

Uncompromising Truth

Robert Sandeman

A faithful letter {reproduced in its entirety} from Robert Sandeman to Samuel Pike, occasioned by some hints dropped in a private letter from Pike which are referred to and quoted in this letter; dated March 24, 1759.

Sir, it was not on supposing you agreed with me in my views of particular men or books, but on apprehending you to be a hearty friend to Sovereign Grace, that my friendly regard for you commenced. I thought, what could move a man to describe it so clearly, to appear so singular in his doctrine about it, and that so publicly, not only from the pulpit but also from the press, as one disposed to risk his whole reputation upon it, if he did not heartily love it. And if he loved it, he behooved to hold it most sacred, so as to consider none as godly, but those who at least professed to love it also. Therefore, in remarking on your discourses, I thought it enough to signify, in the gentlest manner, how unsuitable it was to your leading scope, to suppose, that anyone, who loved the true God, could be found joining in the common odium shown against Sovereign Grace. For let it be called Absolute Predestination or by any other name, still it must remain impossible, to describe it in words, that can sound harder to the pride of men, than these of Paul, "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth."

I thought it enough, I say, to hint my dislike of your tenth page; for as I considered you, as having but lately obtained bolder views of the doctrine of Divine Sovereignty in the matter of Justification, I supposed you might have inadvertently retained somewhat of your former way of thinking and speaking, concerning the opposers of that doctrine, not reflecting how inconsistent it was with those bolder views. But when I found you still inclining to think that true believers might be found "among those who are carried away by the popular odious cry against Absolute Predestination," I was not a little shocked. You could not have alarmed me on a more sacred point. I wonder how you could be at a loss to know what I dare say to you on that point, if you have read page 166 or 347 of my printed letters, or what I have said on charity from page 452 to 480. Must I be still put to the question, after all that I have said, whether I be yet talking for amusement about the Christian doctrine, or in good earnest. True believers taking a side against Sovereign Grace! Impossible! It never was, never can be in the nature of the thing. The first dawn of the Gospel upon any man's heart teaches him to fear God and reverence his Sovereignty in the most absolute view it can be conceived in. And all that fear God, from the least to the greatest, will agree without hesitation in saying, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power; for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created."

But then it will be said, that some who dislike the explicit doctrine of Absolute Sovereignty, may yet, by implication, be concluded friends at bottom to that Sovereignty. Yet nothing can be more foreign to the Scripture than such reasoning. The Scripture indeed leads us to think of men having the form of godliness without the power, but it nowhere gives us the least ground to think, that the power can possibly take place where the very form is disliked. It leads us to think that men may somehow hold the form of sound words without Faith and Love; but that Faith and Love can be where that form is disallowed, is quite foreign to every notion taught us by the Scripture. If such reasoning by implication be allowed, then we may find true believers amongst those who dislike the declaration of Imputed Righteousness and Vicarious Substitution, among those who dislike the declaration of the Trinity, the Deity of Christ, and so in course everything that is most sacred. Yea, thus we may find true believers amongst the worshipers of Mohammed. For if Mohammed signifies a prophet, intercessor or mediator, and if some mean as much by the word Mohammed as others by the word Christ, who would contend for a word, while there was no material difference of meaning?

Jesus Christ, praying for his people, said; "this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." How then can any who disallow the declaration of that knowledge, either that of Divine Sovereignty, Justice, or Mercy be said to have any part in life eternal! If we have any ear to give to the Scripture, we must rank all such among those that "know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; and who {if they be not given Repentance to the acknowledgment of the Truth} shall be punished with everlasting destruction." And if we have any true benevolent concern for such, it will lead us boldly to declare to them their real danger, however harsh or ridiculous it may sound in their ears at present. Though all the clergy in the world should agree in a charitable opinion of any who disallow the declaration of that knowledge, I find myself fully authorized from the Scripture to declare such charity to be the very breath and spirit of the grand destroyer.

Jesus Christ declares that by their words men shall be justified, and by their words they shall be condemned; and in his view lightly or readily to speak evil of Him is the same thing as to be against Him or to be his enemy. Well then may we say, that everyone who deliberately opens his mouth against the Divine Sovereignty, even in the most absolute view of it given in Scripture, thereby shows himself to be an enemy of God. Besides, to talk of Divine Sovereignty or Predestination not absolute, is a downright absurdity; even as every atheistical scheme is. How great was Paul's temptation to mince the doctrine of Divine Sovereignty, when his heart was swelled with sorrow at the apprehension of his kinsmen being rejected! Yet on that occasion he is so far from mincing it, that he displays it in the boldest view, even in that view, which has for many ages given the greatest umbrage to thousands, who by their opposition to it show, that in calling themselves Christians they atheistically profane the Christian name, and the

name of the true God. So the question has at last come to this between us: Is there a God or not? For a God without Sovereignty is no God at all.

