

### DIALOGUE III.

THE DOUBTING CHRISTIAN INSTRUCTED AND CONFIRMED IN HIS FAITH AND HOLY RESOLUTIONS; in a Dialogue between a Minister and his Parishioner.

*Minister.* WELCOME, neighbour, you have been longer away than I expected. What hath been your condition since I saw you?

*Parishioner.* I went home, convinced that your words were true, and that I must become a convert or be undone. And I considered again and again my baptismal covenant, and the articles of the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments. I studied the meaning of them, with that exposition which you gave me. My ignorance had so darkened my mind, that all seemed strange and new to me, though I used to repeat them by rote in the Church from time to time. And being very unskilful in such matters myself, I went off to my neighbour Theophilus, as you advised me, and I thank him, he gladly helped me to understand the words and things which were too hard for me. But when I had done all this, my worldly business took up so great a share of my thoughts, and the cares of my family were so much at my heart, and my old companions so often tempted me, and my flesh was so loath to part with all my sin-

ful pleasures, and matters of religion were so strange to me, that I delayed my resolution, and continued still purposing that I would shortly turn to God. But while I was purposing and delaying, a fever took me; and having, as I thought, received the sentence of death, God by his terrors awakened me out of my delays.

*M.* You see, then, what an unreasonable thing it is to delay when you are once convinced. What! delay to come out of the bondage of Satan? out of the guilt of sin? out of the wrath of God? If death take us in an unconverted state, we are lost for ever. Do you not know that every sin, and every delay, and every resistance of the Spirit, tends to the greater hardening of your heart, and making your conversion less hopeful and more difficult? Do you hope for pardon and mercy from God? If you do, is it ingenuous to desire to commit more of that sin, of which you mean to repent, and which you mean to beg of God to forgive? Dare you say in your heart, "Lord, I have abused thee, and thy Son, and Spirit, and mercy, long; I will abuse thee yet a little longer, and then I will repent and ask forgiveness?" Do you propose to love and honour your Saviour afterward and for ever, and yet would you a little longer despise and injure him? Do you ever expect to find conversion an easier work than now? Do you know how much more you will have to do when you are converted? What greater knowledge, faith, hope, assurance, patience, and comfort, you must obtain? How many temptations you will have to overcome, and how many duties to perform, and what a work it is to prepare for immortality? And are you afraid of having too much time, and of beginning so great

a work too soon? Believe it, Satan doth not loiter—time stands not still—*behold, now is the accepted time—behold, now is the day of salvation.* O that you knew what others are enjoying, and what you are losing all the time that you delay, and on how slippery ground you stand, and what sorrows you are preparing for yourself hereafter!

*P.* Sir, I thank you for your awakening, convincing reasons. But God hath already, I hope, strengthened me against any longer delay. When I thought I must immediately die, all my sins and all your good counsel came into my mind; and the fear of God's displeasure overwhelmed me. What would I not have given for the hope of pardon by Jesus Christ, and for a little more time of preparation in the world, before my soul entered upon eternity? I never thoroughly saw the evil of sin, the truth of God's threatenings, the need of a Saviour, the true value of time, the madness of delay, until then. And now, Sir, the great mercy of God having restored me, I come immediately to you to profess my resolution, and to take your further good advice.

*M.* You see that God is merciful to us when we think that he is destroying us. Afflictions are not the least of God's mercies, which our dull and hardened hearts make necessary. Such fools we are that we will not understand without the rod. My advice is, that you read over again the doctrine of Christianity which I gave you in our second day's conference, and frequently recall to your mind the covenant of baptism, and let me see whether you understand and believe it, and consent thereto.

*P.* You would have me understand what I

read: I desire, then, that you would answer me these few questions, that I may more clearly proceed, and make my covenant with God with a clear judgment.

What must I trust to for the pardon of my sin? and which way and on what terms may I be sure of it?

*M.* The first ground of your confidence is God's mercy. This mercy hath given Jesus Christ to be our Redeemer. Christ hath, by perfect holiness and obedience, and by becoming a sacrifice to God for our sins, deserved and purchased our pardon and salvation. So that you must trust to the sacrifice and merits of Christ alone, as the meritorious cause of your forgiveness, and of your reconciliation, justification, sanctification, and salvation. But the way that God, our Father and Redeemer, takes to give us a right to these blessings, is by making with man a law and covenant of grace. By this law he commandeth us to become Christians; that is, to believe in God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and to give up ourselves to him; to repent of sin, and turn to God by Jesus Christ. To all who do this, he giveth an interest in Christ, as their head and Saviour; and the hope of pardon and salvation. But *practical faith* is the condition on our part.

