

SERMON XXIII.

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.—VER. 8-10.

I SHALL proceed still, as I propounded in the opening the nature of that faith which saves and justifies us, and never ceases till it hath put us into the hands of Christ. I handled something of it in the last discourse. I shewed you what a glorious grace this is, and how it will of all graces else be found to the praise, honour, and glory of Christ, 1 Peter i. 7.

I shall now demonstrate the greatness of it in respect of its workings, and shall also discover the vast disproportion that is between ourselves and our hearts in which it is wrought, and this grace itself; how hardly it is attained, and that it is fetched out of the rock by an almighty power. To that end I have chosen this text, and it is the particular head, 'that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God,' which I will by way of commonplace explain to you.

Only in general, take the scope of the Apostle before in this chapter. His scope is to magnify the free grace of God as the sole author of our salvation, which he magnifies in two respects:—

1. By shewing that misery which man lay in, when God first set his heart upon him: dead in sins and trespasses, deserving a thousand deaths, children of wrath, as you have in ver. 1, 2, and yet that God had provided a salvation, and a great salvation, for such a forlorn creature.

2. He magnifies it in respect of the way of bringing us to salvation, and imports thus much to us, that since free grace was the contriver of our salvation, its great end was to magnify itself, and being to make its own laws, it would be sure to order man's salvation so, that though of necessity something was to be wrought in man, or else he could not be saved, yet it would pitch on something that should have an ingredience into salvation, and yet so that as little as could be should be attributed to man, and all should be ascribed to grace.

There are two things required of us, faith and works. He puts a difference between these two, in that faith is taken up into commission with grace, 'by grace you are saved through faith;' which works are not, 'not of works;' the works are required as well as faith, yet God saith he will not own you in commission with his grace; 'not of works.' The reason is, this faith, as I shewed you, is that grace which so glorifies God, that he was not jealous to put it into commission with himself. Now when God required but as little as could be, yet he must require that we should know his grace and lay hold on it, since otherwise free grace will be lost, but yet in this laying hold on it faith will give all to free grace. But you will object, May not a man step in, and say, I have faith, and I have contributed something by faith to my salvation? No, saith the Apostle, it is 'not of yourselves,' but it is 'the gift of God;' and this is enough for the opening of the words.

I shall now manifest this to you, that saving faith is not of yourselves; there is nothing in you that contributes to faith. My end in it is this: to open the nature of faith to you, that you may see that all in yourselves, and all you can do, can no way help you anything unto the attainment of it. By what the Apostle denies, that they have anything of it in themselves, you will see the false ways men take, and you will see in the negative clearly what the way of believing is, and what the nature of faith is; you will likewise see what the inability of man is to attain it. It will empty you of yourselves, and you will be convinced not only that you are not able to believe on free grace, but you will be forced to come to God, who will enable you to believe on him and on his free grace; and when you also see how you are lost, and that though God only requires sincere faith, yet you are not able to do anything towards it, you will see what you are, and of what weak abilities, and you will be thankful to God for what little faith you have, as being his gift, not from yourselves, and you will go on to perfect faith in a way of dependency on him; those therefore that think faith is so easy to be had may be convinced they have no faith.

When I shall pursue the proving these words to you, *it is not of yourselves*, I shall not go about to shew you the greatness of conversion in general, that it is not of yourselves; but I shall keep close to the point of believing. And therein I shall not speak so much to the workings of the habit of faith, as bring you to the acts of faith, as clearly renouncing a man's self, &c.

I shall perform these particulars by shewing you that all that is in man, or from man, can no way help a man to this faith; yea, all that is in man, and from man, is against it; therefore certainly it is 'not of ourselves,' but it is 'the gift of God.' These two heads shall be the particulars I aim at: that only in the general I will premise this, which I will but touch on; that is, that if we take our nature in innocence in Adam, to believe such things as we believe would have been above such a nature. I will not stand to dispute whether Adam, yea or no, had that habit or principle which we have; only this is that I say, that if he had that same principle of faith we have, yet to believe those things which, when we believe to salvation, we do believe, it was infinitely above what his faith was put to believe. If that the wheels be the same, yet if there be a new spring put in, that turns all the wheels another way. So whereas Adam sought salvation by doing, and continuance in well-doing, and the faith he had set all the wheels going that way; here to us under the gospel comes a new spring that turns all the wheels another way, and is as a new instinct and genius to carry the heart to Christ to be saved, different from what the genius and instinct of Adam's faith carried him to. The law of faith is different from the law of works.

