

SERMON VIII.

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HOW MAY IT CONVINCINGLY APPEAR, THAT THOSE WHO THINK
IT AN EASY MATTER TO BELIEVE, ARE YET DESTITUTE OF
SAVING FAITH?

And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead.—Ephesians i. 19, 20.

THE design of this epistle is to set forth the free grace of God in man's salvation by Christ.

1. *More generally*: "Who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings." (Verse 3.)

2. *By a particular enumeration of those eternal blessings which were decreed for us in Christ*; namely, election and adoption. (Verses 4, 5.)

Having thus looked so far back before the foundation of the world, (verse 4,) the apostle sets down what Christ did in time for us in his own person, when he took our nature upon him, and entered into the office of a Mediator, as our Head, completing our redemption in himself by dying for us: "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins." (Verse 7.) Then follow the blessings that we ourselves, as members of Christ, are partakers of in this life; and they are all comprehended in faith, and in the certain consequents of it.

These Ephesians were called to this faith by the preaching of the gospel, which (the Spirit of God accompanying it) became effectual to beget faith in them. Paul was mightily affected with the success the gospel had among the Ephesians, gives God thanks for it, and prays heartily for a further increase of that faith in them, (verses 15—17,) and shows what a wonderful thing it is, that any are brought to believe in Jesus. It is as great a miracle as the resurrection of Christ from the dead: that was an effect of divine power, and so is this.

I have made what haste I could to bring down my discourse to the text, and to the point or question that I am desired to speak to this morning; namely, *How it may convincingly appear that those who think it an easy matter to believe, are destitute of saving faith.*

In stating this case, I shall do these three things:—

I. *Show what a difficult thing it is to believe.*

II. *Give the reason why many professors count it an easy thing to believe.*

III. *Prove that those who count so, are destitute of saving faith.*

I. *The difficulty of believing.*

That which requires the greatest power and strength to effect it, is no easy thing: But believing requires the greatest power to effect it: Therefore it is no easy thing to believe.

I prove the assumption; namely, that the greatest power in heaven and earth is required to raise up faith in us:—

1. *Because faith deals with the power of God only about those things which it believes.*—Bears itself up upon that; and when God is about to persuade a sinner to believe his free grace, he first convinces him of his power, that he is able to perform his promises.

(1.) *God asserts his power.*—He declares himself to be an Almighty God. So to Abraham, Gen. xvii. 1; and in the New Testament he often asserts his power, that all things are possible to him. Omnipotency sticks at nothing, knows no difficulties. What cannot the exceeding greatness of his power do?

(2.) *God doth exert and put forth his power in some visible exemplification of it, that fully demonstrates his omnipotency, and can signify nothing less.*—Such an instance we have in the text, in the resurrection of Christ. This overt act speaks-out his infinite power; it is matter of fact, and cannot be denied.

(3.) *God gives the saints some feeling and experience of the exceeding greatness of his power put forth in their own souls, by working faith in them.*—They see it is the Lord's doing; that nothing in man would ever lead him out to it, if God did not persuade him, and bring over his heart to believe the gospel.

Believers under the New Testament though they hear much of the power of God set forth in the letter of the word, and though they experience the efficacy of this power in their own hearts, yet that which puts the matter quite out of doubt with them, is this undeniable instance of divine power in the resurrection of Christ. Abraham wanted this: though he saw much of the power of God toward him, in calling him alone from his father's house, and greatly increasing him afterwards, when he became "two bands;" (Gen. xxxii. 10;)* and in giving him a son in his old age, &c.; yet the greatest proof of God's power to Abraham, was the inward efficacy of it upon his own heart, that he should be brought to believe a resurrection, when there was never any instance of such a thing in the world before. It is a sign he was satisfied in the almighty power of God; "accounted that God was able to raise him up," though "he received him from the dead in a figure." (Heb. xi. 19.) Isaac was not really slain; therefore Abraham's faith was more remarkable, that he should believe that God could raise his son from the dead; and that he would do it, rather than break his promise. He resolved to obey God for the present, and to trust him for the future. All that we believe now is but the consequent of Christ's resurrection, and

* This passage relates to Jacob, and not to Abraham.—EDIT.

follows upon it: the Head being risen, the members will also rise, every one in his own order; not only by a bodily resurrection at the last day, but by a spiritual resurrection in their souls here, when the time of their conversion and regeneration comes. That which convinces us of the almighty power of God to perform his promises, is the resurrection of Christ; but that which was the chiefest proof of God's power to Abraham, was the inward impression of it upon his heart when he was first called.

