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# Unbelief Arraigned And Condemned At The Bar Of God

By Ebenezer Erskine

*"And when he is come, he will convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they believe not on me."*—John 16:8,9.

*"He that believeth not, is condemned already."*—John 3:18.

Christ having, in the preceding verse, declared the great end and design of his mission by the Father, or of his manifestation in our nature; namely, not that he should "condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved;" in the verse where my text lies, deduces a two-fold inference therefrom. The first is very sweet and comfortable, in the former part of the verse; "He that believeth on him, is not condemned;" that is, he who falls in with the great end of my manifestation in the nature of man, he who gives me my errand, by entrusting his lost and ruined soul into my hand, although he be a sinner, and a great sinner, though the law and justice of God be pursuing him, for the many millions of talents he is owing: yet the process shall be stopped, the judgment arrested, the sentence of the broken law cancelled, insomuch that he cannot come into condemnation; and if he be not condemned, he must be absolved and acquitted. I, as his Surety, have paid the debt, and obtained the discharge under the hand of justice; I was *made sin for him, that he might be made the righteousness of God in me:* and, therefore, who can lay any thing to his charge?

The second inference, drawn from the design of the incarnation of the Son of God, is very terrible and awful; and you have it in the words I design to spend a little time upon, *He that believeth not, is condemned already.* For which there is a very relevant reason given, in the close of the verse: "Because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

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It is the middle clause of the verse on which I am to speak — *He that believeth not, is condemned already*. Where we may notice, (1.) A capital crime chargeable upon most of gospel hearers, *not believing*. (2.) An awful sentence passed against the criminal; *he is condemned*. (3.) The quality of the sentence implied in that expression, *condemned already*. Which may point either at the certainty of the unbeliever's condemnation: it is not simply a thing future, or to be done; but it is done already. The sentence is pronounced and gone forth against him, from the mouth of the righteous Judge; yea, not only is sentence passed, but is partly executed, the law having delivered him over, in a way of righteous judgment, into the power and dominion of sin, which is spiritual death. Or, the word *already* may point at the severity of the unbeliever's sentence; his sin is of such a deep dye, of such a criminal nature, that the Judge cannot sit with it, as he doth with other sins, Psal. 50:21. It offers such indignity to his beloved Son, the darling of his soul, that he cannot shun to adjudge the accused to immediate death. Or, the word may indicate this much to us, that the sentence of the broken law stands in full force and vigour against the unbelieving sinner, for all his other sins: he despises the only remedy, the only sacrifice for sin; and therefore every sinful thought, word, and action, exposes him to the just vengeance of a righteous God, in time, and through endless eternity.

My doctrine is, "That every unbeliever is a sentenced and condemned criminal before God. Or, take it, if you will, in the very words of the text, *He that believeth not, is condemned already*."

Here, through divine assistance, I shall speak,

- I. Of the crime.
- II. Of the sentence.
- III. Of the grounds on which the sentence is founded.
- IV. Deduce some inferences from the whole.

I. I would *speak a little of the crime, which is unbelief*, by giving some account of it, 1. In its nature; 2. In its causes.

As for the *first*, namely, the nature of unbelief. Before I proceed to show in what it consists, to prevent mistakes, I shall name a few things,

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which will not amount to this heavy charge in God's reckoning, whatever they may sometimes do in the court of an erring or misinformed conscience.

1. Unbelief does not lie in a person's being in the dark as to his actual union with Christ, or interest in him. A real believer may lack the sensible assurance of God's love, and yet, at the same time, have an acting faith with an assurance of appropriation upon the promise of a reconciled God in Christ. Sense may be saying, as in the case of Heman, Psal. 88, "Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. I am afflicted and ready to die, from my youth up: while I suffer thy terrors, I am distracted." And yet faith breathing out its appropriating act, and saying, "O Lord God of my salvation;" it will look in the face of a hiding and smiting God, and say, "Though he should slay me, yet will I trust in him." And, seeing it is so, it must needs follow, that unbelief does not lie in a person's being in the dark as to his actual interest in Christ; to say so, were to "offend against the generation of the righteous," who may be "trusting in the name of the Lord, and staying themselves upon their God, while they walk in darkness and see no light."

2. Unbelief does not lie in the interruption of the actings and exercise of faith. We find the faith of the most eminent saints many times interrupted in its exercise, through the prevalency of temptation and indwelling corruption. Psal. 77:7, &c., the holy man there, in a fit of unbelief, cries, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Doth his promise fail for evermore?" David, in the like case, gives the lie to a God of truth, through the sides of all his prophets, Psal. 116:10, 11: "I said in my haste, All men are liars." This was indeed a pang of unbelief; but it did not argue unbelief in its reign. Many times faith is laid asleep in its habit, while yet the life of it remains; like Samson in the hands of the Philistines, though his life was continued, yet the locks, in which his strength lay, were cut off.

3. This unbelief, of which I speak, does not consist in a disbelief of some particular truths of the word, through ignorance, providing they be not fundamental. Every error in the head, through ignorance, does not destroy the being of faith in the heart; no more than every miscarriage in the life through weakness, destroys the being and reality of the grace of God in the soul. The apostles, we find, all the time of Christ's life, yea, after his resurrection also, were in an error as to the nature of the

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Messiah's kingdom, imagining that it would be modelled after the fashion of the kingdoms of this world; neither did they believe the universal call and offer of the gospel to the Gentile nations, as well as to the Jews, until they were convinced of their error by Peter's vision. But, notwithstanding of this error of theirs, they believed in Christ as the promised Messiah, and rested on him as the Saviour of the world.

4. I do not here speak of the negative unbelief of the heathen world, who never had the benefit of gospel revelation: "How shall they believe," (says the apostle, Rom. 10:14,) "in him of whom they have not heard?" Their unbelief, or infidelity is more properly their punishment than their sin. They can no more be punished for not believing in Christ, than a man can be condemned for not seeing the sun at midnight, when it is in the other horizon; or than a man can be blamed for not receiving a gift that was never offered to him. So that, it is not the negative unbelief of the heathens of which I now speak, but the positive unbelief of those who sit under the light of the glorious gospel.

But, say you, seeing none of these will amount to the charge of unbelief, in what does it consist? *Answ.* There are three things, any one of which will amount to this capital crime —

1. A denial of the truth of the gospel; looking upon the word of God, contained in the scriptures, as a *fiction*, or a *cunningly devised fable*. I am very suspicious there are unbelievers of this stamp among those who are called by the name of Christians; men pretending to be great masters of reason, who, because their weak and depraved minds cannot grasp the unsearchable mysteries of our holy religion, do, therefore, turn infidels, and reject the whole as an incredible paradox. This very thing upon which they stumble, proves it to be of a divine original. The unsearchable wisdom that appears in every one of the works of God, proves them to be indeed his works, and not the works of any created being. And shall it be imagined, that there is less wisdom in his words than in his works, when they are the more immediate product and picture of his infinite understanding, which can never be searched out? Here, if any where, we may expect the "deep things of God; the wisdom of God in a mystery, which none of the princes of this world knew."

2. A doubting or wavering uncertainty of mind about the truths of the gospel, will amount to this crime of unbelief pointed at in my text.

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There are some, who, though they do not go the length of denying flatly that the Bible is the word of God, or that the gospel is of a divine original, yet they waver, and are in suspense about it; like the worshippers of Baal, they "halt between two opinions;" they neither believe nor disbelieve it; but are like the scales of an even balance, ready to turn either to this or the other side. Such are unbelievers, in Christ's reckoning; for "he that is not with me," says he, "is against me."

