

LECTURE I.

FAITH CONSIDERED AS THE INSTRUMENT OF JUSTIFICATION.

JOB xxxviii. 2.

“ Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without
knowledge ? ”

Two main views concerning the mode of our justification are found in the writings of English divines; on the one hand, that this great gift of our Lord's passion is vouchsafed to those who are moved by God's grace to claim it,—on the other, to those who by the same grace are moved to do their duty. These separate doctrines, justification by faith, and justification by obedience, thus simply stated, are not at all inconsistent with one another; and by religious men, especially if not divines, will be held both at once, or indifferently either the one or other, as circumstances may determine. Yet, though so compatible in themselves, the case is altogether altered when one or other is made the elementary principle of the gospel system,—when

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professed exclusively, developed consistently, and accurately carried out to its limits. Then what seemed at first but two modes of stating the same truth, will be found, the one to be the symbol of Romanism, the other of what is commonly called Protestantism.

It shall be my endeavour in these Lectures to take such a view of Justification, as may approve itself to those among us who hold whether the one or the other doctrine in an unsystematic way, yet falls in with neither when adopted as the foundation or “leading idea” of a theology. Justification by faith only, thus treated, is an erroneous, justification by obedience is a defective view of Christian doctrine. The former is beside, the latter short of the truth. The former legitimately tends to the creed of the rigid Lutherans who opposed Melancthon; the latter to that of Vasquez, Caietan, and other ultra-Romanists. That we are absolutely saved by obedience, that is, by *what we are*, has introduced the proper merit of good works; that we are absolutely saved by faith, or by *what Christ is*, the notion that good works are prejudicial to our salvation.

In this and the following Lecture I propose to set down some chief characteristics of the Lutheran and Roman schemes of justification; and first, of the Lutheran.

The point at which it separates from the doctrine of our Liturgy and Articles is very evident. Our formularies speak of faith as in many ways essen-

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tial to our justification, but not as the instrument of originally gaining it ¹. This peculiar instrumentality of faith is the Lutheran tenet here to be discussed; and is plainly the consequence of what has been already adverted to, the attaching an *exclusive* importance to the doctrine of justification by faith only. Those who hold that this doctrine declares only one out of several truths relating to the mode of our justification, even though they express themselves like the strict Lutherans, may really agree with our Church; but it is far otherwise with those who hold it as comprehending all that is told us about that mode.

This then is peculiarly the Lutheran, or what may be called the Continental view, that faith is the instrument of justification ². That justification is the application of Christ's merits to the individual ³, or (as it is sometimes expressed) the imparting a saving interest in Him, will not be denied by English divines. Moreover it will be agreed that His merits are not communicated, or a saving interest secured, except through an instrument divinely appointed. Such an instrument there must be, if

¹ The passage in the Homily on the Passion will be explained in a subsequent Lecture.

² *Fides non justificat vel meritorie, vel per modum dispositionis, ut volunt Pontificii, sed organice et per modum apprehensionis, quatenus meritum Christi in verbo Evangelii oblatum complectitur.*—Gerhard. de Justif. § 153.

³ *Beneficia Christi . . . in quorum applicatione modus ac forma justificationis consistit.*—Gerhard. de Justif. § 148.

man is to take part in the appropriation supposed ; and it must be divinely appointed, since it is to convey what God only dispenses. It is then a means appointed by God and used by man, and is almost necessarily involved in the notion of justification. All parties seem to agree as far as this ; but when we go on to inquire what it is which God has made His instrument, then, as I have said, we find ourselves upon the main subject of dispute between ourselves and the strict followers of the German Reformer. Our Church considers it to be the Sacrament of Baptism¹ ; they consider it to be Faith.

These two views indeed need not be, and have not always been, opposed to one another². Baptism may be considered the instrument on God's part, Faith on ours ; Faith may receive what Baptism conveys. But if the word *instrument* be taken to mean in the strictest sense the *immediate* means by which the gift passes from the giver to the receiver, there can be but one instrument ; and either Baptism will be considered to convey it (whether conditionally or not is a further question), or Faith to seize, or, as it is expressed, to apprehend it,—either Faith will become a subordinate means, con-

¹ Baptismus . . . est signum regenerationis, per quod, *tantum per instrumentum*, recte Baptismus suscipientes, Ecclesiæ inseruntur, &c.—Artic. XXVII.

