the mouth of him who confesses it. He also tells us what that word is: "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thy heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." Robert Sandeman {Letters on Theron and Aspasio Addressed to the Author, 1757}

Self-Righteous Conditionalism

Tis agreed, by the great majority in all Christian countries, that there is no salvation but by Jesus Christ. Thus far general consent agrees with the apostolic doctrine. But, then, a capital difference between these two arises in the following manner. The apostles maintained, that Christ did enough to save sinners in his own person, without their concurrence, and that all who were so persuaded, accordingly found salvation in Him alone. As the natural counterpart of this, they at the same time maintained, that if any man went about to deny or undermine the all-sufficiency of Christ's work to save, by insisting on the necessity of any other concurring requisite whatever, Christ should profit him nothing. On the other hand, since Christianity began to flourish and prevail in the world, the majority of those wearing the Christian name have been agreed in maintaining the necessity of something beside the work of Christ to save them, or procure them acceptance with God. Yea, long before that time, even in the apostolic age, the Judaizing Christians, who were far from being few in number, proceeded upon the same plan. This we are taught by the apostles to call a corrupted or perverted gospel. And here chiefly we may perceive the consent of the Christian world all along opposed to the apostolic doctrine. But while we behold the Christian world consenting against the apostles, about the necessity of some addition, we see them at the same time very far from being agreed among themselves about what ought to be added, and how much, the nature of the assistance needful to promote the addition, and the proper means of soliciting the concurring assistance, with various other considerations depending on these. So, when Israel once departed from the worship of the one God, who led them out of Egypt, they could never settle upon the worship of any other, but lay open to all the innovations of the neighboring nations. Thus, when a wife once departs from her husband to admit another, she may easily be prevailed upon to admit a second, third, and fourth, till at last she become a downright prostitute. In the apostolic age, the favorite

addition was, to become a Jewish proselyte by circumcision. And it is evident, that much more could be said in favor of that, than could be urged in behalf of any other that has been adopted since. In the Roman church, the additional grounds of acceptance with God have been multiplied in a very extravagant manner; and though Protestants have in many respects discarded the extravagance of that church, yet they still generally agree in establishing their own righteousness as the ground of their acceptance with God, according to various schemes of their own, some in a more open, others in a more secret and ambiguous manner frustrating the all-sufficiency of the righteousness finished by Jesus Christ. Now it is evident, that the scheme of doctrine which most resembles the apostolic in honoring the accomplishments of Christ in the matter of salvation, yet find means of rendering it of no effect, must in a more especial manner awaken the jealousy and move the resentment of such as maintain the all-sufficiency of that work exclusive of every reserve. - These attempts made to deface the excellency of the sole requisite to justification bear no small resemblance to the methods that have been employed to eclipse the dignity of the Messiah's Person. Robert Sandeman {Letters on Theron and Aspasio Addressed to the Author, 1757}

Sovereignty of God

Having briefly pointed at some of the methods by which the popular preachers set aside God's Divine Justice, so as to render the sacred truth of little or no value in the eyes of men, let us next observe how they set themselves in opposition to that Divine Sovereignty; and we shall find, that for every jewel they rob from the crown of the Most High, they plant a feather in the crest of human pride. - The Scripture clearly asserts the Sovereignty of God, as having mercy on whom he will have mercy, and hardening whom he will; and repels the strongest objection that ever was made against it. "Why doth he yet find fault; for who hath resisted his will?" Many who profess to reverence the Scriptures as a Divine Revelation, reject this doctrine with scorn, though it be revealed there as clear as words can make it; and that not in one or two passages, but interwoven with the whole style of the Scriptures, and supported by a variety of facts recorded there. - Objectors to the Absolute Sovereignty of God are not willing to allow any superiority to God, but such as one creature may be supposed to have over others. They incline still to think of God as resembling the first magistrate in a free state, who is bound himself to observe the laws he enforces upon

others. Hence the many idle reasonings we have heard about the ends of government, which men with great assurance apply to God; not reflecting, that of every earthly potentate it must be said, that his very being as a prince, his dignity, wealth, and power, consist in his having subjects. Yet mortals, as once was said of the haughty prince of Tyre, set their hearts as the heart of God, and think of circumscribing them by the same laws by which they themselves are bound. But how shall that law which commands devotion to what is above us, and our regard to our equals be applied to the Deity? For thus runs the sum of the divine law to man. "Thou shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself." Can we find a superior to whom the Deity owes reverence; or an equal to whom he owes affection? The objectors are not satisfied, how God can say, as he does to Cyprus, {Is.45:7,} in opposition to the two principles of the Persians, "I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace, and create evil; I the Lord do all these." They are not satisfied how he creates the latter, in order to show his glory, and proper delight in opposing, defeating, and making them give place to the former, so as to appear the Author of Light and Peace. {Note: How far the true God, exhibited in the Scriptures, is above what is worshiped by a great part of those who bear the Christian name, may appear from such passages as these: Gen.50:20, Ex.9:16, Ps.83:17,18, PV.16:4, Is.10:5-15, Acts 2:23, Acts 3:18, Acts 15:18, Rev.4:11} They cannot look with attentive delight on the Great Architect proceeding in his work, and rearing up to view his beautiful fabric, out of a confused heap of unshapely materials, till once they be satisfied how he procured these materials, and where he found them so unshapely. And to tell many reasoners he created them, sounds only in their ears like saying, he found them where they were not. Yet, thus the first scene of the grand drama of the universe is opened. As soon as the curtain is drawn, or any object offered to our thoughts, or rather when our minds are carried back from the present beauty of the universe, to the remotest point of view, a dark confused mass is presented. And we are informed, by a short prologue, that God was the Cause or Beginner of the whole, to guard us against imagining any other eternal principle. And this is all we can learn of the matter. To pry farther back is utterly in vain. But we shall receive all reasonable satisfaction, if we will have patience to attend on God, proceeding in what is more properly called his work, which he carries forward in so gradual a manner, and so inviting to our attention, as plainly to show, he determines to be more especially known to us thereby. We shall perceive him in every