3. When, though a person may be convinced in his mind, by rational arguments, that the Bible is the word of God, that the gospel is of a divine extract, yet does not fall in with the great design of the scriptures by receiving Christ, and resting upon him alone for salvation, as he is there presented and revealed. We have the design of the whole word of God expressed in one verse, John 20:31: "These things are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name." And therefore when Christ is not received as the promised Messiah, the Saviour of the world, and actually made use of for these ends and uses for which he is revealed and exhibited in the word; particularly for "wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption;" in this case, I say, a person falls under the heavy charge of unbelief, and is condemned already. This last is the unbelief which I take to be principally pointed at in my text, and is most frequent and prevalent among the bearers of the gospel. So much for the nature of unbelief.

I come, *secondly*, to inquire a little into some of its causes and, among many that might be named, I shall only mention these few:

1. The devil has a great hand in it. Faith is the great engine by which his kingdom and interest is overthrown in the world; and therefore he studies, by might and main, to keep the sinner under the power of unbelief: for which end, he uses a great many wiles and stratagems. His first and principal care is, to hush the house, and keep it in peace and quiet. In order to this, he persuades the man that his state is good enough; that, though he be a sinner, yet his sins are but small and venial; and that it cannot consist with the justice of God to pursue such small sins with eternal punishment. If, notwithstanding these surmises, the man's conscience cannot be satisfied, but it begins to awaken, challenge, and smite him, he studies to lay him asleep again, with the prospect of general and absolute mercy. If, again, this lying refuge be beat down by the hail

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of divine terrors, he betakes himself to another artifice; he conceals and hides the attribute of mercy, presenting God to the soul as an implacable and inexorable Judge, who will by no means acquit the guilty; and thus, by hiding the remedy, he studies to drive the sinner to despair. And, indeed, the devil is much more skilled in representing the justice than the mercy of God to a sinner's view, being an utter stranger to the last, but well acquainted with the first from his sad experience. But whatever views he gives of God to the sinner, whether in his justice or mercy, his design is still to carry the soul off from Christ, and the mercy of God running in the channel of his propitiatory blood. By presenting absolute mercy, he encourages the sinner to go on in sin, hoping to be saved, though he never be sanctified by the Spirit of Christ. When he presents the justice of God, he studies to drive the sinner to a hopeless despair of salvation by his atoning blood; and thereupon the sinner either with Judas runs to a halter for ease, or puts on a desperate resolution, that if he be damned, he shall be damned for something, and so takes a full swing in gratifying his lusts, crying with those, Jer. 2:25, "There is no hope. We have loved strangers, and after them will we go." If, notwithstanding the utmost arts and efforts of hell, the remedy be revealed to the sinner, namely, Christ, as the sole foundation God hath laid in Zion; then the enemy has another stratagem at hand to discourage the poor sinner from making use of Christ: he persuades the man that he is not fit enough for Christ; he must be so humble, so holy, so penitent, and have this and the other qualification, before he venture to come to Christ. O if I were sanctified, mortified, self-denied, washed, then Christ would make me welcome. This is nothing but an artifice of hell, for the ruin of souls, persuading sinners that they must bring money and price with them to Christ; that they must have such and such things before they come to Christ, which are only to be got by an actual union with him by faith. Thus, I say, the devil has a great hand in unbelief; it being the very strength of his kingdom; and so long as he keeps this hold in safety, he is very easy what shapes of morality, civility, or profession, a man may cast himself into; for he well knows that "be who believes not, shall be damned," let him do else whatever he pleases.

2. Ignorance is another great cause of unbelief. "My people," says the Lord, "are destroyed for lack of knowledge." Ignorance of God, in his holiness, justice, and other adorable excellencies; ignorance of the law of God in its purity, extent, and spirituality; ignorance of sin in its exceeding

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sinfulness; ignorance of the great mystery of godliness, the union of the two natures in the person of our wonderful IMMANUEL; ignorance of his substitution in the room of sinners, and of that everlasting and law-magnifying righteousness he has brought in by his obedience unto the death; ignorance of the free access sinners have to Christ, and his whole salvation, in and by a confirmed testament or promise, which is put in their hands, and *left* to them, Heb. 4:1, that they may use and claim the benefit of it in a way of believing: I say, the god of this world "blinds the minds of them which believe not," that they may not know "the things which belong to their eternal peace;" he is afraid, "lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine into their hearts." I am persuaded, did sinners but know how near Christ, and his purchased salvation, are brought to them by the gospel, there would not be so many unbelievers among us. People generally look on Christ, and eternal life in him, as things that are far out of their reach; and thereupon they turn careless and easy about them, having no hope of ever attaining them, being things too high and great for them. But, O sirs, this is only a veil or mist cast before your eyes, by the great enemy of your salvation, that you may not see your *own mercy*; for were your eyes opened, you would see Christ, and all the blessings of his purchase, brought, as it were, within the very reach of your hand. The manna is lying round your tent-door, and you have no more trouble but to gather and use it, Is. 46:13; Rom. 10:7, 8; John 6:32.

3. Pride is another great cause of unbelief. This is just the poison of the old serpent, who being "lifted up with pride, fell into condemnation." By pride he ruined all mankind at first; *Ye shall be as gods*; and by pride he still keeps us under his power: hence we read of high and towering imaginations in the heart of man, which "exalt themselves against the knowledge of Christ." There is a pride in the heart of man, by nature, which stands directly opposite to the way of salvation by grace: God is willing to give life, but we desire to merit and deserve it: God will have all to be of grace, that boasting may be excluded; but we will have all in a way of debt, that we may have whereof to glory. What, says the proud heart, will ever God give, or shall I take, eternal life for nothing? No, I will not have it, unless God will accept some equivalent, some service or work for it. "Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams?" &c. The pride of the heart will set a man at work to do or suffer any thing for life and salvation, rather than believe in Christ, and be saved in a way of grace; as

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we see in the case of the poor deluded Papists. They will rather quit their kingdoms and thrones, put themselves into monasteries, lie on hair, live on alms, tire themselves with saying the book of Psalms over once every twenty-four hours; and for that end break their sleep, by rising twice or thrice a night, saying so many prayers to the Virgin Mary, and to this and the other saint; they will whip themselves, tear their bodies, go into penances and long pilgrimages: all this, and much more, will they do, for pardon and salvation, rather than take God's method, which is to receive eternal life, as the free gift of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Whence comes all this stir, but only from the pride of our hearts, which will stoop to any thing of our own devising, though ever so base and mean, rather than stoop to be saved in a way of grace? That is a strange instance of the pride of the heart, which we have, Rom. 10:3, where it is said of the proud self-righteous Jews, "they went about to establish their own righteousness, and would not submit unto the righteousness of God." O strange! Shall a poor naked beggar, that has not a rag to cover him, reckon it submission or humility in him to accept of a robe? Shall a condemned malefactor reckon it submission to receive the king's pardon? The captive to accept of liberty? Or a man mortally wounded to accept of a healing balm? Yet this is the very case with us: through the pride of our hearts we will not submit to the righteousness of God, but feel compelled to establish a righteousness of our own. Nature, though assisted by external revelation, can never think of another way of salvation than that of the first Adam, namely, by doing and working. To be saved and justified by the doing and dying of another, is a mystery which flesh and blood cannot receive, till the strength of natural pride be broken by the almighty power of God. Men naturally will wear no other garment than that which, like the spider, they spin out of their own bowels. But what says God, Is. 59:6? "Their webs shall not become garments, neither shall they cover themselves with their works." Man will needs enter into life and glory, by the door of the law, which God has condemned and barred against all mankind since the fall; "for by the works of the law shall no flesh living be justified." Sirs, allow me to tell you, that God never designed to bring man to life by the law, or the works of the law: no, the law of works was only intended as a scaffold, by which he meant to rear up a house of mercy, in which he designed to harbour a company of broken debtors and bankrupts, that they might live upon his charity and grace for ever: and immediately upon the entrance of sin, the scaffold of