*P.* Are all my sins then pardonable, whatever? I have been a greater sinner than you know of. Alas! my sins have been so many and so great, that I can hardly think that God will pardon them.

*M.* The covenant of grace provides for the forgiveness of all sins without exception; that is, all sins that are repented of and forsaken: but final

impenitence and unbelief are pardoned in none. So that a true Christian is not to doubt of the pardon of any of his former sins, thus truly repented of, no more than he doubts of his faith and Christianity.

*P.* But I shall sin again, in some degree: how then must I have pardon of my sins hereafter? I have heard that baptism washeth away all sins; but it is long since I was baptized, and I am yet imperfect.

*M.* Baptism is said to wash away the guilt of original sin; and it is the pledge of the forgiveness of sin to them who still repent and believe. And God's law or covenant provideth pardon for sins after baptism, whenever we truly turn to God by faith and repentance. It provideth pardon for our daily sins of infirmity; and for extraordinary falls upon our extraordinary repentance. So that you must hereafter, for your *particular* sins, have a *particular repentance* and recourse to Christ.

*P.* What must I do for grace and strength to keep my renewed vows of better obedience?

*M.* You can do nothing that is good without "God's grace giving you a good will, and working with you when you have that good will." But the Spirit of Christ will endue your natural powers with spiritual life, strength, and activity; your understanding, with spiritual light, that is, knowledge and faith; your will, with holy love and willingness: and when he hath planted these in you, he will be ready still to preserve, excite, and increase them. So that it is the Holy Ghost that must give you spiritual life, light, and love. But you must know how to obey his motions, and not to resist him.

*P.* What must I do, that I lose not the Spirit and fail of obtaining these benefits?

*M.* You must know, that as Christ giveth us his Spirit on condition of our faith, so the continuance of it is on condition of our continuing in the faith. And the increase and actual helps and comfort of the Spirit, are given us on condition of our dependence on Christ our head, for the daily communication of it.

The means of preserving the spiritual life, are to wait on Christ in the daily exercise of faith, and in the use of all his instituted ordinances; and not to resist his holy Spirit.

*P.* But I am afraid I have committed the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost: for I have joined with profane persons in deriding the Spirit. I have mocked at them who did but talk of the Spirit; or speak of the necessity of the Spirit—and is not this the sin against the Holy Ghost?

*M.* The sin was very great, and the case of those that encouraged you, fearful; and no doubt but it was a sin against the Holy Ghost. But it is not every sin, against the Holy Spirit which is unpardonable; only the blasphemy of infidels described, Matt. xii. which is, that when they cannot deny the mercies of Christ, they will rather hold and maintain that he wrought them by the power of the devil, than believe in him. So that it is none but infidels, and but few of them, who have this blasphemy of the Holy Ghost to answer for.

*P.* How shall I distinguish the operations and motions of the Spirit, from delusions? and how shall I know whether I have the Spirit or not?

*M.* The Spirit is from God our Saviour, and leadeth to him. Its operations are, holy light to

know and believe God; an holy love toward God, and his government and children; and a holy life or active duty toward God. If you have these, you have the Spirit of God.

The motions of the Spirit are always fitted to God and holiness as the end, and always agreeable to the holy Scriptures; and by them must be tried.

God giveth the same Spirit indeed, but not in the same measure to all. To the apostles and evangelists he gave it in an extraordinary degree to plant his church, and to indite an infallible Scripture, the records of his Gospel, and to confirm it by miracles, and leave it to the world, as the rule of our faith and life. The Spirit is given to others in an ordinary degree, only to help them to understand, believe, and obey that word.

*P.* What, then, is the law and rule by which I must live, according to the covenant that I have made?

*M.* God is the universal King, and Christ our Redeemer, as man, is the Head and Ruler of God's spiritual kingdom. God's law is written in the holy Scripture. This is the law by which you must live, and by which you will hereafter be judged.