That he who as a man had this law written in his heart that "he should not kill," should so readily yield to the killing of his son; and, when he was resolved so to do,—had the knife in his hand ready stretched out, was under the highest impulse of faith to do what God commanded him,—that he should presently be taken off from it by a counter-command from heaven! How did God try Abraham, as if he had set himself to puzzle him! turns him and winds him this way and that way, backward and forward: he must not kill; and then he must kill; and by and by he must not kill. God was resolved his faith should move as he would have it, according to his will; and Abraham was as ready to comply. "He is my God," says Abraham, "and I will obey him; Isaac shall die, and Isaac shall live; what God will. He sees further than I do; I will follow him, though I know not whither I go, nor what I do: God knows; that is enough for me; I will trust him. Lord, what wilt thou have me do? Tell me, and I will do it. Shall I kill my son, or shall I spare my son? It shall be as thou wilt, Lord." Herein Abraham excelled all believers under the New Testament: though they have some experience of God's power put forth upon their souls in believing, yet they do not bear only upon this, as Abraham did; they have the resurrection of Christ to support their faith, which Abraham had not, and yet believes a resurrection-power as firmly as they who saw Christ risen from the grave. God appeared to Abraham, and made such immediate impressions of his power upon his heart, that he needs no sign, no visible instance, to confirm his faith: he was satisfied without it; he saw *that* in God himself that made him never to dispute his power afterwards.

Saints now, though they have experience of a Divine Power touching their hearts, and drawing them to Christ, yet they cannot so clearly discern this conquering, subduing power of God in themselves, as they may in Christ their Head; because they are under many infirmities not yet removed. They do not see sin and death, and the devil and the world, quite overcome in themselves; but they see all overcome in Christ; his resurrection proves all; and they are fain often to reflect upon that, to strengthen their faith and assurance of victory in their own persons at last. They know that Christ did not die for himself, nor rise for himself, but for them. They see Christ "crowned with glory and honour:" (Heb. ii. 9:) he suffers no more in his person, though he still suffers in his members; but they shall ere long be as free from suffering as the glorified person of Christ now is in heaven. Thus it will be when Christ mystical shall have all things put under his feet; then Christ and his saints will reign glo-

riously to all eternity; all tears shall be wiped from their eyes then; and this will as surely come to pass as Christ himself is risen from the dead. “‘Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world;’ (John xvi. 33;) I have, and you shall, overcome it. In me you already are ‘more than conquerors;’ and in your own persons you shall be when ‘I come again.’”

2. *Because no natural principle in man can take in the objects of faith.*—Flesh and blood cannot reveal them to us. Faith is an act above reason. How is it possible for a man, as a man, to act above his reason? It is absurd and irrational to think so. Gospel-truths are so deep and mysterious, that they do transcend our human capacities, and cannot be discerned but by the light of a divine faith. What is human we may undertake, and count that easy to us; but what is divine is above us, quite out of our reach. Therefore faith is said to be the work of God, fulfilled by his power. (2 Thess. i. 11.) The knowledge of faith, by which we are persuaded of that which we conceive not, is higher than all rational understanding. We acknowledge the truth of that, as Christians, which as men we do not scientifically know by any logical demonstration. Faith gives us the certainty of those things which we comprehend not.