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the law as a covenant was taken down, and broken in pieces. Oh! what devilish pride is it in us, to attempt the rebuilding of the scaffold, that we may climb up to heaven by it, rather than enter the threshold of the house of mercy, which God has resolved *shall be built up for ever!* Psal. 89:2. Sirs, allow me to tell you, however high you may climb heaven-ward upon the scaffold of the law, in your own conceit, and in the esteem of others; yet you shall be *cast down into hell* like Capernaum. Your house being *built upon the sand*, it will *fall*, and *great* will be the *fall thereof*. "The day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty; and the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low: and the Lord alone shall be exalted," Isa. 2.

4. A pretended humility and self-denial is another great bar in the way of believing to many. They thrust away Christ and the mercy of God from them, under a pretence that they are not fit for it. O! says the man, I am such a hell-deserving sinner, my sins are so great, that I dare not think of coming to Christ; he was never intended for the like of me. This carries a fair show of humility and self-denial, while it is only a devil of pride, transforming himself into an angel of light. You say you are not worthy of the mercy of God. I answer, It is very true; but then you should consider, that mercy could not be mercy, if you were *worthy of it*; it would be merit, and not mercy: grace would not be grace, but debt, if you could deserve it. This way of thinking or speaking is quite contrary to a covenant of grace, where Christ, and all the blessings of his purchase, are made over to us, in the form of a testamentary deed, or free gift and legacy. "I will be their God, and they shall be my people: I will take away the stony heart; I will sprinkle them with clean water," &c. In these, and the like absolute and unlimited promises, the grace and favour of God in a Redeemer comes to every man's door, be who or what he will; and by these great and precious promises, we must receive Christ, and apply him in a suitableness to our soul's need, or perish for ever. And to refuse Christ, and his salvation tendered in the word of grace, under this pretext, that we are great sinners, is all one, as if a traitor should refuse his prince's pardon, because he has been in arms against him; or as if one should refuse to accept of a free discharge, because he is a bankrupt, drowned in debt.

5. A secret jealousy as if God were not in good earnest with us, when he offers Christ and his salvation to us in the gospel. I am afraid

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that this lies at bottom with many; they do not really believe, that God is willing to bestow his Christ, and salvation through him, upon them, though he be every day calling, commanding, beseeching, and entreating them to embrace him. But, sirs, what else is this, but to charge God with treachery and disingenuousness, as if he said one thing in his word, and intended another in his heart? God says, "He is not willing that you should perish;" yea, he swears by his life, that he has no pleasure in your death, but rather that you turn unto him, through a Redeemer, and live: and yet, to think or say that he is not in good earnest, what else is this, but to make God a liar, yea, to charge him with perjury? And what an insufferable affront is this to a God of truth, for whom "it is impossible to lie?" We cannot offer a greater indignity to a man than to call him a liar; yea, if we but insinuate a jealousy of his veracity and ingenuousness, it is enough to exasperate and enrage his spirits; for "jealousy," says Solomon, "is the rage of a man:" and how, then, shall we imagine that God will sit with it? O, sirs! Be persuaded that God speaks the truth in his heart; his words of grace and truth in the scripture, are the sweet picture of his thoughts. And, therefore, beware of harbouring the least jealousy in your hearts, as if he were not in good earnest when he offers his Christ to you, and commands you to receive him, and his whole salvation.

6. People finding peace and ease in some one thing or other on this side of Christ, is another great cause of unbelief. Perhaps the man has had some challenges and awakenings; upon which, he falls to his prayers, vows, promises, resolutions, to be a better man in time coming, and better servant to God; upon this he finds quiet and ease, and there he rests, without ever coming to the blood of the Lamb. But, sirs, as sure as God lives, this is but a refuge of lies, a hiding place which "the hail shall sweep away." Do not mistake me; I am not dissuading you from duties, but only persuading you not to rest in your duties; let duties be as wagons to carry your souls to Christ, who is *the end of the law*, and of all the duties it enjoins; for when you rest in them as a righteousness or ground of acceptance before God, they become a bar in the way of your coming to Christ, and they prove soul-damning and ruining things, instead of being the causes or means of salvation. And, therefore, go a little farther than these; do not make a plaster of them to heal the wound of conscience; for if your healing do not come from under the wings of the sun of righteousness, the wound will fester, and prove deadly in the issue. Let him only be the well-spring of your comfort, who is the *consolation of*

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*Israel*, and in whom all our well-springs are. We read of the brook Cherith, which supplied the prophet Elijah with water, for a time; but, at length, the brook dried up, and he would have perished, unless God had brought him to a spring of water. Just so it is with many: they lie for a long time by the brooks of their own duties; and finding some sort of ease and comfort there, conscience is pacified, and they rejoice, because they think God will pity and save them, while they have done as well as they can. But, depend on it, these brooks will dry up, and your souls will starve and perish for ever, if you do not, by faith, come to the fountain opened in the house of David, and draw water out of this well of salvation. O come, sirs, to this open and overflowing fountain: "Whosoever will, let him come, and drink of the waters of life freely:" here you shall find water in the time of the greatest drought, Is. 41:17: "When the poor and needy seek water," in duties, ordinances, and created comforts, "and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I, the Lord, will hear them. I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them." Jer. 17:7,8: "Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh; but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit." So, then, beware of resting on this side of Christ. Many other causes of unbelief might be remarked upon; but I will let them go for now.

II. The *second* general head proposed was, to *give some account of the condemnatory sentence passed against this crime of unbelief*. The unbeliever is *condemned already*. Here I shall, 1. Prove that sentence is passed. 2. Show in what courts it is passed. 3. Give some qualities of the sentence.

*First*, I would prove that sentence is passed against the unbeliever. I need not stand to prove this, when it lies so plain and clear in the text: *He that believeth not, is condemned already*. The word rendered to *condemn*, is forensic, borrowed from courts of justice, where the malefactor, or guilty person, is arraigned and indicted before the judge, his crime made legally evident, and then sentence passed against him, according to the nature and demerit of his crime. So, here, the unbeliever is, as it were, arraigned before the bar of divine justice; process is led against him, and he found guilty of the violation of the royal law of

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Heaven, and of holding in contempt the glorious remedy provided and offered in the gospel; and, thereupon, sentence goes forth against him, from the mouth of the great Judge, who has "justice and judgment for the habitation of his throne." This man believes not in my Son, and, therefore, I condemn him to death everlasting; he rejects the Saviour of sinners, and, therefore, let him die in his sins; he would needs seek life by the law as a covenant, and, therefore, let the curse of that covenant lie on him for ever. See, to the same purpose, the last verse of this chapter: "He that believeth not the Son, shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."

*Secondly*, I come to tell you in what courts the unbeliever is condemned.

