

THE TRUE WAY OF SALVATION

Avoiding Legalism and Antinomianism

Extracts from *The Saints' Everlasting Rest* (1650) by Richard Baxter (1615-91)

Presented and Edited by Dr Alan C. Clifford

Christ is the door; the only way to this rest. Some will allow nothing else to be called the way, lest it derogate from Christ. The truth is, Christ is the only way to the Father; yet faith is the way to Christ; and gospel obedience, or faith and works, the way for those to walk in, that are in Christ. There be, as before, many ways requisite in subordination to Christ but none in co-ordination with him; so then it is only God's way that will lead to this end and rest.

Take heed of being estranged or separated from God, or of slacking your daily expectations of renewed help, or of growing insensible of the necessity of the continual influence and assistance of the Spirit. When you once begin to trust your stock of habitual grace, and to depend on your own understanding or resolution for duty and holy walking, you are then in a dangerous, declining state. In every duty remember Christ's words, "Without me ye can do nothing," John xv. 5, and, "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves, to do any thing as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God," 2 Cor. iii. 5.

It hath been the ground of a multitude of late mistakes in divinity, to think that "Do this and live," is only the language of the covenant of works. It is true, in some sense it is; but in other, not. The law of works only saith, "Do this," that is, perfectly fulfil the whole law, "and live," that is, for so doing; but the law of grace saith, "Do this and live" too; that is, believe in Christ, seek him, obey him sincerely, as thy Lord and King; forsake all, suffer all things, and overcome; and by so doing, or in so doing, as the conditions which the gospel propounds for salvation, you shall live. If you set up the abrogated duties of the law again, you are a legalist; if you set up the duties of the gospel in Christ's stead, in whole or in part, you err still.

Christ hath his place and work; duty hath its place and work too; set it but in its own place, and expect from it but its own part, and you go right: yea, more, how unsavoury so ever the phrase may seem, you may, so far as this comes to, trust to your duty and works; that is, for their own part; and many miscarry in expecting no more from them, as to pray, and to expect nothing the more, that is, from Christ, in a way of duty; for if duty have no share, why may we not trust Christ, as well in a way of disobedience as duty? In a word, you must both use and trust duty in subordination to Christ, but neither use them nor trust them in co-ordination with him. So that this derogates nothing from Christ: for he hath done and will do all his work perfectly, and enableth his people to do theirs; yet he is not properly said to do it himself, i.e. Christ believed for us legally, or so far as the law

required faith, but not as it is the condition or command of the new covenant; he believes not, repents not, &c. but worketh these in them; that is, enableth and exciteth them to do it. No man must look for more from duty than God hath laid upon it; and so much we may and must.

If I should quote all the Scriptures that plainly prove this, I should transcribe a great part of the Bible: I will bring none out of the Old Testament; for I know not whether their authority will here be acknowledged; but I desire the contrary-minded, whose consciences are tender of abusing Scripture, and wresting it from the plain sense, to study what tolerable interpretation can be given of these following places, which will not prove that life and salvation may be, yea, must be the end of duty. "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life," John v. 39, 40. "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force," Matt. xi. 12. "Strive to enter in at the strait gate," Matt. vii. 13; Luke xiii, 24. "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling," Phil. ii. 12. "To them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, eternal life. Glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good," &c. Rom. ii. 7, 10. "So run that ye may obtain," 1 Cor. ix. 24. "A man is not crowned, except he strive lawfully," 2 Tim. ii. 5. "If we suffer with him, we shall reign with him," 2 Tim. ii. 12. "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life," 1 Tim. vi. 12. "That they do good works, laying up a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life," 1 Tim. vi. 18, 19. "If by any means I might attain to the resurrection of the dead; I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling," &c. Phil. iii. 14. "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and enter in by the gates into the city," Rev. xxii. 14. "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit, &c. For I was hungry, and ye," &c. Matt. xxv. "Blessed are the pure in heart, &c. They that hunger and thirst, &c. Be glad and rejoice, for great is your reward in heaven," Matt. v. "Blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it," Luke xi. 28. Yea, the escaping of hell is a right end of duty to a believer. "Let us fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it," Heb. iv. 1. "Fear him that is able to destroy both soul and body in hell ; yea, (whatsoever others say,) I say unto you, Fear him," Luke xii. 5. "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway," 1 Cor. ix. 27. Multitudes of Scriptures and Scripture arguments might be brought, but these may suffice to any that believe Scripture.*