3. *That which makes believing so difficult, is the seeming contradictory acts of faith.*—It seems not to consist with itself. Here I take faith more generally, as it has for its object the whole word of God, the law and the gospel. The special object of faith, as saving, is the promise; saving faith seeks life, which is not to be found in commandments and threats, but in a promise of mercy. Faith, acting upon the whole word of God, seems to contradict itself; for faith believes, a sinner is to die according to the law, and that he shall live according to the gospel. Faith has the word of God for both, both for the death and life of a sinner; and both are true. The law must be executed, and the promise must be performed; but how to reconcile this is not so obvious and easy to every one. “Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid.” (Gal. iii. 21.) It is impossible both should be accomplished in the person of a sinner; he cannot die eternally, and live eternally: yet both are wonderfully brought about by Jesus Christ, according to the manifold wisdom of God, without any derogation to his law and justice. God and his law are satisfied, and the promise of salvation made good to the sinner; and so both law and gospel have their ends; not a tittle of either falls to the ground; heaven and earth may sooner pass away than this can be. O what a mystery is Christ! Flesh and blood cannot reveal this to us. Every believer assents to the truth of the law as well as the gospel. He knows that both must have their full course: the law is fulfilled in inflicting death, the gospel in giving life. The law contributes nothing to the eternal life of a sinner; but kills him, and leaves him weltering in his blood; is no more concerned about him for ever. If God will bring this dead sinner to life again, he may dispose of him as he pleases; the law has done its utmost against him. So the law did against Christ: [it] spared him not; but killed him out-

right, and left him for a time under the power of death. But having slain a man who was God as well as man, death was too weak to hold him: he swallows up death in victory. He whom the law slew as man, rises as God, by the power of his Godhead. The law contributed nothing to his resurrection: the law had the chief hand in his death, but none in his resurrection. And here begins our eternal life,—in the resurrection of him who dies no more, and is “the resurrection and life” to all who believe in him.

4. *The reigning unbelief that is among the generality of men.*—Even among those who are of greatest reputation for wisdom and learning; ay, and among those who carry the vogue for zeal and religion, [who] are counted the head and pillars of the church; some pretending to infallibility; others set up themselves, and are cried up by many, as such competent judges in all matters of faith, that their judgment is not to be questioned, but readily complied with by all who would not be counted singular and schismatical. So it was in our Saviour’s time: the Jews, who had been the only professors of the true religion for many ages, in opposition to all idolatry and false worship,—they stumble at the gospel; the Greeks, who were the more learned sort of the heathen world,—they counted it “foolishness.” And thus was the whole world set against Christ. Here was the greatest outward hinderance of the belief of the gospel that could be imagined. And add to this the indefatigable pains and industry of the devil to keep out the light of the gospel from shining in upon us. He blinds the eyes of men by a cursed influence upon their corrupt minds, that they should not believe. Is it not a hard matter under all these discouragements to embrace the gospel, and declare our belief of it? “‘Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him? But this people who knoweth not the law are cursed.’ (John vii. 48, 49.) Why should any regard what a company of poor illiterate people do? Their following Christ is rather an argument why we should not follow him; they are all but fools and idiots that do so; a ‘cursed’ sort of people.” This is the judgment the men of the world have of believers. There is nothing, among too many self-conceited sceptics, [which] lies under a greater imputation of folly and madness, than faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. O, what a pass are things come to, that, after so many hundred years’ profession of Christianity, we should grow weary of Christ and the gospel!

5. *The notorious apostasy of many professors this day*, who have made shipwreck of faith and a good conscience, (1 Tim. i. 19,) may convince you all, that it is no easy matter to believe; so to believe as to persevere in the faith.

6. *Believers themselves find it a difficult matter to act their faith.*—If their lives lie upon it, they cannot act it at their pleasure, without the special aid and assistance of the Spirit. It is God [that] must “work in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” (Phil. ii. 13.)

Believers are hardly put to it. Great is the labour and travail of their souls in believing; they meet with much opposition from flesh and blood in every act of faith they put forth; they are forced to cry

out for help in the midst of an act of faith, lest they should fail in it : "I believe ; Lord, help my unbelief." (Mark ix. 24.) As if he had said, "I am now under some light and power of faith ; but I see I cannot hold it, if thou dost not help me. I feel flesh and blood rising up against my faith ; I begin to stagger already. Lord, help me ! that I may not be run down by my carnal heart." Temptations shake our faith many times. There is a perpetual conflict between faith and diffidence ; yet faith fails not utterly ; there it is still. (Psalm xxxi. 22, 23 ; xlii. 6, 9.) Faith upholds the heart still. (Psalm cxvi. 7.) Unbelievers,—they tremble and turn away from God ; but true believers, in their greatest frights and fears, do run to God, make toward him still. (Psalm lvi. 3.) Were it an easy matter to believe, such sudden fits of unbelief would not come so strongly upon believers themselves.