1. Then, he is already condemned in the court of the law as a covenant, by which he is seeking to be justified and saved: Rom. 3:19: "Now we know, that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." Every unbeliever is upon a law foundation; he is seeking salvation and righteousness by the works of the law, by some good thing or other, which he apprehends to be in him, or done by him, or which he hopes to do. But I may say to you, who are of this law-spirit, as Christ said to the self-righteous Pharisees, John 5:45: "There is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust;" where, by Moses, we must understand the law of Moses. The same say I to you, The law accuseth and condemneth, it is denouncing its heavy anathemas against you, while you cleave to it as a covenant: "As many as are of the works of the law, are under the curse; for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." While you are out of Christ, cleaving to the law as a husband, it lays you under the curse for every and the least failure in obedience. O, sirs! The vengeance of Heaven lies upon you, while you are under the power of unbelief; you are cursed in your basket and store, in soul and body, and all that belongs to you: and the curse not being causeless, it shall come; yea, it cleaves to you, and will cleave to you for ever, unless, by faith, you flee to him who "hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us."

2. The unbeliever is already condemned in the gospel-court. Now, do not mistake this way of speaking, as if, when I speak of the gospel-

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court, I meant, that the gospel, strictly considered, condemned any man: the gospel, like its glorious Author, "comes not into the world to condemn the world, but that the world, through" it, "might be saved." Neither do I mean, as if there were new precepts and penalties in the gospel, considered in a strict sense, which were never found in the book or court of the law. This is an assertion which has laid the foundation for a train of damnable and soul-ruining errors; as of the Antinomian error, in discarding the whole moral law as a rule of obedience under the gospel; the Baxterian error, of an evangelical righteousness different from the imputed righteousness of Christ; the Pelagian and Arminian error, of a sufficient grace given to every man that hears the gospel, to believe and repent by his own power. But when I speak of the unbeliever's being condemned in the court of the gospel, my meaning is, that the sentence passed against him in the court of the law, is aggregated and heightened by his contempt of gospel grace. All I intend by it is comprised in that awful word, Heb. 2:3: "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation?" or that, Heb. 10:28, 29: "He that despised Moses' law, died without mercy, under two or three witnesses; of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, and unholy thing?"

3. The unbeliever is condemned already in the court of his own conscience. Conscience is God's deputy and vice-regent, and, in the name and authority of the God of heaven, it keeps a court in every man's breast, and either approves or condemns, accuses or excuses, according to the views and uptakings that it has to the holy law of God. When the law is only known by conscience, in the letter of it, it condemns only for sins which lie against the letter of the law; but when conscience comes to be irradiated and instructed by the Spirit of God, in the spirituality and extent of the law, then it condemns even for those spiritual wickednesses, that are of a more refined nature, and which lodge in the high places of the soul; of which kind is the sin of unbelief. A natural conscience, even though assisted by external revelation, will smite a man for a thousand sins, before it gives him one check for his unbelief. This seems to be the peculiar province of the Spirit of God, to "convince the world of sin, because they believe not in Christ," John 16:8,9. And, O! When once conscience, by the direction of the Spirit, begins to smite for this sin of unbelief, there is no sin in the world that appears in such a formidable

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hue; and there is no sin that the worm of conscience will gnaw a man so much for in hell through eternity, than that he had a Saviour in his offer, and yet refused him. In a word, let a man be ever so moral and sober, let him have ever so much seeming peace and quiet, yet he still carries an evil conscience in his breast, till by faith he comes to get his heart sprinkled from an evil conscience by the blood of sprinkling, Heb. 10:22.

4. The unbeliever is already condemned in the court of the church; or, may I call it, in the ministerial court. Ministers, by virtue of the commission they have received from their great Lord and Master, must "go and preach the gospel to every creature." And having acted according to their commission, they must, in the same authority declare, that he who believes this gospel, shall be saved; he who believeth not, shall be damned. Indeed, this ministerial sentence is but little regarded by a profane and secure world, who are ready to say or think that our words are but wind. But, whether sinners hear or forbear, we must, by our commission, declare to the righteous or believer, "it shall be well with him:" but "woe unto the wicked, it shall be ill with him; for the rewards of his hands shall be given him." And when this ministerial sentence, whether doctrinal or judicial, is faithfully pronounced, whatever men may think of it, it is ratified in heaven: Matth. 16:19: "Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven."

5. The unbeliever is condemned in the court of the great God. It is true, every one of these courts I have mentioned is his; he sits as supreme Judge in each of them: but they are only his inferior courts; and while the sinner's sentence is in dependence before them, there is still access for an appeal by faith to a throne of grace, or mercy seat. But when once a man comes to be personally sifted before the bar of God at death or judgment, no farther appeal can be admitted; the man then goes out of mercy's reach; "he that made him will have no mercy upon him;" the things that belonged to his peace are then "for ever hid from his eyes." O that an unbelieving world may lay this to heart in time, before their case become absolutely hopeless and helpless: "Consider this, ye that forget God, lest he tear you in pieces, when there is none to deliver."

*Thirdly*, I come to give you a few qualities of this sentence of condemnation passed against the unbelieving sinner.

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1. It is a most mature and deliberate sentence: the sentence is well advised and ripened, before it is pronounced or executed. "The Lord is a God of judgment," and can do nothing that is rash or precipitate. "The Lord is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed;" he ponders the crime before he sentences the criminal. It was resolved among the counsels of heaven, from all eternity, that every unbelieving sinner should be condemned to the "lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death," Rev. 21:8.

2. It is a most righteous sentence, as will appear when we come to speak of the grounds upon which it proceeds. O, sirs, God will be clear when he judges; yea, so clear, that the guilty panel, before all be done, will be made to subscribe to the equity of the sentence, and own that his blood is upon his own head. As justice satisfied, and judgment executed upon the Surety, is the foundation of a throne of grace, where the believing sinner is acquitted and absolved; so, vindictive justice and judgment, terminating on the person of the sinner, is the habitation of the throne of justice, where the unbeliever is condemned.

3. It is a most awful and terrible sentence; and it cannot be otherwise, for it is pronounced by a terrible Judge: "With God is terrible majesty. He cutteth off the spirit of princes, and is terrible to the kings of the earth." The sentence goes forth from a terrible tribunal, a bench clothed with red vengeance. The nature of the sentence itself is terrible, for it is a sentence of condemnation. To be condemned to a natural or bodily death, is terrible; but to be condemned to eternal death, to be "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from [or by] the glory of his power," has a terror in it, that surpasses expression and imagination.

4. When the sentence comes to be uttered by God against the unbeliever, personally compeering before his tribunal, upon the back of death, it becomes an irrevocable sentence, which shall never be repealed through eternity; it stands ratified for ever: as the tree falls, so will it lie; for God's loving-kindness is not declared in the grave, nor his faithfulness in the land of darkness.

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III. The *third* thing in the method was, to *inquire into the grounds of this condemnatory sentence*. And, among many others, I shall instance in the few following.