Adam believed that God made him, and that he made the world, for he did not see it was made. I will not dispute whether his faith may be resolved to sense, or sanctified reason, yea or no. But this, I say, was an easy thing for him to believe, that all that was made was by him that said, Let us make the world. But if he had this same principle of faith, yet I believe it was so low that he could not try it further without new principles. Indeed, for him to believe that 'the soul that sins shall die,' and that he should die that day he did eat; it was easy for him to believe this, because he found that by doing the will of God he lived; therefore he might believe the contrary, that if he transgressed he should die. But what if God had said to him that God himself should die, and that he should be 'made sin who knew no sin?' If such a thing as this is should have been propounded to his faith, and the devil should have come and contradicted it, it would have put

his faith to it. For Adam to believe that while he pleased God in all things, he should continue in his favour, it was easy for him to believe it; because he had a principle in his conscience which told that he should have peace if he did it. There was the justice of God, whereof he had the image in his own bosom, that might assure him. But to believe that God will justify the ungodly, and to apprehend myself ungodly, and yet to believe that he will justify me; to believe that God will account an ungodly person as godly and righteous as all the angels in heaven, this would have posed his faith. Further, when that ungodly person justified shall continue holy, and yet not have a dram of power in himself, but he must go and fetch it from another,—‘Without me you can do nothing,’—all these would have been paradoxes, and those too great even for Adam to believe. Therefore well may it be said, ‘Faith is not of ourselves, it is the gift of God.’

But, besides, a second consideration may be this: that in the beginning, if Adam had power to do all these things, yet now it is above ourselves, for we all have lost it, and have so lost it, that of all things else we are weakest in the point of believing. Beside the general reason which is common to all grace, there is a special reason why that, in losing that which he had, we are utterly disenabled for ever, of ourselves, as to any power of believing. For consider where was it that the temptation entered in? It was certainly in a way of unbelief. The devil first destroyed Adam’s faith, and through that breach wounded him to death: ‘Hath God said, Thou shalt not eat,’ &c. If a man be killed with a shot in his eye, though that shot piercing the eye, it kills the whole man; it must be almighty power to raise that man to life; yet there is a further power required to raise that eye than to raise the man: so it is with us, Rom. xi. 32. We are said there to be ‘shut up in unbelief, that he may have mercy upon all.’ God hath concluded, or hath shut them up altogether,—that I may fit it to that thing I have in hand,—namely, that we are disenabled to faith of all things else.

He compares unbelief to a special prison; suppose this man had life that he could help himself, yet if he be shut up, he is utterly disenabled. It imports, in the first place, that God hath in a special manner shut up all in unbelief; other sins are the sins for which God imprisons us, but that we may be surely imprisoned, he makes unbelief the gaol; we are shut up with a door of unbelief on us, and therefore he makes the greatness of the mercy of God to lie in giving faith. God hath shut up all in unbelief, that so he may have mercy: he hath shut them up in unbelief over and above all other sins. Gal. iii. 22, he saith there, that the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that he might have mercy upon all; there are outward prisons of all men’s other sins, but here he makes unbelief the inner prison; so God shews a further mercy in giving faith than any other grace. So that I may express it thus to you: the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promises by Christ might come. The promises may come, and knock at the prison doors, and say, We have come to all other sins, and may come and say to a poor sinner, Believe, and tell him thus, If you will come and but believe, do but come out of your dungeon you are in, and you shall be set at freedom and be saved. Now saith the poor soul, if all other prisons be open, though there be free access to God from all other my sins, yet, saith the poor soul, I cannot come out of this prison; I am shut up, I cannot believe. The promise of faith in Christ is given to them that believe, and as the promise is given to them that believe, so the text saith here, faith is the gift of God; all the promises may knock at the prison door, but in vain, unless God open the door, as there the expression is, in Acts xiv. 27. We are in a special

manner shut up in this estate of unbelief; it is not therefore of ourselves to believe.

Now the course I shall take to demonstrate it shall be this, to go through all the pieces in you; take your understanding, will, and affections, you shall find all these cannot help your faith in the truth; all that is in us is against this, all that is in us will still under-work all its workings, unless the power of God come with it. There is nothing in the heart that is conducing to it; and all that is in a man, or comes from him, of duties, endeavours, &c., cannot attain to true faith. Faith is not of ourselves. I might, I say, go through all the faculties of a man's soul, and discover how little they can contribute to faith; but at present I shall only instance in his understanding.