But God hath officers under him in the world; parents and masters of families; pastors in the church; magistrates in the state. These are to promote the execution of God's law: and all these, under God, must in their places be obeyed.

*P.* To what church must I join myself?

*M.* You were baptized into Christ's universal church. But you must join with that part of the pure, reformed, and apostolical church, in which God giveth you an opportunity to worship him and

learn his will, according to his own appointment, and with the best advantage to your own soul; and where you enjoy that ministry in the orders of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons, which "it is evident unto all men diligently reading holy Scriptures and ancient authors, has been from the apostles' times." The apostle says, (Heb. v. 4.) that "no man taketh this honour unto himself" (the ministry,) "but he that is called of God, as was Aaron," by an external commission. Even "Christ glorified not himself to be made an high Priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee." Heb. v. 5.

This external commission, without which no man can be lawfully called of God to the Christian ministry, can be derived only from Christ, the "head of the body," the church, and the source of all power in it. This commission can be derived from Christ only by succession. He commissioned the apostles to ordain to the ministry; and they constituted an order of men, now called Bishops, to whom, as their successors, like Timothy at Ephesus, Titus at Crete, St. James Bishop of Jerusalem, Epaphroditus at Philippi, and the seven Angels or Bishops of the churches in Asia Minor, the power was given to "lay on hands;" to "commit that which they received to faithful men;" to "ordain elders." By union with this apostolical ministry, you preserve the unity of the church. Remember that God is a God of order, and hates disorder in his church; and schism is a deadly sin. See then that by communion with this ministry you preserve "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

*P.* What are the institutions or means which I

must use, in order to preserve my union with Christ and the influences of the Spirit?

*M.* Prayer, thanksgiving, praises to God, and the Lord's Supper in communion with the apostolical ministry of his church; the reading and hearing of God's word, and its explanation and application by your lawful appointed minister; and holy discipline, in submission to your spiritual guides.

*P.* What must I do with my calling, and labour, and estate in the world: must I forsake it, or not?

*M.* Six days must you labour, and do all that you have to do. *Exod. xx.* He that will not labour (if able) is unworthy to eat. Religion must be no pretence for slothfulness. You must not love the world as your felicity, or for itself, or for your fleshly lusts. But you must make use of the world, in the service of your Creator; yea, and love it as a sanctified mean of your salvation, and as a way to your promised inheritance. You must labour for your daily bread, as well as pray for it; yea, for the maintenance of your family, and that you may have things decent, and to give to him that needeth.

But this is the thing that you must principally remember, that God and the heavenly glory must still be desired before all; and the world and all things in it are but means to help you to these; and only as they are such, must be valued, loved, desired, and sought; and whenever they oppose God and your heavenly interest, they must be forsaken.

When common worldly things thus further your obedience, and when they are devoted to God, and referred to his will and service, then they are sanctified to you.

*P.* What! if I am now uncertain whether my heart be sincere in this covenant which I make with God, when I renounce all, and profess to prefer him before all? Will not this be a kind of lying unto God?

*M.* If your heart be false, it will be lying unto God; but if it be not, it will be no lying, though you are uncertain. There is much difference between one who flattereth himself with the conceit that he consents to the covenant of God, when he doeth not; and one who is but yet deliberating, and is unresolved what to choose and do; and a third who truly consenteth and resolveth, but is afraid lest his deceitful heart be not sincere in it. All that can be expected from us is, that we speak our own minds according to the best acquaintance with them which we can get.

*P.* But some think that baptism is not to engage us to this special covenant; but only to admit us into Christ's school, as our teacher, that by him we may learn how to be regenerate and sincere, that we may then be pardoned. If this would serve, I could easily consent.

*M.* You ought to know that baptism hath been kept unchanged by the church in one form; and the church never knew any baptism but such as was joined with a profession of faith and repentance, and renunciation of the devil, the world, and the flesh, and a total dedication to God in Christ, either by ourselves, or by others in our name. The church never baptized any whom she did not consider thereby to be made visible Christians; and she considered no man as a Christian, who took not Christ for his Saviour, Priest, and King, as well as for his Teacher.

*P.* What if my heart should not prove to be sincere? Or what if I should fall away again hereafter.

*M.* If your heart be not sincere in your consent to the covenant, you will remain unpardoned in your sin and misery.