1. The unbeliever is condemned already, because, by his unbelief he has offered the highest indignity to a Trinity of persons in the glorious Godhead, that a creature is capable of. He despises the love of the Father, who, out of his good-will and kindness to a lost world, "gave his only begotten Son." He gives him to be incarnate; he gives him to death; and gives him and his whole purchase in the revelation of the gospel, "that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life." But now the unbeliever despises all the riches of this grace and love, and practically says, that the unspeakable gift of God is not worthy to be taken up at his foot. And as he despises the love of the Father, so he tramples upon the blood of the Son, as if it were an unholy thing. He says, upon the matter, that Christ shed his blood in vain; hence, unbelievers are said to "crucify the Son of God afresh:" they react the bloody tragedy that was once acted upon Mount Calvary; and, upon the same account, the unbelieving communicant is said to be "guilty of the body and blood of the Lord." Again, the unbelieving sinner sins against the Holy Ghost. I do not mean that every unbeliever is guilty of the unpardonable sin, for then there would be no need of preaching the gospel to them. But I mean, that every believer, in rejecting Christ, runs directly cross to the work and office of the Spirit, in the economy of redemption. It is the office of the Spirit to *convince the world of sin, because they believe not in Christ*; but the man is so far from acknowledging this, that he practically denies unbelief to be any sin at all. It is the office of the Spirit to *convince of righteousness*; that is, of the necessity and excellency of the righteousness of Christ for justification: but the unbeliever goes about to establish a righteousness of his own, and will not submit to this righteousness of God. It is the office of the Spirit to glorify Christ, to "take of the things of Christ, and show them unto us:" But the unbeliever, upon the matter, says, "There is no form nor comeliness in him, why he should be desired." Thus, I say, the unbeliever affronts a whole Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; and therefore he is condemned already.

2. The unbeliever is condemned already, because he has affronted all the glorious attributes and perfections of the divine nature. He rebels against awful and adorable majesty and sovereignty. The authority of God

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is, in a particular manner, interposed in the command of believing; God speaks of this command as if he had never given another command to the sons of men, 1 John 3:23: "This is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ." Now, the unbeliever flies in the face of all this authority, saying, with proud Pharaoh, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey him?" Let the Almighty depart from me; for I desire not the knowledge of his ways. Again; the man makes a mock of the masterpiece of Infinite Wisdom, as though it were nothing but unmitigated folly. The device of salvation through a Redeemer, is *the wisdom of God in a mystery*; it is *hidden wisdom*: but the unbeliever, with the Greeks, calls it *foolishness*; and, with the Athenians, looks on it as mere *babbling*, when it is brought out in a gospel revelation. The unbeliever also spurns against the passionate sympathy of infinite and amazing love; yea, as it were, runs a spear into the heart of a compassionate God, which are sending out a sound after him: "O turn ye, turn ye; why will ye die? As I live, I have no pleasure in your death." He dares and challenges Omnipotence to its worst, while he refuses to take sanctuary in Christ, and to turn in to the strong hold, where he may be sheltered from the storm, wind, and tempest of divine vengeance. He laughs at the shaking of God's spear, and the whetting of his glittering sword. He gives the lie also to the veracity of God, 1 John 5:10: "He that believeth not God, hath made him a liar:" not as if he could do so indeed; for God will be true, and every man a liar: but the unbeliever does what he can to make God a liar. This is the language of his sin, God is a liar, he is not to be trusted, there is no truth in his words. Which is blasphemy in the highest degree. Thus, I say, the unbelieving sinner injures God in all his glorious excellencies. And is it any wonder then though he be condemned already?

3. Another ground of this awful sentence is, because the man counteracts, and runs directly cross to the most glorious designs that ever God had in view; I mean, his designs in the work of redemption through Christ. I shall only clear this in two or three instances. (1.) God's design in redemption was the illustration and manifestation of his own glorious excellencies, which were sullied or obscured by the sin of man: but the unbeliever, as was showed just now, does his utmost to darken and affront every one of them. (2.) God's design is, that in all things Christ should have the pre-eminency; that he should have "a name above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow." But, now, the

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unbeliever, like the devil, being lifted up with pride refuses to bow or submit to that name JEHOVAH-TSIDKENU, *the Lord our righteousness*, Jer. 23:6, Rom. 10:3. He refuses to own or bow unto that royal name written upon his thigh and vesture, Rev. 19:16. The KING of KINGS, and LORD OF LORDS. He joins in a confederacy with those who refuse to stoop to his royal sceptre, saying, "Let us break his bands asunder, and cast away his cords from us," Psal. 2:3. (3.) God's design in redemption is, that grace only should reign, and that all ground of boasting and glorying should be cut off from man for ever, so as he that glorieth may glory only in the Lord. But, now, the unbeliever's language is, Not grace but self shall reign. He chooses rather to be damned for ever, than submit to grace's government, "reigning through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord." What, says the man, will not "God be pleased with thousands of rams?" &c. If God will give him life for some equivalent, some good thing wrought in him or by him, he is content; but to take it for nothing, as the gift of free grace, through Jesus Christ our Lord, this is too low a bargain for his proud heart to stoop to. And for this pride of his heart, which makes him to run cross to God's glorious designs in redemption, he is condemned already.

4. He is condemned already, because his sin (I mean his unbelief) is of a more criminal nature, in God's reckoning, than any other sin that can be named or thought upon. The sin of Adam, in eating the forbidden fruit, was a most aggravated crime. For a creature newly dropped out of his Creator's fingers, a creature dignified with the lively image of God upon him, exalted to sovereignty over this lower world, having all things put under his feet: I say, for such a creature, upon a slender temptation, to turn his back on God, and cast himself into the devil's arms, to ruin himself and the whole tribe of mankind at one blow; this, no doubt, was a most crying sin. But yet the sin of unbelief far surpasses it: for our first parents sinned only against God as a Creator; but the unbeliever sins against him as a Redeemer, consequently, he sins against more love than they could sin against, before the revelation of Christ. Again; unbelief is more criminal than the sin of the Jews in crucifying of the Lord of glory; they crucified him when veiled and disguised under the form of a servant; but the unbeliever crucifies him upon his throne, when the evidences of his being the true Messiah are completed by his resurrection from the dead, Rom. 1:4. It would be a crime of a far more capital nature, to maltreat a king sitting on the throne, with all his nobles about him, than to

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maltreat him when under a disguise, sitting upon the dunghill with a company of beggars about him: yet the former is the case with the unbeliever. Again; unbelief is worse than the sin of Sodom, which provoked God to rain hell out of heaven upon its inhabitants. Christ tells us that Sodom and Gomorrah will have a cold hell in comparison of those who have had the offers of a Saviour in the gospel, and yet have rejected him. Matth. 11:24: "It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for" Chorazin, Bethsaida, Capernaum, and other cities where Christ had preached. Again; all the sins of the blinded nations are not comparable to the sin of unbelief. We have a black list of their sins, Rom. 1, toward the close: but yet Christ speaks of them as no sins, in comparison of the sin of those who remain in unbelief under the drop of the gospel: "If I had not come, and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin." Witchcraft is a very monstrous sin; for a man or woman to enter into compact with the devil, and give themselves soul and body to be his for ever: and yet the unbeliever does the same upon the matter; for he is in league with hell, and with death is he at an agreement. I remember, the rebellion of Saul against the express command of God, ordering him utterly to destroy the Amalekites, is compared to the Sin of witch-craft, 1 Sam. 15:23. Now, the unbeliever (as was said) rebels against the greatest command that was ever issued out from the throne of the Majesty on high. I shall only add, that unbelief is a sin attended with aggravations which are not to be found in the sin of devils. The devil never rejected a Saviour, as the unbeliever does; for "he took not on him the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham." Some think that the devil, and his angels who joined him, were cast out of heaven for refusing to be subject to God in man's nature, when intimation of his design was made in heaven. No doubt he would have been well enough pleased to subject himself to God, manifesting himself in the nature of angels; but to be subject to "God manifested in the flesh," he looked upon it as a disparagement. But the unbeliever rejects God appearing in his own nature, Saying, "We will not have this man to rule over us." Is it any wonder, then, though the unbeliever be condemned already?