part of his work speaking, acting, and beholding what is made with delight, or seeing it good, in opposition to the state wherein it was before; and this, day after day, till he rests with man on the seventh, from all his works, which he created to make. {Gen.2:3} I scarcely need to add, that the case is the same with respect to the entrance of sin and misery into the world, and the grand design which God is carrying forward, of making thence to arise the brightest discovery of righteousness and salvation together, as is plainly intimated in the words immediately following the last quotation from Isaiah. "Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness; let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together; I the LORD have created it. Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou; or thy work, He hath no hands?" {Is.45:8,9} As the sinful state of mankind is often compared to the first condition of the earth, and salvation from sin, to the producing of light and order at the first, I shall only mention one passage. "Darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people; but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee." {Is.60:2} Thus, we see, that the entrance of sin and misery into the world, was as fixed a part in the scheme of God as His great salvation; yet we cannot see God in the former, as we do in the latter. We cannot see him by keeping our eye only on the shade; but if we love the grand picture, we will not put the murmuring question, Why or how did the shade take place? The Apostle Paul, speaking of the happiness of those who are reconciled to God by Jesus Christ, as not only saved, but saved glorying in God, adds, "Therefore," or rather, "For this," {Rom.5:12,} namely, that this brightest discovery of the Divine Glory, this highest perfection of human happiness might take place, sin was introduced into the world. But, not to enlarge, methinks we may easily be convinced, that Christians are not very numerous in the world, while we find so few who are fond of this doctrine which fixes the dependence of man upon God exclusive of all reserve; yet this very doctrine is the sure refuge of the wretched and the destitute, yea, of all who enter into the kingdom of heaven. Though this be indeed the case according to the Scripture, we may find some who profess to acknowledge it, holding it so very cheap, as to think those who reject it may yet be very good Christians; whereas, if one should treat the writings of Cicero as the Christian enemies of this doctrine do the Scriptures, he would be universally hissed at by all the lovers of classical learning. But numbers rule the fashion,

and can keep one another in countenance as to anything; and we must expect no other, while it is the interest of multitudes to honour Christianity in pretense, and to hate it in reality. However, we may frankly say, that such a one as Lord Bolingbroke, {Henry St John, 1st Viscount Bolingbroke, 1678 - 1751) who hates this doctrine, and therefore rejects the Scripture which clearly supports it, acts a far more uniform and consistent part. Robert Sandeman {Letters on Theron and Aspasio Addressed to the Author, 1757}

Spirit of Truth

Much has been said and written in defense of supernatural grace, or the agency of the Divine Spirit influencing the hearts of men, in opposition to those reasoners who doubt of or deny any such influence; and many things have been said on this head, serving to give us false notions of Divine grace and spirit. This much the Scripture will support us in saying, that when any man is influenced by the Holy Spirit, some point of knowledge is conveyed to his mind; he learns something of the truth of the gospel which he knew not before; or what he knew before is seasonably brought to his remembrance; or his mind is kept steady in the persuasion of the known truth, his love to it cherished, and his hope enlivened. The apostles said, "God hath given to us the spirit of power and of love, and of a sound {or sober} mind." So that, whatever they affirmed, whatever they practiced under the influence of the Holy Spirit, they could give a sober and solid reason for it. If they confidently declared their faith, they had the clearest evidence to produce; if they fervently expressed their love, they had the most amiable objects to describe; if they joyfully made mention of their hope, they had the grandest enjoyments in prospect. The Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Truth, as also the Spirit of Grace. He speaks and breathes only the grace and truth that came by Jesus Christ. When a man, then, comes to know the gospel, or to receive this Spirit, he thinks of no other grace but what appeared in Christ's tasting death for men; no other truth, but what was manifest in Christ, the end of the law for righteousness. This differs not a little from what the popular doctrine leads us to think of; namely, the truth of grace in the heart. When our systems describe faith to us, as a saving grace bestowed on us, by which we make use of Christ for salvation, are we not led to think of some grace necessary to our salvation, beside what appeared when Christ, by the grace of God, tasted death for the sins of men? Robert Sandeman {Letters on Theron and Aspasio Addressed to the Author, 1757}

Testimony of Christ

When we hear Jesus saying, "The world hateth me, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil;" shall we say, that he was sent from heaven to tell the world, that murder, adultery, theft, &c., were evil actions; or did the world ever hate any man for declaiming against vice; or rather, would not any man speaking publicly in its favor, run the risk of being stoned or torn to pieces even by the most vicious of the mob? The truth is, Christ witnessed against the world as evil, in that respect wherein they approved and valued themselves most; and accordingly the zealous Jews understood him. Would they not judge, then, that they had good ground to count him an enemy to all that they called virtuous or pious? But how must it heighten their provocation, to hear such a man, whose character was everywhere hissed at, who was even thought beside himself by his near relations, declaring in the most open manner, with unshaken confidence, that God had no delight in any character under heaven but his alone; that none of mankind could ever find favor with God, but by his virtue and piety alone. Would they not think they had the highest reason for their resentment? "Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil?" "He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him?" This controversy, we know, issued in the death of Christ. And, if I might be allowed to adopt the vulgar use of the word 'victim' on this occasion, I would say he fell a victim to the resentment of every human excellency. For what is it that man glories in, that did not find itself piqued and affronted by the doctrine, joined with the extraordinary circumstances of the life of Christ. Robert Sandeman {Letters on Theron and Aspasio Addressed to the Author, 1757}