For those that think this rest may be our end, but not our ultimate end, that must be God's glory only, I will not gainsay them. Only let them consider, what God hath joined, man must not separate. The glorifying himself, and the saving of his people, as I judge, are not two decrees with God, but one decree, to glorify his mercy in their salvation; though we may say, that one is the end of the other; so I think they should be with us together intended. We should aim at the glory of God, not alone considered, without our salvation, but in our salvation. Therefore, I know no warrant for putting such a question to ourselves, as some do, Whether we could be content to

be damned, so God were glorified? Christ hath put no such question to us, nor bid us put such to ourselves. Christ had rather that men would inquire after their true willingness to be saved, than their willingness to be damned. Sure I am, Christ himself is offered to faith in terms for the most part respecting the welfare of the sinner, more than his own abstracted glory. He would be received as a Saviour, Mediator, Redeemer, Reconciler, Intercessor, &c. And all the precepts of Scripture, being backed with so many promises and threatenings, every one intended of God as a motive to us, do imply as much. If any think they should be distinguished as two several ends, and God's glory preferred, so they separate them not asunder, I contend not. But I had rather make that high pitch, which Gibieuf and many others insist on, to be the mark at which we should all aim, than the mark by which every weak Christian should try himself.

In the definition, I call a Christian's happiness, the end of his course, thereby meaning, as Paul, 2 Tim. iv. 7, the whole scope of his life. For as salvation may, and must, be our end, so not only the end of our faith, though that principally, but of all our actions; for as whatsoever we do, must be done to the glory of God, whether eating, drinking, &c. so must they all be done to our salvation. That we may believe for salvation, some will grant, who yet deny that we may do or obey for it. (The scriptures before cited do prove both). I would it were well understood, for the clearing of many controversies, what the Scripture usually means by faith. Doubtless, the gospel takes it not so strictly as philosophers do; but, in a larger sense, for our accepting Christ for our King and Saviour. To believe in his name, and to receive him, are all one (John i. 12); but we must receive him as King, as well as Saviour: therefore, believing doth not produce heart-subjection as a fruit, but contains it as an essential part; except we say, that faith receives Christ as a Saviour first, and so justifies before it take him for King, as some think; which is a maimed, unsound, and no Scripture faith. I doubt not but the soul more sensibly looks at salvation from Christ, than government by him, in the first work: yet, whatever precedaneous act there may be, it never conceives of Christ, and receives him to justification, nor knows him with the knowledge which is eternal life, till it conceive of him, and know him, and receive him for Lord and King. Therefore there is not such a wide difference between faith and gospel obedience, or works, as some judge.** Obedience to the gospel is put for faith, and disobedience put for unbelief, oftentimes in the New Testament.

* I speak the more of this, because I find that many moderate men, who think they have found the mean between the Antinomian and the legalist, yet do foully err in this point. As Mr. F. in the "Marrow of Modern Divinity," a book applauded by so many eminent divines, in their commendatory epistles, before it: and because the doctrine, That we must act from life, but not for life; or in thankfulness to him that hath saved us, but not for the obtaining of salvation; is of such dangerous consequence, that I would advise all men to take heed of it, that regard their salvation, 1 Cor. xv. ult.; 2 Cor. iv. 17; v. 10, 11; 2 Pet. i. 10, 11. I here undertake to prove that this forementioned doctrine, reduced to practice, will certainly be the damnation of the practiser: but I hope many Antinomians do not practise their own doctrine.

** In this point of works concurring in justification, I am wholly of Davenant's judgement,

“De Justicia Actuali.”