5. He is condemned already, because unbelief is the spring and ringleader of all other sins. Every sin is a turning away from the living God: and whence comes this, but from an evil heart of unbelief? Heb. 3:12. The name of the sin of unbelief may be *Gad*, for a troop doth follow

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it. Why are men proud? why are their hearts lifted up within them, as if they were "rich, and increased with goods, and stood in need of nothing?" Why, the reason is, they do not believe the verdict of the Spirit of God concerning them, that they are indeed "wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." Why are men covetous? Why have they the world set in their hearts, but because they do not believe that Christ is a better good than this world, and the things of it? Why are men uncharitable to the poor, but because they do not believe that what is given to the poor is lent to the Lord, and that he will pay it again? Why are men secure in a way of sin, crying, Peace, peace, but because they do not believe that wrath and destruction from the Lord is pursuing them? Why is the blessed Bible so much slighted and neglected by many, like an almanack out of date, but because they do not believe it to be the word of God, or that eternal life is to be found therein? Why do people generally hear us, who are ministers, preaching the everlasting gospel, with such raving hearts and careless ears, but because they do not believe that we are ambassadors for Christ, and that God doth beseech them by us to be reconciled unto him? Why do many live in the neglect of prayer? Why are they so formal, heartless, and careless in prayer, but because they do not believe God to be the hearer of prayer? Why are there so many hypocrites, contenting themselves with a show of religion, but because they do not believe there is a reality in religion and that God searches the heart and tries the reins? Why do men remain under the power of natural enmity, but because they do not believe that "God is love," 1 John 4:16; and that, through the ransom he has found, he bears a hearty good-will toward them? Ezek. 33:11. Whence comes that flood of profanity, which, like Jordan, has overrun all banks and bounds in our day, such as cursing, swearing, cheating, lying, Sabbath-breaking, thefts, robberies, forgeries, and the like abominations! Why, the plain reason is, they do not believe there is a God, or that ever they shall stand before his tribunal to answer for the deeds done in the body. The plain language of the heart of unbelief is, "The Lord doth not see, neither doth the God of Jacob regard;" and therefore they give themselves loose reins in a way of sin.

To conclude this head, unbelief is the principal pillar of the devil's kingdom in the world, and in the soul of man. Let this pillar be but broken, and all his strong holds go to ruin. Faith is the root grace which gives life and spirit to all the other graces: it is the spring of all true gospel-obedience, therefore called *the obedience of faith*: so, in like manner,

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unbelief is the root sin, which gives life and spirit to all vicious habits and acts of disobedience in the life and conversation. Faith is a shield that beats back the fiery darts of Satan; so unbelief is a shield that beats back all the good motions of the Spirit of God. Faith is the victory by which we overcome the world; unbelief is the victory by which the world overcomes us. After all, is it any wonder though such a severe sentence pass against the unbelieving sinner, as that in my text, *He that believeth not, is condemned already?*

IV. The *fourth* and *last* thing proposed, was the *application*, which I shall endeavour to discuss in a few inferences.

*Inf.* 1. See hence a very relevant reason, why ministers of the gospel harp so much upon the subject of faith or believing. Why, it is for unbelief, that sinners are condemned already; and there is no way to free them from this sentence, but by bringing them to believe in the Son of God. Unbelief is the main pillar of the devil's kingdom; and therefore the main batteries of the gospel must be raised against it. It is but at best a foolish ignorant objection of some against ministers, Why so much insisting upon faith? Are not other things as necessary to be preached? I answer, Other things are necessary in their own place, but faith or believing in the first place: and till we bring you to believe, we do nothing at all, this being the laying of the foundation of all religion; and, you know, it is foolish to think or speak of rearing up a superstructure, till the foundation be once laid. Can we ever make you accepted of God without faith in his Son? No, surely, "Without faith it is impossible to please him:" we are "justified by faith without the works of the law." Can we ever make you the members of Christ without faith? No, this is the very bond of the soul's union with him; "Christ dwells in our hearts by faith." Can we ever make you the children of God who are by nature the children of wrath, without faith? No, "We are the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." It is to them who *receive him* that *he gives power* or privilege *to become the sons of God*, John 1:12. Let us press and inculcate the duties of holiness with ever such flourishing harangues of rhetoric, we shall never make you holy, till we once land you in Christ by faith, he being the fountain and root of holiness; therefore said to be "made of God unto us sanctification." In one word, whatever duties we inculcate upon you, we only call you to

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build castles in the air, to build a tower without a bottom, unless we first bring you to Christ by that faith which is of God's operation.

*Inf. 2.* See hence the miserable and mournful condition of the generality of gospel-hearers; they are a company of condemned men, under sentence of death. O that God may dart home an arrow of conviction on the hearts of unbelieving sinners, and persuade them of the truth of my doctrine, that every unbeliever is condemned already. I am sure it is true, whether you believe it or not; and you shall find it to be so, sooner or later. O sirs! here is a hand-writing against you, that may make the joints of your loins to loosen, and your knees to smite one against another: HE THAT BELIEVETH NOT, IS CONDEMNED ALREADY. And, that I may, if possible, awaken you to some serious thought and concern about this matter, will you consider whose sentence it is? It is none other than God's sentence of condemnation. It is somewhat awful and terrible, to be arraigned and condemned at the bar of man; what then must it be to be condemned at JEHOVAH'S bar? The Judge is omniscient; "his eyes are as a flame of fire;" he "setteth our secret sins in the light of his countenance," so that the crime cannot be concealed from him: his justice is unbiased; his eye cannot be blinded with bribes: the arm of his power cannot be stayed from the execution of the sentence. What a fearful thing is it to fall into the hands of this living God? He is indeed a *consuming fire*. The solemnity of the bench adds terror to the criminal; and you may see with what solemnity the bench is to be reared, before which you and I must stand ere long, Matth. 25:31: "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory." O! Whither will the unbeliever fly for help? or where will he leave his glory at that day? If hills and mountains could cover him, he would choose far rather to be buried under them, than appear before the face of the Lamb, when he comes to ride his circuit as the universal Judge of all the earth. You may read your doom, Matth. 25:41: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." The sentence being passed, there can be no stop in the execution; the Judge will have his officers at hand, an innumerable host of angels, all ready for this service: these reapers shall gather the tares, bind them in bundles, and burn them. The Judge will stand and see the sentence executed before his face, saying, "Those mine enemies which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me," Luke 19:27. Among all the innumerable multitudes of angels,

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men, and devils, who shall be spectators of the righteous execution, there shall be no eye to pity; and the reason is, because the sinner wilfully, through unbelief, slighted Christ the only Saviour, and refused to accept of pardon and redemption through his blood. Who will pity the traitor, who dies for his treason, rejecting his prince's pardon presented to him to the last? Christ would have gathered you, as the hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and ye would not; and therefore ye must die without pity, and without remedy.

*Inf 3.* See hence how fitly the gospel is called a joyful sound, Psal. 89:15: "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound." Among other reasons why it gets that denomination, this is none of the least; it brings a proclamation of life to the sons of death, a sound of liberty to the captive, and of pardon to the poor sinner condemned already. One would think that the very hint of a pardon to a condemned criminal, would make his heart to leap within him for joy: but, alas! sad experience tells us, that the gospel, which brings such "glad tidings of great joy" to condemned sinners, meets with a very cool reception from the generality, Is. 53:1: "Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?"