If you fall into a particular sin, you must be restored by renewed repentance for it, through faith in Christ. But as you love God and your soul, take heed of wilful sinning! But if (which God forbid!) you should fall quite away from Christ, renouncing him, as if you believed him not to be the Messiah, your recovery will be highly improbable, to say the least of it.

*P.* I am much afraid, lest, when temptation cometh, I should turn again to my former folly, (though God forbid I should renounce my Saviour!) I have so corrupt a nature, and am exposed to so many temptations and worldly snares, that though I am now resolved on a holy life, I am afraid lest I should depart from my resolutions.

*M.* It becomes you to fear it, that so you may prevent it. But this fear should not hinder you from your holy resolutions. Dream not of joining sin and holiness, or the worldly and the heavenly felicity, and of dividing your heart and service between God and mammon; for that is the fatal self-deceit of hypocrites.

You shall not only have that which is an hundred-fold better than all that you forsake; but you shall have the world itself sanctified to your greater and eternal good.

When you are engaged in the service of God, you will find that light which will guide you through all temptations, and that delightful expe-

rience of spiritual pleasures which will make you loathe what formerly you loved. The comforts of faith, and hope, and love, will make you despise the pleasures of the flesh.

You will, moreover, have the direction, encouragement, and example of those who fear God; and the help of all his holy ordinances.

And you will be planted into Christ, and receive the communications of his Spirit; and his strength will be magnified in your weakness. You are not to trust in your own strength, but in the love of God, the grace of Christ, and the communion and operation of the Holy Ghost.

This holy resolution is a matter of absolute necessity. You must resolve on a holy life or perish for ever, and be condemned as a rejecter of salvation. God sets before you Christ, and holiness, and heaven; the devil sets before you the pleasures of sin for a moment, and everlasting misery in the end. Take which you will; for one you must have. There is no middle-way; they cannot be reconciled together.

If you well knew in what danger you stand till you are resolved to serve God, and what a scorn and indignity you put upon your God and Saviour, and Heaven, to suppose for a moment that the profits and vain pleasures of this world are better than they, and to hesitate whether your Redeemer, after all his love, should be preferred before a sinful indulgence, you would not remain undecided, but would instantly determine to engage in the service of God, and to pursue the glories of heaven.

*P.* But I have been used so long to a looser life, that I am afraid I shall be weary of a strict, reli-

gious, godly course, and shall never be able to hold out.

*M.* I tell you again, that if you think of the life to which you must turn, as tedious, melancholy, and grievous, you know it not; and are not well informed what it is that you have to do. It is the only honourable, the only profitable, the only safe, and the only truly pleasant life in the world.

You must indeed repent of sin with shame and godly sorrow; but this is only preparatory to the comfort of pardoning and healing grace.

You must believe all the comfortable promises of the Gospel; all the love that Christ hath manifested; all the wonderful history of his life and death, and resurrection, and ascension, and heavenly glory; the certainty of his word and his gracious covenant.

You must believe the wonderful love of the Father in giving us his Son, and reconciling us to himself, and adopting us as his sons, and undertaking to secure us as his peculiar treasure, and giving us his holy Spirit.

You must live under the help and consolation of the Holy Ghost, still drawing you to God, and making you more holy, and helping your infirmities.

You must live in the hope and desire of everlasting glory; verily expecting to see Christ glorified, with all the Saints and blessed Angels, and to see the glory of God, and to love and praise him to eternity.

In all your sickness, wants, persecutions, and death itself, you have all these comforts, and this hope of glory is a constant cordial to your heart;

and when others fear death for fear of hell, you must welcome it as the door to endless life.

You must live in the church, in the communion of saints, where all God's ordinances, regularly and duly administered by those having authority, will be your help for the daily exercise of these graces. And your chief exercises of piety must be, begging for more grace in fervent prayer; giving thanks for all God's mercies; singing forth the praises of Jehovah; hearing the glad tidings of the Gospel opened to you; joining in the prayers of the church; and with joy and thankfulness feasting upon Christ's body and blood, in the sacrament thereof; thus renewing your baptismal covenant, and receiving a renewed pardon, and new degrees of life and strength.

Tell me now what trouble is in all this, that a man should be afraid or weary of it? unless you take it for a trouble to live in the love of your dearest friend, and in the foretaste of everlasting joys. In a word, "godliness is profitable to all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." 1 Tim. iv. 7.