II. *The reason why many professors count it an easy thing to believe.*

The main reason is this, and I will insist upon no other ; namely, *Because they mistake a formal profession of faith for real believing.*—This undoes thousands, who, because they are qualified, as national Protestants, for all worldly preferments,—here they rest, and make no other use of their religion ; as if the Articles of their faith obliged them to nothing. A formal profession is general ; takes-up religion in gross, but is not concerned in any one point of it. But real believing is particular ; brings down every gospel-truth to ourselves, shows us our concernment in it. "Save thyself," saith faith, "and 'work out thy own salvation ;' see you neglect it no longer." No man can save another man's soul by his faith ; his own he may. Faith busies itself about our own salvation, shows us what we must do to be saved. Were there more of this faith among professors, we should every one have work enough upon our hands, and not find it so easy a matter to secure our souls into eternity. General professors carry it as if they had nothing to do, were sure of heaven already. At this rate we may count it an easy matter to believe ; but when we come to die, we shall not find it so. Any faith may serve some men's turns to live by ; but every faith will not serve our turns to die by. When we are dying in good earnest, a feigned faith signifies little to our comfort ; we see through it, and sink under it.

If your faith do not often call upon you to look to your own souls, it cannot be saving faith. He that seeks not to save himself, let him talk what he will of his faith, it is not saving faith : that is intent upon the salvation of a believer, and finds enough to do in carrying on that work, "with fear and trembling" lest it should not go through with it. You who have been at this work in good earnest, do not find it so easy as some would make it. New doubts, new difficulties, new temptations do arise every day, that put the faith of the best Christians to it. If faith does not bestir itself, the devil may be too hard for you and your faith too ; if "the righteous are scarcely saved," surely, it is no easy matter to get to heaven. You must run, wrestle, strive, fight, contend earnestly, else you may miss

of heaven, and come short of all your expectation of eternal glory. I speak not this to discourage you; but to awaken you to that diligence and care that so weighty a business calls for.

Saving faith is to cast myself and my own soul upon Christ for salvation. Whatever your faith may be, it is not come to saving faith till you do this. You may carry all your knowledge and all your faith to hell with you. Any faith that is not saving, but remains separate from it, will prove a damning faith to you. It will greatly aggravate your condemnation, that you who knew such things, believed such things, assented to such truths and gospel-doctrines, should never put forth an act of saving faith for your own souls in particular, according to the import of those doctrines. It is strange to see how many professors do leave themselves quite out of their own faith: they will not be at the pains to act it for themselves; but, in general, they believe as the church believes. But, let me tell you, it is not the church, nor all the churches in the world, it is not all the angels in heaven, nor all the saints upon earth, [that] can believe for you; you must every one believe for yourselves, and act your own business, cast your own souls upon Christ for salvation, else they will be eternally lost. How many knowing historical believers are there in hell, who have prophesied in his name, prayed in his name, have written, disputed, argued strongly for the faith, have done every thing that belongs to a common faith, but could never be brought to put forth one act of saving faith upon Christ for the salvation of their own souls!

“Come unto me, all ye that are weary,” &c. (Matt. xi. 28.) Is this done, till you personally come to Christ for the pardon of your sins, and for the justification of your persons by name? John, Thomas, Mary, whatever your names are, he or she, I am sent this day to give you a particular call to come to Christ; and I do warn every one of you, and exhort every one, to go to Christ by a personal act of your own faith for eternal life. He has purchased it for all who come unto him: if you neglect it and will not go, your blood be upon your own heads; I have delivered my own soul.

Brethren, be persuaded to hearken to the invitation that is given you in the gospel, before it be too late. O, what ado is there to bring a sinner to Christ! O that you would bethink yourselves this day, and set about saving faith! Act that faith that will save you; and say, “Lord, after all my knowledge and long profession, after all my praying, hearing, reading, I now see these are but means in order to something else; the end of all is real believing in Christ; and I am now at last come to do that, to commit myself wholly to Christ, to cast my sinful soul upon him for righteousness and life. Lord, help me to do this; bring me to a thorough reliance upon Christ, and keep me in the frequent exercise and lively actings of this faith every day; that I may see myself safe in him, who is faithful, and will keep that which I so commit unto him.” “The just shall live by his” own “faith” which he acts for himself and for his own soul: if you do not thus commit yourselves to Christ every day, by a

renewed act of faith, you may lose the joy of your salvation ere you are aware.