What satisfaction can a man find in his conscience, in maintaining Saving Grace to be Sovereign Grace, if at the same time he thinks that a man may be a true believer, so as enjoy the Divine favor, who opposes that Grace? Or what delight can a man take in the character of the true God, who thinks that his neighbor may be truly pious and happy in worshiping another god? In my view, the more a man knows of the character of the true God, and is yet capable of holding it in such a profane manner, he is thereby only so much the more eminently fitted to be an agent of Satan in undermining it. I fondly presumed that our friendship had commenced upon a sacred foundation, even Sovereign Grace; but if we must have the same friendship for those who oppose that Grace, or who join in the opposition to it; then it is evident, there can be nothing more sacred in our friendship than in the mutual courtesy that takes place amongst infidels. Have we then been all this while employed only like two philosophers striving as to who shall get freest of inconsistencies in their manner of talking!

Any attempt to revive the Christian profession with you must be the idealist thing in the world, unless it be founded in the fear of God. When Jacob was to swear by his most awful view of the Divine Majesty, he chose to swear by the fear of his father Isaac; even that Sovereignty at which Isaac trembled with a great trembling, when he beheld his favored first-born son rejected, and his younger son chosen. Were a few with you united only by the fear of God, they would find themselves concerned to regard the noisy cry of all England against them, no more than the falling of a cascade or the humming of so many bees.

Paul lays down the following rule as a first principle to be attended to, by all who would profitably study the will of God revealed in the Scripture: "be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." No sooner does a man begin to be over-awed by the cry of the religious world, then, like Peter seeing the wind boisterous, he begins to sink, and the majesty of the Truth is eclipsed from his view. And until your mind undergo some change in this respect, I am afraid that the continuance of our correspondence will only serve to raise fresh doubts in your mind, and that you will never be able to take my meaning rightly, or at least will still doubt, if I can be in earnest in what I say.

You gently move me to withdraw some expressions of resentment against those who corrupt the Gospel, in my second letter, section three, in reply to your third query; where, after discoursing of the glorious evidence of the Truth, I proceed in these words, "can one enter for a few moments, &c." The expressions of resentment there uttered, though no particular persons are pointed at, you seem to think not very suitable to the gravity of the rest of my language in that passage, and therefore wish to have the sentence dropped. Now as I am sensible that it was never left to me to write any appendix to the Bible, I have no reason to be very

anxious whether any sentence in my letters be dropped or retained; yet as I am far from approving the tempter of mind which hints a dislike of the sentence now pointed at, I am not disposed to comply with that temper. You have in the course of our correspondence sufficiently cleared yourself from the imputation of approving that temper and language in my printed letters, which is most offensive to the religious world. With this you ought to have been contented without soliciting me to entertain a more favorable view of the world; especially, as I was willing to bear with you in that, wherein I thought you deficient, till on a proper trial your own experience should more fully show you how the religious world stood affected to the Gospel. Now my bias cannot appear more censurable to you than yours does to me. For unless the Gospel be held forth in its proper opposition to the taste of the world, I must consider all that's said about it, as little other than so much religious canting to acquire a reputation for piety. And the nearer one comes to the true Gospel, while at the same time a reserve is made for softening or averting the hatred of the world, such reputation is often established to the better advantage. But I must consider those as keeping but a very slack hold of the Gospel, who cannot heartily approve of Paul denouncing his repeated anathema against all, be they men or angels, who go about however slyly, to undermine the doctrine of Divine Grace which he preached.

Besides, I must differ from you as to the gravity and propriety of the sentence above pointed out in my second letter. I find it was Paul's manner, when his heart was warmest about the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, to point his keenest resentment against those who defaced that knowledge. Yea, this was a topic he frequently insisted on, as appears by many passages of his epistles; of which at present I shall only produce one for a sample. While he is reminding the Philippians of his view of the Gospel, the effect it had upon him, and calling upon them to follow him; he adds, "for many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, &c." And how can we be said to hold the Truth in the fear of God, unless we are persuaded that destruction attends every departure from it both in ourselves and others? Unless we are so persuaded, our zeal about the Gospel will amount to no more than an idol emulation about orthodoxy. And it may be held for a sure maxim, that however zealous we may be to hold a sounder set of principles than our neighbors, we can never greatly condemn ourselves for any deviation from the Truth that we think consistent with the Christian character in others. It ought likewise to be considered, that as the unsociable temper of my book was chiefly attacked; it was my business, so long as I approved that temper, to take every proper occasion of showing that I had not relented, and that I was neither to be wheedled nor frowned out of it; and that temper I hope I shall approve while I breathe.