² Gerhard. de Justif. §§ 64. 153. Vid. Baxter, Life of Faith, iii. 8. error 20.

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dition, or qualification, or Baptism a mere sign, pledge, or ratification of a gift otherwise received. And this is the alternative in which the question has practically issued at all times.

I am now to consider the system of doctrine arising out of the belief that Faith, not Baptism, is the instrument of justification. What I think of that system may be gathered from the text I have selected. I have tried to delineate it fairly; at the same time I am sensible that, in doing so, I have not gone to the bottom of the subject. This however is not my business here, but to go to the bottom of the particular theory raised upon it, and of the meaning of those who hold it.

Its advocates then suppose that Faith is the one principle which God's grace makes use of for restoring us to His favour and image. Born in sin, and the heir of misery, the soul needs an utter change of what it is by nature, both within and without, in itself and in God's sight. The change in God's sight is called justification, the change within is regeneration; and faith is the one appointed means of both at once. It is awakened in us by the secret influences of the Holy Spirit, generally co-operating with some external means, as the written word; and, embracing the news of salvation through Christ, it thereby brings it home to us forthwith, and appropriates it, becoming at the same time the element and guarantee of subsequent renewal. As leading the soul to rest on

Christ as its own Saviour, and the propitiation of its own sins in particular, it imparts peace to the conscience, and the comfortable hope of heaven ; and, as being living, spiritual, and inseparable from gratitude towards Christ, it abounds in fruit, that is, in good works of every kind.

Such is the first general sketch which may be given of this doctrine, according to which *justification* means a change of God's dealings with us, and *faith* means trust. Our article puts the same sense upon the word *justification* ; so we need not stop to consider it here. Let us rather confine ourselves to the examination of what is meant by faith or trust, to which such great effects are ascribed.

The most ready answer to this inquiry is to say what it is *not*. Accordingly, it is not unusual to explain that faith is not mere belief in the being of a God, or in the historical fact that Christ has come on earth, suffered, and ascended. Nor is it the submission of the reason to mysteries, nor the sort of trust which is required for exercising the gift of miracles. Nor, again, is it the knowledge and acceptance of the sacred truths of the New Testament, even the Atonement, however accurate, however implicit. It is neither the faith of Judas who healed diseases, nor of Simon Magus who submitted to baptism, nor of Demas who might be orthodox in his creed, nor of devils who "believe and tremble." All such kinds of faith are fictitious, do not deserve the name, and have no con-

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nection whatever, except in the accident of an homonymous term, with that faith which justifies.

Such is supposed to be justifying faith or trust, considered negatively: a more direct account of it is as follows;—that it is a spiritual principle, altogether different from any thing we have by nature, endued with a divine life and efficacy, and producing a radical change in the soul; or more precisely, that it is a trust in Christ's merits and in them alone for salvation. It is regarded as that very feeling exercised towards our Almighty Benefactor, which we are on the contrary warned against, when directed towards any thing earthly, as riches, or an arm of flesh. It is the feeling under which we flee in any great temporal danger to some place or means of refuge; the feeling under which the servant in the parable asked forgiveness of his debt, with a firm belief that it lay solely and entirely with his lord to grant it. It consists then in a firm reliance on His mercifulness towards even the worst of sinners who come to Him,—an experimental conviction that the soul needs a Saviour, and a full assurance that He can and will be such to it,—a thankful acceptance of His perfect work,—an exaltation and preference of Him above all things,—a surrender of the whole man to Him,—a submission to His will,—a perception and approval of spiritual things,—a feeling of the desirableness of God's service,—a hatred of sin,—a confession of utter unworthiness,—a self-

abhorrence of what is past,—and a resolution, in dependance on God's grace, to do better in future. Some such description is often given of it; or in a word, it is spoken of as being, or implying, love, gratitude, devotion, belief, holiness, repentance, hope, dutifulness, and all other graces.