If you say this is done, I will not ask you when you did it first ; that may seem too nice a question to some : but I will ask you when you did it last. I hope you do it every day. If you are at any stand in your thoughts about this, your wisest course is, to act over this saving faith more distinctly, more particularly, more frequently, for the salvation of your own soul ; then your faces will shine, and your hearts will rejoice ; we shall know you have been with Jesus.

It is impossible to experience the power and efficacy of saving faith till we act it in our own case, for our own souls ; then it comes home indeed to ourselves ; then we feel the comfort of it. We may own the general doctrine of faith, and be little affected with it, or concerned about it ; but when the grace of faith comes and makes a particular application of that doctrine to thy soul and my soul, then we believe for ourselves, and are " filled with joy unspeakable and full of glory," that we should be received unto mercy, have all our sins pardoned, our persons accepted, and our souls eternally saved. All this, faith makes out to us by name, from such undeniable grounds and reasons, that we cannot gainsay.

They count it easy to believe *who* shut all acts of self-denial quite out of their faith. They live as they did before ; it may be, walk on more securely in their evil courses, from a presumptuous persuasion of mercy at last. Pray God deliver us from such a faith that gives encouragement to sin ! If your faith do not strongly incline you to a holy life, you may be sure it is not right saving faith. It is a sad thing to consider how little influence the faith of some confident professors has upon their lives ; they are not, they will not be, governed by the faith which they profess. The devil allows of such a profession ; and it is all the religion he will admit of in his followers : provided they do not touch upon the power of godliness, all forms are alike to him ; and in some cases the purest and most scriptural serve his turn best, when separated from the power of godliness. Then he has some scripture on his side, to persuade them that all is well ; then he cries, " The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are ye ! " (Jer. vii. 4 ;) settled in a church-way, according to all the rules of discipline laid down in the word. And is not this religion enough to save you ? " Thus the devil will sometimes give the best form its due commendation from scripture, when it may serve as an argument to persuade a formal Christian to sit down short of the power of godliness. He knows, God's own form will not save us then, though he would make them believe otherwise. He put the Jews upon pleading this, and possessed them that all was well, while they held to the outward form of worship that God had appointed ; which made the Lord himself so often to declare against them, and the outward forms of worship that he had appointed, because he saw they rested in them, and played the hypocrites under them. Let us have a care in these gospel-times, that we do not rest in gospel-forms only, placing the whole of our religion in that which

God has made but a part of it ; and such a part, that should never be divided by us from the power and spirit of the gospel. We talk of "damnable heresies," and there are such : the Lord keep us from them ! But, let me tell you, you may pass (though more silently) into hell through a formal profession of the truth, and have your portion with hypocrites, who professed what you do, had the same form of godliness that you have, but denied the power of it. I do not say, as some of you do, "I hope otherwise of you all." But let every one examine himself, what powerful influence those gospel-truths have upon him, which he has lived so long under the profession of. You know this best ; and others may more than guess at it, by your lives and conversations. But I spare you ; having laid my finger upon the sore place, I take it off again, and leave every one to his own feeling.

OBJECTION. "You seem as if you would put us off from our profession."

ANSWER. It may be "better off than on," in some respects. But my design is to bring you up to your profession, that you may be real in it, and not mock the Lord, nor deceive yourselves. I have often thought that he who makes a solemn profession of his faith, and says, "I believe in God, and in Christ," had need consider well what he says, lest he "lie unto the Holy Ghost." Though what you profess be truth, yet your profession may be a lie, if you say you believe what you do not believe. "With the mouth confession is made, but with the heart man believes." Believing is heart-work, which the Searcher of hearts only can judge of ; therefore you should consult your hearts, whether you do indeed believe, before you tell God and man that you do. It is a sad thing, that the frequent repetition of our Creed, and the renewed profession we make of our faith, should be charged upon us as so many gross lies ; as, Psalm lxxviii. 36, 37.

III. *They who count it an easy matter to believe, are destitute of saving faith.*

I prove it thus,

1. They who have never found any conflict in themselves about believing, are destitute of saving faith :

But they who count it an easy matter to believe, have never found any conflict in themselves about believing :

Ergo.