*Inf. 4.* See hence how ill-grounded the joy and triumph of a Christless unbelieving world is. We would think that man beside himself, who, being under sentence of death, and to be brought forth in a little to the place of execution, would spend any little time he has, in eating, drinking, dancing, and revelling. Yet this is the very case with the generality; they take up the timbrel and harp, rejoice at the sound of the organ; they spend their days in wealth and ease, without ever thinking that they are condemned already by the great God. All I shall say, to stop your progress at present, is this: The triumphing of the unbelieving sinner is short, and his joy but for a moment. You may, indeed, "kindle a fire, and compass yourselves about with sparks: but this shall ye have of the Lord's hand, ye shall lie down in sorrow," Is. 1:11.

*Inf 5.* See hence how much we are obliged to Christ, who came to save us from this heavy sentence of death we were under: "He came not into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved." He himself was condemned, that we might be acquitted. Judgment passed upon him, that it might not pass against us. He was made a curse, to redeem us from the curse of the law. When Adam had

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entailed death and condemnation upon us, and all his posterity; Christ comes, and by his obedience to death, cuts off that entail, procuring our justification. "As by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life," Rom. 5:18. O believer, acknowledge thy obligations to the Son of God; for if he, as thy Surety, had not paid thy debt, thou hadst been condemned to the prison of hell for it for ever.

*Inf. 6.* See hence that it is every man's duty and interest to examine and try, whether he be under this heavy sentence, yea or not. It is a miserable thing to be under sentence of death, and to know nothing of it. Neither will a man ever seek to be freed from it, till he be convinced that he is indeed under it. I shall give you the few following characteristics of such as are under sentence of condemnation.

*1st,* You who never yet saw yourselves to be condemned in the court of the law and conscience for sin, and particularly for the sin of unbelief, you are surely under sentence of death to this day; for the first work of the Spirit, when he comes to liberate a poor soul from condemnation, is to "convince the world of sin; of sin, because they believe not on him," John 16:8,9.

*2dly,* You whose minds are so blinded with ignorance and prejudice against Christ, that you "can see no form or comeliness in him," notwithstanding of the bright displays of his glory that are made to us in the word. "If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them," 2 Cor. 4:3,4.

*3dly,* You, who are yet wedded to the law as a covenant, and are seeking life and righteousness by that first husband, you are, to this moment, under the sentence of death; for, "as many as are of the works of the law, are under the curse." If you never knew what it is to be dead to the law by the body of Christ, to have as little hope of life and salvation by the law and its works, as though you had never done any one duty commanded by the law in your whole life, you are yet married to the law as a husband, consequently, under the law's sentence. Yea, I will adventure to say, that the legalist, or self-righteous person, is a step

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farther off from heaven and eternal life, than the grossest of sinners; for "publicans and harlots," says Christ, "shall enter into the kingdom of heaven before you."

*4thly*, You who cast off the obligation of the law as a rule of obedience, under a pretended hope of being saved by grace, without the works of the law. All practical Antinomians, who are following the swing of their own lusts, are under the power of unbelief, and consequently condemned already. Away with lying, swearing, drinking, whoring believers. Will you pretend to be the people of a holy God, the members of a holy Jesus, the federates of a holy covenant, the heirs of an undefiled inheritance, and yet wallow in your sins, or yet retain any known iniquity in your hearts? No, no. To such, not I, but God himself saith, "What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldst take my covenant in thy mouth? seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee." O sirs, they that are dead to the law as a covenant, are so far from casting off its obligations as a rule of duty, that they bind it about them as an ornament, choosing it for a light to their feet, and a lamp to their paths. We are not without law to God, when under the law to Christ. The law is so dear and sweet to a true believer, that it is his meditation day and night. *O how love I thy law!* says David: as if he had said, I love it so well, that I cannot tell how well I love it: "My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times," Psal. 119:20.

*Inf. 7.* Is it so that every unbeliever is a condemned criminal before God? O, then, be concerned at your hearts to get rid of that disastrous sentence you are under. What can be matter of concern, if this be not? I come, in the name of God, to tell you, that this is not impossible; yea, I dare go farther, and tell you, that if you will but *hear, your souls shall live*, and not die under that condemnatory sentence which is gone forth against you. I am so bold as to promise you not only a reprieve, but a remission; for thus saith the great Judge, as a reconciled God in Christ, to the poor trembling defendant, standing condemned before the bar of his holy law; "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins," Is. 43:25. Here is an act of grace passed at a throne of grace, sealed with the blood of the Lamb, published and proclaimed from the tops of the high places, that none may pretend ignorance, and that every condemned sinner may take the benefit of it, and come in upon the King's royal indemnity, granted upon the

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satisfaction made to justice by his eternal Son. O, then, sirs, "Hear, and your souls shall live, and he will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David," Is. 55:3: "O earth, earth, earth, hear this word of the Lord."

I come not to tell you how you may be rich, great, and honourable in the world; these things are but trifles to people in your circumstances. Should you come to a condemned man, and talk to him of riches, honours, crowns, robes, sceptres, and kingdoms: Alas! would he be ready to say, what is all that to me? I am a poor man going into another world within a few hours; if you can tell me how I may save my life, or how I may get rid of my sentence, chains, prison, you will say something to the purpose. This is the very case with thee, O sinner; for "by the offence of one, judgment is come upon all men to condemnation." And, therefore, O poor criminal, listen, lend me a believing ear for a few moments, and I will tell thee how infallibly thou shalt make thy escape.

*Quest.* O, may the poor criminal say, how is that? I answer, I have no advice to give thee but one; it is an old advice, a new advice, and the only advice that can be given while the world stands; it is the very same which Paul and Silas gave to a poor panel, trembling at God's bar, crying, "What must I do to be saved?" The plain advice they gave him, I give this day to you, Acts 16:31: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved:" agreeably to which are the words of Christ himself, in the first part of the verse, where my text lies, "He that believeth on the Son of God is not condemned;" and verse 16: "Whosoever believeth in him, shall not perish, but have everlasting life."

*Quest.* You advise us to believe in Christ; but pray tell us what is it to believe in him? You have the answer in your Catechism: To believe, is to "receive Christ, and to rest upon him alone for salvation, as he is offered to us in the gospel;" or, in other words, it is to trust and credit him, as the Saviour of sinners, with the salvation of thy lost soul, upon the warrant of his own call and command in the word. Christ's business and occupation is to save that which was lost. Now, you all know what it is to trust a man in his trade and occupation; you who have some business at law, know what it is to trust your advocates with your most valuable concerns, and the whole management of your cause depending before the

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judges. Well, in like manner, to believe, is, upon the credit of God's testimony concerning Christ in the word, to trust him, as the Saviour of sinners, with the salvation of thy own soul in particular. This, I say, is the business, the office, and occupation of Christ, to save sinners; and he is so fond of employment in his trade of saving, that he says, "Come to me who will, I will in no wise cast out." And, therefore, trust in him in his occupation; put thy condemned soul in the hands of the sinner's Saviour, for that is to believe in him and on him. O, what a happy suitable meeting is it when the sinner and the Saviour of sinners thus meet together! Some have a notion, when we bid them believe, we bid them do some great thing as the condition of salvation. But this is a mistake. Believing is a resting from works in point of salvation, and a resting on Christ alone for salvation from sin, and all the effects of it. It is to receive a salvation already completed and prepared to your hand, and brought near to you in the word of grace. But I must not stand farther in describing faith at present.

*Quest.* What influence (may you say) will our believing have upon our being delivered from this condemnatory sentence we are under?