This description however includes too much, as the former said too little; let us then dismiss such popular accounts as meet us at first opening the subject, and endeavour to fix our minds on it more steadily. What then shall we say that justifying faith really is? The Lutheran divines define it to be a “fiduciary apprehension”¹ of gospel mercy,—a belief, not only that Christ has died for the sins of the world, but that He has died specially for the individual so believing, and a sense of confident trust in consequence², a claiming as one's own, with full persuasion of its efficacy, what He has done and suffered for all. This is an intelligible account of it, but not at all sufficient for the purpose, for this plain reason; that justifying faith is always supposed to lead to good works, but such a confident persuasion may exist without any fruit following to warrant it. Trusting faith is not necessarily lively faith. The servant in the parable knew he owed his master a large sum; he knew

¹ *Propria et specifica fidei justificantis forma est fiducialis apprehensio Christi Mediatoris ac beneficiorum ejus, quæ in verbo Evangelii nobis offeruntur.*—Gerhard. de Justif. § 117.

² Gerhard. de Justif. § 127, et seq.

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his master only could remit the debt. He applied to him; he appropriated to himself his mercy, in the only way he could, by falling down and throwing himself upon it. He did not in any degree trust in himself or in any thing else; he discovered no pride, no self-righteousness; his trust was implicit,—unless we choose to say that his promise for the future interfered with it. Yet he went away and sinned; trust then is not necessarily lively faith.

Shall we then define justifying faith to be faith which is lively? This is a more adequate account of it, but a less intelligible one. For what is meant by lively? is it to be explained as merely that, which *in the event* is fruitful, without having in itself any thing discriminating or characteristic? But that which results in good works must have some principle in it which is the cause of that result; and this is confessed by calling it lively. What then is the *life* of faith? What is that which makes it what it is? What is that, not *on account* of which it is acceptable (for we all acknowledge that Christ is the only meritorious cause of our acceptance), but what is it which makes it to be what it is,—(for Christ's sake) acceptable? What is the formal quality of justifying faith? Let us but ascertain this, and we shall be able to set down a sufficient definition of it.

Many divines accordingly, of various schools, consider this life of faith to be love; and it must be

confessed that even the strict followers of the German Reformer speak in a way to sanction the notion. Thus at all times they have indulged in descriptions of faith as an adhering to Christ, a delighting and rejoicing in Him, and a giving oneself up to Him. Luther, however, himself, as we shall presently find, is most earnestly opposed to such a doctrine, as if it denied the innate life and power of faith as such, and associated another principle with it as a joint instrument in justification ¹.

¹ Non enim dicit [Paulus] Charitas est efficax, sed, Fides est efficax ; non, Charitas operatur, sed, Fides operatur. Charitatem vero facit fidei velut instrumentum, per quod operatur.—In Gal. v. 6. (f. 407.) Illa charitas, vel sequentia opera, nec informant meam fidem, nec ornant; sed fides mea informat et ornat charitatem. In Gal. ii. 19. (f. 316.) Quisquis spiritualis vitæ particeps factus per fidem, is eandem exerit per charitatem, sicut per externas operationes vita hominis naturalis manifestatur.—Gerhard. de Justif. § 153. Yet Melanchthon and Calvin take the sober tone of our Homilies in denying that justifying faith can for a moment exist without love, contrary to Luther and his school. “Fides significat fiduciam; in fiducia inest dilectio, ergo etiam dilectione sumus justi.” *Concedo in fiducia inesse dilectionem, et hanc virtutem et plerasque alias adesse oportere; sed cum dicimus, Fiducia sumus justi, non intelligatur nos propter virtutis istius dignitatem, sed per misericordiam recipi propter Mediatorem quem tamen oportet fide apprehendi. Ergo hoc dicimus correlative.*—Melanchth. Loc. Com. f. 213. Vid. Calv. Justific. iii. 11. n. 6. What is the real difference between saying with these writers that faith is not justifying unless love or holiness be *with* it; or with Bellarmine, that it is not so, unless love be *in* it? What is the distinction between the metaphors conveyed by *in* and *with*? between *never without* and