If faith did not act in opposition to carnal reason, and carry it against all the strong reasonings of the flesh to the contrary, supernatural truths would never enter, never be admitted, never find acceptance in the soul ; we should never be brought over to assent to them, so as to make them the sure ground of our trust and confidence in God. But faith captivates all rebellious thoughts that exalt themselves against the knowledge of God, (2 Cor. x. 5,) as if they could disprove all that the gospel says ; but the demonstrations of the Spirit are with that power, that we cannot resist them. Christ teaches "as one having authority ;" beside the instructive evidence of truth in clear reasonings, and full demonstrations of it by the Spirit,

there is authority and power to back all this ; so that, having nothing to object that is not fully answered, we dare not but obey, because of his authority and power over us. Were it not for this authority and power, the proud flesh would pertinaciously stand out against all the reasonings of the Spirit ; but when the *rationale* of the gospel is made out by the Spirit beyond all contradiction from flesh and blood, the carnal heart "is nonplussed and silenced, cannot speak sense against the gospel ; yet however, it will be muttering and kicking against the truth. Here comes in the authoritative act and power of the Spirit, suppressing the insolence of the flesh, and commanding the soul in the name of God to obey, and not stand it out any longer against such clear evidence, resisting the wisdom of the Holy Ghost. You must know, that flesh and blood, that is, that carnal corrupt, part that is in every man, is never convinced, it is not capable of any such thing ; but the power of the Spirit of God brings on a conviction upon the soul from a higher light, notwithstanding all that the wisdom of the flesh can say to the contrary. Flesh is flesh still in all those who are born of the Spirit ; but it is overpowered and kept under by the stronger reasonings of the Spirit, which is the cause of that continual conflict that is between the flesh and spirit. To talk of easy believing, without any resistance from our own corrupt minds, is to talk of that that never was, nor can be, in any man whatever. Saints are inclined two contrary ways ; though one principle be predominant, yet the other is not extinct, has not yet lost all its power ; it will stir, and fight, and resist, though it cannot overcome ; and faith itself feels the strugglings of unbelief, and bears up with more courage against them.

2. They who were never convinced of the sinfulness of sin, and of the dreadfulness of God's wrath against sinners, are destitute of saving faith :

But they who count it an easy matter, &c. :

Ergo.

I do not mean that all must pass under the like terrors of conscience : some have a more easy passage from a state of nature to grace, from death to life, from terror to comfort ; they may sooner get over their tears, and attain to peace, than others may. But this I say, that all who have fled for refuge unto Christ, are sensible of this, that they have escaped eternal death, are delivered from the wrath of God ; they remain under this conviction ; and it adds much to their comfort, that they have escaped so great danger ; and glad they are to see themselves safe under the wing of Christ. They live in a constant admiration of the goodness of God to them, in bringing about so great salvation for them, who had no might nor power to do any thing for themselves. It was not their own arm that saved them. They who know not the nature of sin, may think it an easy matter to be saved : slight wounds are easily cured ; but old, putrefied sores require more sovereign remedies, and good skill to apply them. Sin is an old sore ; they who know the plague of their own hearts do count it so. It is more than a cut finger ; it has infected the very

vitals, and will prove mortal, if the blood of Christ be not applied as the only remedy in that case; nothing else will do. Slight thoughts of sin is the cause of all that neglect and contempt of Christ that is in the world: "The whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." (Matt. ix. 12.) It is a fatal symptom when the brain is affected, and the senses taken away; when the malignity of sin has quite stupified the conscience, and wrought a numbness and mortification, there is little hope of such an one. And thus it is with too, too many hardened, seared, senseless sinners, who think 'themselves safe, though they are at the brink of destruction; they bless themselves, and cry, "Peace, peace," when the curse of God lies upon them. (Deut. xxix. 19, 20; Jer. vi. 14.)

3. Those who have never been tempted to unbelief, are destitute of saving faith:

But those who count it an easy matter to believe, were never sensible of any temptation to unbelief:

Ergo.

No man ever got over temptations to unbelief without difficulty. Unbelief has much to say for itself; and it will be sure to say all it can to hinder the soul from closing-in with Christ. When we come to set our faith against all the strong reasons that flesh and blood urge to the contrary, then tell me whether it be an easy matter to believe. Here comes-in all the trouble the saints meet with in their way to heaven. The sinking of their faith discourages them, and lets-in the strength of the enemy upon them: they overcome the world by faith; but if that fail, every thing is too hard for them; *they* stumble at every straw, *who* before could remove mountains, and make nothing of them. "All things are possible to him who believes;" and every thing is next to impossible to him who believes not, is clouded and darkened in the apprehensions of his faith, is not under the clear evidence of things not seen: he must have good eyes who discerns things that are not seen.