First, we will begin with our understandings. All the parts of wit and wisdom that all the men of the world have had, or shall have, if they were all in one man's heart or head, they could not help him to look up to a Saviour. 1 Cor. ii. 5, 'That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God;' and in 1 Cor. i. 18, he there prosecutes it to the end; he saith, God hath a design by setting up faith in the hearts of men, to save them thereby, and to confound all the wisdom of the world; saith he, 'The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but unto us that are saved it is the power of God.' 'It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.' He shews that as God had in man's redemption, as appears in that in Genesis, an eye to confound the devil; and so chooseth out that which is the most excellent thing, faith. Saith he, I will do it by the most foolish means, as by that man that is crucified, and by the foolish means of faith and preaching, which all the wisest men shall not attain to; he doth not say he will confound the wise men, but the wisdom of men. Some wise men are saved, but he saith he will confound wisdom, for they must lay their wisdom aside when they come to believe; he useth two or three words: he saith in the 19th verse, he will make no use of wisdom; then he saith he hath made it foolishness, he hath put a scorn upon it; as in the 20th verse he shews that the wisdom of men is the foolishest thing in the world.

Then, my brethren, if you would know the reason why God does so, and know the reason why that wisdom in man cannot thus attain to faith; the reason why he doth it is, that he may confound that which is in man, the chiefest excellencies, and that it may be in his power to save whom he will, and that it may be in his power only to raise men up to what degrees of grace he himself shall please. This he doth while he makes not use of wisdom, because foolish men he can make believe as much as the wisest men; nay, he usually raises faith up to a greater degree in the foolishest men than the wisest in the world, than what by their learning they can attain to.

Let me not only tell you that wisdom falls short of it, and is not able to do it, but natural wisdom is in itself a hindrance to it, and all the wisdom and reason in a man is against the way of faith. Saith wisdom, I think by my brains and wit to attain this, which a foolish soul shall not do. Pride is opposite to faith, and knowledge puffs up pride. No man is more opposite to faith than he whose heart is lifted up in him. 'The just shall live by faith,' Hab. ii. 4. He whose heart is lifted up in him is not right: therefore nothing so opposite to faith as pride and wisdom. And knowledge, since it puffs up, when the wisest men in the world and great men in the world come to believe, faith lays them as low as the poorest man in the

world ; such a soul will say, I would not care if I were a fool, the poorest beggar in the world, so I had a dram of faith.

Then reason, which is also joined with wisdom, being the form of a man, as he is a man, it is it that constitutes the man, and so it is the highest thing till faith comes, and then faith opposeth it, subdues it, as reason subdues sense ; and then reason riseth up against faith, when it comes to be put from its kingly power and dignity, which it hath had all its days. When a stranger comes and tells reason of a strange thing in another world which reason never took in before, and on the news of this he must lay down his reason at the feet of this same testimony, and take the law at his mouth ; reason, which hath been the supreme principle in man's heart, will never do this. Saith faith, I will have all these reasonings and principles put from you. Reason stands on them, Rom. iv. 19 : saith reason, Consider your dead body ; Abraham being not weak in faith, considered not his dead body. Reason would have put in many objections, but he considered not his dead body, but gave himself up to faith.

In the third place, the stronger reason any man hath, when he comes to believe he will find the harder pull of it. Men of parts, the larger their knowledge is, they are against believing the more. Why ? Because they will find out arguments against themselves ; and all a man's reason and parts will but serve to make his indictment more against himself, and the more shrewdly a man will argue, and especially being a man of strong reason, he will reason against himself, to the amazement of all men, and as before faith, you will never believe till you see your lost condition. What makes men say that conscience tells them so, but they will not acknowledge themselves to be in such a state, but because carnal reason useth all the strength it hath to build up high towers, and plods how to get plausible shifts and pretences how to flatter a man's soul ? And a natural man thinks he is in a good condition, therefore all the reason a man hath is mainly exercised in this dispute of his conscience, and reasoning in his heart, about the goodness of his estate. But when a man comes to be humbled and believes, all these reasonings turn on the other side, and use as much strength to object why he should not have mercies, and that he must do thus and thus before he comes to believe. Never any comes to believe, if he will go the way of reasoning, while he considers his dead soul ; as Abraham, if he had considered his dead body, would not have believed. Self-flattery in a man is the general reason that leads him on in a way contrary to faith, for he thinks he is in a good estate ; for he must lose such opinion of himself before he can believe ; then when self-flattery is killed, and faith comes to lead up all her forces, then comes unbelief and fires conscience, and turns all the word another way ; that there is more ado to raise a man up to bottom his heart, and to rest in Christ, than to humble a man and to let him see his natural condition. You see that wisdom and reason, all of it, conduceth not to faith, but is all against it.