*Answ.* Much every way. For,

1. That moment thou believest, thou becomest a member of Christ, as a new covenant head. While under the power of unbelief, thou art a member of the first Adam, and consequently under Adam's covenant, which is a cursing and condemning covenant to all who are under it, "judgment being come upon all men to condemnation," through Adam's breach of it; but in believing, thou becomest a member of Christ, the second Adam, the head of the new covenant, the covenant of grace and promise, which contains nothing but blessings to the soul that takes hold of it, Rom. 8:1: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." It is not said, there is nothing culpable or condemnable in the believer; but there is no condemnation to him: he is no more liable to the penalties of Adam's covenant, Christ, his glorious Surety, having endured these in his room and stead; and it were inconsistent with justice, to demand payment of the same debt, both from the cautioner and principal debtor.

2. To clear this yet farther, the poor soul, in believing, is married to a new husband, even Christ; and being under his roof, the cover of his blood and righteousness, the condemning law can have no action against

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it, this new and better husband having made his spouse free indeed, by the imputation of his law-magnifying righteousness: Rom. 7:4: "Ye are dead to the law by the body of Christ (or, by the offering of his body on the cross,) that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead." He does that for us, which the law could not do, through the corruption of nature; particularly, "condemns sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us. Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." And if the law have its end, and be fulfilled in the believer, by virtue of his union and marriage with the Son of God, how can he be liable to condemnation, or any law penalties?

3. That moment the condemned sinner believes in Christ, he is entered heir of a new family, a member of a new corporation: he is come, not to Mount Sinai, but to Mount Zion; not to the earthly Jerusalem, which is in bondage, but to the heavenly Jerusalem, which is free. He is "no more a stranger and foreigner, but a fellow-citizen with the saints, and of the household of God." He comes in among the "general assembly, and church of the first-born." He becomes an "heir of God, and a joint-heir with Jesus Christ;" and the inheritance is settled upon him by a charter, which contains no irritant clauses. No, no: having *taken hold of God's covenant* by faith, he hath a *name and a place within the walls of God's house, even an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off*; and therefore must needs be free from the condemnatory sentence he lay under before he believed.

4. That moment you believe, your cause is carried into a new court; I mean, from a tribunal of justice to a mercy-seat, where all the acts and interlocutors that pass are acts of grace and mercy, acts of pardon and acceptance in the beloved. No sentences of condemnation pass in the court of grace: no, this is inconsistent with the nature of the court. O let every guilty sinner, who finds himself condemned in the court of the law, and of conscience, carry his cause, by a solemn appeal, to this court; for the court is open to all comers, and the Lord merciful and gracious, who sits upon this throne of grace, receives all appeals that are made to him, and will in no wise cast out the sinner, or cast his appeal over bar. O, therefore, "let us come with boldness unto a throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help us in time of need."

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*Quest.* But (may you say) if matters stand thus with a believer, that he cannot fall under the sentence of the law, cannot come into condemnation, then he may live according to his desires. Does not this doctrine open a wide door for licentiousness and profanity? For if once a man be a believer, according to this doctrine, he has nothing to fear, and so may do what he will. Where it not better for ministers to forbear doctrines that are liable to such abuse? I answer,

1. The whole counsel of God must be revealed, and not one particle of divine truth must be suppressed, though a whole reprobate world should break their necks on it, by wresting it to their own destruction. The gospel will be the savour of death unto some; Christ crucified will be a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence. But shall we, because of this, forbear to preach Christ, and his gospel? God forbid; we must not starve God's children, out of fear lest dogs snatch at it to their own perdition.

2. I acknowledge, that a carnal-gospeller, who has some dizzy notions of the grace of God in his head, may abuse the doctrine of the believer's freedom from condemnation by virtue of his union with Christ: but the grace of God in the heart teaches the very reverse of this; namely, to "deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world."

3. Though the believer be delivered from the law as a covenant, and its condemnatory sentence, through Christ, yet it does not in the least pave a way to licentiousness; because at the same time that he is absolved and acquitted from his obligation to the law as a covenant, he comes under stronger and more powerful ties than ever to yield obedience to it as a rule of duty.

I shall conclude this discourse, by naming a few of these bonds of obedience the believer remains under, even when delivered from condemnation.

*1st,* He is still under the bond of the royal authority of the great God both as a Creator and Redeemer. The authority and obligation of the divine law can never be dissolved, while God is God, and the creature a creature.

*2dly,* He is under the bond of interest, to obey the divine law. It is true his obedience does not give him the title to the reward of glory; it is only his union with Christ, the heir of all things, that gives him this; but

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yet his own personal obedience is evidential and declarative of his title through Christ. And is it not much for the believer's interest, to have his claim to glory and everlasting life cleared up and made evident to his own soul? In this sense I understand that word, Rev 22:14: "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city."

*3dly*, He is still under the bond of fear; Jer. 32:40: "I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me." This is not a slavish fear of hell and vindictive wrath, for that is inconsistent with his freedom from condemnation: but is a filial fear of God as a Father, flowing from an affectionate regard to his authority, interposed in the commands of the law. Though they be not afraid of being cast into hell; yet they "fear him who is able to cast soul and body into hell." Though they have no reason to fear him as an avenging and condemning Judge; yet they have much reason to fear him as a fatherly Judge, lest he "visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes;" for, pass who will unpunished, they shall not pass: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities."

*4thly*, He is under the bond of love. He studies to love the Lord his God with all his heart, soul, strength, and mind; and this love of God in Christ, like a strong cord, draws him on in the way of obedience, "I drew them with the cords of love:" "The love of Christ constraineth us," says Paul. This love laid in the believer's heart has such a force and power with it, "that many waters cannot quench it, neither are all floods able to drown it," Cant. 8:7; Rom. 8:35,39.

*5thly*, He is under the bond of gratitude; being bought with a price, he studies to glorify God in soul and body, which are his. Christ having delivered him from the hand of his enemies, he serves the Lord without fear, in holiness and righteousness, all the days of his life. The believer, when delivered from the hand of the condemning law, says to Christ, as the men of Israel did to Gideon, Judg. 8:22: "Rule thou over us; for thou hast delivered us from the hand of our enemies." Suppose a king should not only pardon a rebel, but restore him his forfeited inheritance, advance him to the highest places of honour about the throne; yea, make him his son, his heir, and set him upon the throne with himself: would not that man be under a far greater obligation to serve and obey the king, than if

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he had never received such singular favours at his hand? There is no bond of obedience like the bond of gratitude to a sincere spirit.

*6thly*, He is under the bond of a renewed nature. The man is made a partaker of the divine nature, by which the life of God, the love of God, and the law of God, is laid in his very heart; and this is a mighty bond to obedience: Heb; 8:10: "I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts." It is engraved there with the finger of the Holy Ghost: his heart is cast into a divine mould, moulded into the will of God, his will of grace, his will of precept, and his will of providence; so that he "delights in the law of God, after the inward man. The law of his God is in his heart," and therefore "none of his steps shall slide."

*Lastly*, The inhabitation of the Holy Ghost is another efficacious bond to obedience: Ezek. 36:27: "I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes; and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them." This law of the Spirit of life, which is in Christ Jesus, makes them "free from the law of sin and death." And being *led by the Spirit*, they do not fulfil *the lusts of the flesh*. To conclude, that very grace of God which frees them from the law as a covenant, binds them to it as a rule, Tit. 2:11, 12.

These are some gospel bonds of obedience: and you who never knew what it is to have your souls under the sweet influence of these, but only obey the law with a view to purchase a title to heaven, or to redeem your souls from hell and wrath, I, in the name of God, pronounce the heavy doom of my text against you, *he that believeth not, is condemned already*.