4. He who is not much in prayer, much in the use of all means to increase and strengthen his faith, is destitute of saving faith:

But he who counts it an easy matter to believe, takes no pains this way, he can believe at any time: Then thou canst do that that flesh and blood never did, that no mortal man ever did in his own strength.

5. He who does not look upon a life of faith to be a careful, studious, laborious life, is destitute, &c. Faith hath new rules, counsels, and methods of living, that a man was never acquainted with before: he meets with many scruples, doubts, and intricate cases, that put him to it, to find out the right way of pleasing God; for that is the great design of faith, to walk before God unto all well-pleasing. Faith lives in a continual fear of offending God, is very circumspect and watchful, lest it should take a wrong step. The saints are busied much in building-up themselves on their most holy faith; (Jude 20;) they know, all will run to ruin, if the spiritual building be neglected. It must be often viewed; we must see what is lacking in our faith, what repairs are necessary; care must be

taken that we fall not from our own steadfastness ; when we begin to yield to a temptation, to move never so little from any point of truth formerly received, we may be quickly beside the foundation. Therefore be unmovable from the hope of the gospel. When once you begin to move from Christ, you know not whither you may be carried, as the Galatians were. (Gal. i. 6.) All this shows what a careful, laborious life a life of faith is.

QUESTION. "These may be convincing reasons to others, that those who count it an easy matter to believe, are destitute of saving faith ; but how shall we fasten a conviction of unbelief upon the persons themselves, who count it an easy matter ?"

ANSWER. Though we may not convince them, yet we may lay convincing arguments before them, that some time or other an awakened conscience may take notice of, and urge upon them, especially when they are not under any present urgent temptation to unbelief. A man may be convinced of a sin before the temptation, and yet cast-off all his convictions under a temptation ; because conscience is more disposed to judge impartially of the matter, when it is not biassed by any present temptation to the contrary. As Hazeal : "What, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing ?" (2 Kings viii. 13.) Do you count me such a villain, such a wretch ?" And yet in an hour of temptation he acted-over all that wickedness. Though men may throw off all, and turn away from the light of their own consciences ; yet it is good to furnish conscience with arguments beforehand, that may be produced in a fit season, if not to the conviction, yet to the silencing, of those who talked so fast before against all they were charged with. Though you cannot convince a man of this or that sin that you know he is guilty of, yet it is good to charge him home, and to lay convincing arguments before him, that may be of great use when conscience is at leisure to consider them ; as it may be, and will be, when the temptation is ended. And let me add this : I do conceive it possible even by reason to convince a man of his unbelief, though not of the sin of unbelief ; that is a further work, a special work of the Spirit. But you may by reason convince a man of unbelief ; whether he do well or ill in not believing, that is another case ; but that so it is, that he does not believe ; such convincing evidences of this may be laid before him, that he cannot but own himself to be an unbeliever. I do not speak now of negative infidelity among Pagans, who never heard of the light of the gospel ; this needs no proof ; Heathens do own their infidelity, they openly profess it : but I speak of positive, wilful unbelief, in those who live under gospel-light, and under an outward profession of faith too, yet really do not believe. They say they have faith, but have it not. How to find out such men, and to convince them of their unbelief ; how to dig up this fox that is so deeply earthed under a specious profession of faith ; this requires some skill ; we shall find it difficult work : yet I conceive it may be done ; they may be so narrowed up, that, unless they deny their sense and their reason, they must own their unbelief.

Though we cannot by reason bring men to believe, yet we may by

reason convince them of their unbelief. Here we offer nothing new or surprising to them ; we only state the matter as it is in their own hearts, which they know to be so ; we do but bring them to reason, to their own reason ; we make them judges of themselves in a matter of fact, of their own doing : though they say they have faith, yet, being closely put to it, they must needs unsay that again ; the evidence of the thing itself overthrows all they can say against it.