You have another principle in you ; there is a great deal of hope from that which is a good principle, and that is your conscience ; it is indeed the best thing in a man. But take natural conscience, though never so much enlightened, let it remain still in that estate which by nature a man was in, and it conduceth nothing to believing ; nay, it is the greatest enemy to faith that a man hath. Conscience, I confess, is a good principle, it hath goodness in it ; though it is defiled, yet there is a moral goodness in it ; it tells him of his sinfulness, but it will not help him a whit to believe. Come to conscience, it will set you on doing the clean contrary, and put you out of the way, and it will not direct you one foot of the way of faith. What the law

says, it hath an ear to that, but it is deaf to what the gospel saith; as for Moses we know him, but this man we know not. Nay, which is more, your conscience, enlightened, will help to discover all sorts of sin, but conscience alone will never discover unbelief to you in the bottom of it; of other sins conscience, enlightened, will tell a man roundly, but not of unbelief, John xvi. 8. It is the Spirit that convinceth of sin. Two sins there are which, the truth is, are out of the jurisdiction of conscience to set home on the heart. Ordinarily, one is the guilt of Adam's first sin. Here a man's conscience alone cannot help him; it is through spiritual discerning he must see the corruption of nature. The other is the vanity of thoughts. What comes in the compass of the law, that the heart and conscience will tell a man of. But come to a man that is troubled in conscience, he will make no conscience of believing, as if there were no command for it. They think they do well to argue against themselves, and refuse the promises; it is ordinary for them to do so. Men will cavil at the promises, but to look on faith as the great comfort, and to have a heart discerning, and to have unbelief set home on a man's soul, and to say that I must of necessity believe, conscience will not do; it is the work of the Spirit on our hearts that must do it.

This is a great truth; nothing will help you so to know the nature of faith as this thing. I am to speak of conscience not subordinate to faith, as in man it is not: it is the greatest enemy to faith as can be, it is the greatest hindrance of believing, in respect of the guilt of sin. What is a great hindrance to you in the way of believing? It is the greatness of your sins, your hearts misgive you. I shall not shew you how to take it away, for that is another thing. But this is all, I intend to shew you the guilt of sin as on the conscience; which conscience is it that raiseth it up, and conjures it up. It is conscience is the subject of it. It is called an evil conscience that represents to a man that sin is good, yet it is called evil also because that the state of man is evil. What keeps men from believing? The greatness of their sins. When conscience is awake,—what presents their sin still to them is conscience,—all your discouragement is from your conscience unsprinkled with the blood of Christ. Conscience hath not learned the lesson from faith; it hath not dipped itself in the blood of Christ. If it had, it would be quiet and not be suggesting sin, so as to discourage a poor soul when he looks on sin so sinful, and when he looks on sin so as to discourage him. When conscience doth this, he bids Christ depart from him; for he is sinful, Heb. x. 22, ix. 14. A man must have his heart sprinkled from an evil conscience. What is it that sprinkles it? It is faith that doth it by taking the blood of Christ. The Holy Ghost in the soul by faith sprinkles the conscience, and that quiets it; Heb. ix. 14, that he may 'purge your conscience from dead works.' Now then there is nothing that will satisfy your conscience in respect of the guilt of sin, but only the blood, death, and resurrection of Christ. While conscience shall be suffered to speak louder than faith, it will cry the blood of Christ down, as in Isa. lix. 9, 12. Say they, 'Salvation is far off; as for our iniquities, we know them.' Slight thoughts of sin further presumptions, but sin discovered of itself hinders faith; you all feel it. But there is a second way, wherein conscience, if it be not subordinate to faith, hinders faith both secretly and closely, and draws all your hearts its way; that I say, of all that is in man, there is not a greater enemy to faith.

This I will say in the general to you: there are two covenants, the covenant of grace, and the covenant of works, and these two are incompatible one with another. Take the law as it is a covenant, it is incompatible with

the covenant of grace. These two are two vicegerents in man's heart ; the law hath natural conscience in men's hearts to keep its courts, and the gospel hath faith in the heart to keep Christ's court. Now all men in the world, let them be never so much enlightened, and have not saving grace, they are under the law ; therefore conscience is the supreme principle in them : all men that are godly are under grace, Rom. vii. 1, vi. 14 ; therefore they are under faith. Now here lies the great mystery of it : that still conscience would be the supreme principle, it would act according to the tenor of the law in a man's spirit, it would keep a man under the law ; for it is true to its master which naturally it is appointed to serve, and doth oppose the dignity of faith, and therefore only God can so subdue conscience unto faith, as the law ought to be subdued to the gospel.