If ever the profession of the Faith begin to purpose with you, it will begin with raising foundations, with hearty convictions of guilt for holding the Truth in

unrighteousness, and with trembling at the words of James, "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God; whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." I know no character a Christian ought to detest more than that of Balaam, who preached the soundest doctrine, saying, "the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations," and who knowing that the happiness of Israel lay in being so situate, nevertheless practiced secretly to mingle them with the heathen, by negotiating an alliance between them and the Moabites. Mr. Baxter, noted for piety in the last age, slackened a point of the Christian doctrine, and you see what has been the consequence among the Dissenters! I must add here, that as the love of the world and self-righteousness always go hand-in-hand together, I cannot wonder greatly at you scrupling to admit, that returning backsliders can draw no encouragement from past experiences. Yet the voice of God runs thus, "if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him." When the conscience of an apostate is awakened to hear this voice, he can by no means conclude, from any past experiences, that God has any pleasure in him more than in the most ignorant and profane. He can infer nothing from past experiences but peculiar aggravations of his guilt; and when such are heartily awakened, they commonly find their objections against the doctrine of forgiveness stronger than at the first. Therefore, it is in some respects a greater miracle to see an apostate fairly recovered, than to see one at first brought to the knowledge of the Truth.

The four addresses at the close of your two sermons appear to me to have in general a tendency to adapt the soundest doctrine to the common train of self-righteous exercise. The first makes use of the doctrine to carry forward the careless to the rank of serious exercised persons. The second serves to set the awkward to work in curbing their legal attempts, and be concerned to get themselves placed at the footstool of sovereignty, or to be brought to a proper posture so as to be led to place their hope alone upon the Redemption that is in Jesus Christ. The next addresses a third sort of persons as being, in distinction from the former two, in a proper posture to find mercy. The last congratulates the Orthodox, presuming them possessed of the best dispositions. I think it needless to enlarge on these heads, as from what you have already seen of my mind, you may easily judge what I would further say. You may likewise judge that I must either drop all mention of your two sermons, or in some general manner signify my exception against page 10th, and the application. They have likewise a little dash of the clergyman, though modest, in comparison of what is commonly allowed to be decent, as, "let me proclaim," and, "behold I bring you glad tidings."

When I received your last letter, as I first read the beginning and end before I took leisure to consider the particulars relating to our correspondence, I was greatly refreshed. It was to me like the cool of the fever, or as life from the dead. But when I found you seeking to damp my confidence about Divine Sovereignty, and soliciting me to hold it, as if I held it not; I was greatly shocked. I thought, if

you believed, it behooved to be like those chief rulers who believed, "but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God." Yet in my view, one has put a poor pretense even to the character of a Pharisee, who opposes the common Calvinistic doctrine of Predestination. Besides, how can one avoid being grieved to find that after all he is able to write, even on the most sacred matters, it is still doubted if he be in jest or in earnest?

I am obliged then to say, that if you would correspond any further with me, you must refrain from every attempt to damp my confidence about that knowledge wherein eternal life lies, even the knowledge of the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent. For I must consider every such attempt in no other light, than as a sollicitation to go and serve other gods; which I am bound to resent in the strongest manner against my nearest friend. I must likewise repeat my warning to you to be cautious, and count the cost well before you risk anything on your connection with me. And do not imagine that {unless I be forsaken of God} I can never be broken or softened as to the spirit of opposition to the religious world, which runs through my letters. You may see, that if I should write ever so much I have nothing new to say; and I have the satisfaction to think, I have not disappointed or deceived you. For I can take to witness my printed letters by which you first knew me, that I make a point of nothing with you now, but what I insisted on there in the most explicit and determinate manner. I stand by the theme of our agreement, Saving Grace, Sovereign Grace. If you depart from that, and a breach of friendship ensue, the breach does not lie at my door. So much from him, who is still willing to be, on the former terms, Dear Sir, your Affectionate Friend and Servant, Robert Sandeman, March 24, 1759.