I would argue thus with them,

1. *Let them, if they can, produce any of those fruits and effects of faith that are inseparable from it.*—"What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works ? can faith save him ? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled ; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body ; what doth it profit ? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone." (James ii. 14—17.) To pretend to such an active principle as faith is, and yet do nothing by it, is very unreasonable. They say they have faith ; they may as well say they have wings and can fly, though they cannot bear up themselves one inch from the ground, unless some part of the body rest upon it. Indeed, if a man's feet be upon the ground, all the other parts of the body may be erect ; but for the whole body to carry all its weight upwards through the air, this is flying. It is equally absurd for men to say they have faith, are risen with Christ, are in an ascending posture, when they visibly rest upon the earth ; nay, when they lie flat upon it, are sunk into it, covered all over with it, are, as it were, buried alive in their carnal affections. Men may say what they will, it is apparently otherwise : upwards and downwards cannot be so confounded, that one should be taken for the other ; it is against common sense. Men may and must be convinced of this, that what is contrary to faith is not faith : "Faith without works is dead : " (James ii. 26 :) were there any thing of the true nature, life, and spirit of faith in them, they could not carry it as they do.

They make faith an easy thing who make just nothing of it, and do nothing by it ; nay, they do that which they might with far more colour of reason do, if they did not at all pretend to faith ; but to say they believe in Christ, and yet act in a direct opposition to him, and to their own faith also, is that which no man in his wits would give credit to.

2. *Let them try their skill in those indispensable acts of faith that Christ requires in all his followers.*—"Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it : and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it." (Matt. xvi. 24, 25.) The reading of those words is enough to convince any considering man, that it is no easy matter to believe. That which is not easy to do, is not so easily believed.

3. *Let them consider the mysterious points of faith, that are above our reason and do transcend our human capacities.*—As the doctrine of

the Trinity, of the incarnation of Christ, of the resurrection, of justification by imputed righteousness. How have men stumbled at these things; could never come to any satisfaction in [them], by their own reason! And shall we say it is an easy matter to believe these things? They are stupidly ignorant of the mysteries of faith who say so. If this be easy, there is nothing hard or difficult in the world.

OBJECTION. "How comes it to pass that any do believe?"

ANSWER. Because God puts forth his power in some, and not in others. There is not a greater instance of the power of God in the whole world than this, in bringing over the heart of a sinner to believe in Christ. O "the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe!" (Eph. i. 19.) This is the undoubted experience of every true believer. You who know not how you came by your faith, but slid into it by custom, education, and long continuance under the means of grace, and have always counted it an easy thing to believe; let me tell you, you know not what it is to believe to this day. It is true, God makes it easy to believe; but so that we still see it impossible to believe without his help. "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." (Phil. iv. 12.) "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." (Gal. ii. 20.) We may soar aloft when upon eagles' wings; we may move anywhere as we are carried; but all this while we know we are not the cause of our own motion; the spring of it is not in ourselves; *acti agimus*, "we act as we are acted;" the root bears us, not we the root; we feel Christ living in us; we live, because he lives in us. What we receive from another is ours when we receive it; but it is not from ourselves, because we receive it from another. God makes us so to work, in such a dependence upon him, that we see it is He that "worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure." (Phil. ii. 13.) To ascribe the free acts of [our] own will to another, requires a humble mind, sensible of its own weakness, and of the secret ways of God's divine communications to his creature man, exactly suited to the rational nature of so free an agent as man is; the freedom of whose will is preserved under a constant dependence upon God in every thing he does. God that gave him this freedom, can cause him freely to act it as he pleases; otherwise man would not be a governable creature, if the natural freedom of his will did exempt him from a due subjection to God that made him; in which subjection he is as free, as he could be supposed to be, if left to himself to do what he list. A believer lists and wills what he does; and yet he does not do what he lists, but freely subjects his own will to the will of God, "whose service is perfect freedom." A saint keeps up the liberty of his will, by a voluntary obedience to the will of God; and this is his grace. Till our stubborn hearts are brought to this, they are, and will be, rebellious against God.

What I have said may be convincing to these easy believers, that they are void of true saving faith, unless they resolve not to be convinced; and though they do so resolve, yet they must be convinced, whether they will or no. Truth and reason, plainly proposed, never want a witness in the conscience of man, that will speak, some time or other, as the thing is.