*P.* You tell me of another kind of godliness than what I thought of.

*M.* To young beginners, perhaps, and to new converts, a holy life may seem strange and troublesome. It will be a wonderful preventive of your troubles and dangers, if you set out well instructed in the beginning.

But the worst and common cause of all the difficulty of a religious life is, that people are so exceeding ignorant and dull, that it is a long time before we can make them understand those few plain things which I have set before you.

*P.* I thank God and you, Sir, for your counsel and his grace. I am resolved, and ready to subscribe my resolution to be the Lord's, entirely upon the terms of my baptismal covenant; and I bless the Lord for this measure of his grace. What would you yet advise me to do?

*M.* One thing more to God's glory and your comfort, that you will the next Lord's day communicate with the church in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, having been already confirmed; and thus renew your baptismal covenant before the church; where God will set his seal to your pardon, and to the promises of his covenant. And, in the mean time, that you will freely before God confess your sinful life, and publicly profess your repentance, and resolution to pursue a new and holy course; and thus approach the table of the Lord.

Thus much you owe to the church and godly Christians, that they may rejoice in your conversion, and may see that you are indeed a proper object of their special love.

*P.* But, Sir, would you have all that are converted do thus?

*M.* Certainly I would. Some, indeed, have kept their baptismal covenant, and preserved their baptismal grace, and lived under a sense of religion from their childhood, though with many ordinary sins; and have by degrees grown unto true godliness.

But I would have all do thus, that have openly broken that vow, and are converted afterwards to true repentance.

*P.* What would you have me do after that?

*M.* I shall, with pleasure, set down your name among the church-communicants: and I shall earnestly pray for your increase in grace, and for your perseverance; that you may live continually in the faith of Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of Saints, and return no more to your ungodly life. In the mean time, you may do as the converted Eunuch did; go on your way, rejoicing that you are united to Christ, that you are justified from your former sins, and are a true member of the family of God, and are made a fellow citizen with the Saints, and have a lively hope of everlasting glory.

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*Prayer suited to the State of a Christian resolving to fulfil his baptismal Engagements, and preparing to partake of the Lord's Supper.*

(In the Language of the Book of Common Prayer.)

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, by whose Spirit the whole body of the church is governed and sanctified; and who in baptism hast received me for thine own child by adoption, and incorporated me into thy holy church; I most earnestly beseech thee to give me thy grace, that I may faithfully observe my baptismal vows; that I may believe from the heart in God the Father who hath made me, in God the Son who hath redeemed me, and in God the Holy Ghost who sanctifieth me; and that I may keep thy holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of my life. Mercifully look upon me, Almighty God,



and increase in me the knowledge of thy grace, and confirm in me the faith of thy holy name. O Lord, speedily keep and deliver me, who for my evil deeds do worthily deserve to be punished; that so I may be cleansed from all my sins, and serve thee with a quiet mind. Grant, Almighty God, that being *regenerated* in baptism, and made thy child by adoption and grace, I may be *renewed* by thy Holy Spirit; may crucify the old man, and utterly abolish the whole body of sin; may continually mortify all my evil and corrupt affections, and daily proceed in all virtue and godliness of living. And I beseech thee, O God, so to direct and sanctify me by thy grace, that I may worthily receive the holy communion in remembrance of the precious death and sacrifice of thy Son Jesus Christ for my redemption. Repenting truly for my sins past; having a lively and steadfast faith in Christ my Saviour; amending my life, and being in charity with all men; and, above all, rendering to thee, God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, most humble and hearty thanks for the redemption of the world by the death and passion of our Saviour Christ, both God and man, may I take to my everlasting comfort this holy sacrament. Duly receiving these holy mysteries ordained by Christ my Saviour as pledges of his love, and for a continual remembrance of his death, may I be fed with the spiritual food of his most precious body and blood; be filled with thy grace and heavenly benediction; be assured of thy favour and goodness, and that, being a very member incorporate of the mystical body of thy Son, I am also an heir through hope of thy ever-

lasting kingdom. And I most humbly beseech thee, O heavenly Father, so to assist me by thy grace, that I may continue in that holy fellowship, may walk in the ways of thy laws, and in the works of thy commandments, and finally be exalted to that blessed state, whither my Saviour Christ hath gone before; who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. *Amen.*