

SECOND PART CONTAINING ANSWERS TO THE OBJECTIONS MADE TO THIS ESSAY

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Objection I dread novel Doctrines, and such is your Doctrine of the Dispensations of divine grace: Why this going on from Faith in the Father, thro' faith in the Son, to faith in the Holy Ghost? I see no such thing in the Scriptures.

Answer 1. You have then read them with little attention to these words of our Lord, where he points out so clearly the three degrees of faith I contend for: Ye believe in God (Here is the first degree) Believe also in Me: (Here is the second degree.) He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly that flow rivers of living water: and this he spake of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive. Here is the third degree.

2. The Words Dispensation of God's grace, and going on from Faith to Faith, even unto Perfection cannot offend you by their novelty, for they are as old as primitive Christianity and St. Paul, who used them all: See Eph. III.2, Rom. I.17, and Heb. VI.1. your objection is therefore less reasonable than that of the men, who reject the distinction of Father, Son and Holy Ghost in the Deity, because the Word Trinity does not occur in Scripture: But,

3. I will prove you, that, altho' the Words I use were not in the Scriptures, yet the Things I contend for are there: To do it, I shall take a view of the most remarkable conversions described in the New Testament, and shew that they display the three degrees of faith which I plead for.

Let us begin by the Conversion of the Apostles. They were Theists, they believed in God before our Lord called them, unless we suppose that in a nation who knew and worshipped the true God, our Saviour picked up 12 Atheists to wait upon him. Here is then (1) Faith in the Father.—When Christ had called them, when they saw his first miracle in Cana, believed on him there and left all

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to follow him, without doubt they had (2) Faith in Son; and this faith was true and living, since our Lord declared to Peter, when he made an open confession of it for all the Disciples, that he was blessed, that he believed by the revelation of his heavenly Father, and that, upon the rock of such a firm confession of faith he would build his church. And no body will deny, that on the day of Pentecost, Peter and the other disciples entered into the dispensation which the Scripture calls a being full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, or a being fill'd with the Holy Ghost and with power; Here was then (3) what, for brevity's sake, I call Faith in the Holy Ghost, or the Dispensation of the Spirit.

§§ We may observe the three same steps in the conversion of the Jews who composed the Church of Jerusalem. Devout Jews were come to worship at Jerusalem not only from distant parts of Asia but even from Europe, and Africa. Here was then (1) Faith in the Father with a witness; for Atheists would not have been at the trouble and expense of a journey of 500 or 1000 miles to worship the true God. When Peter charged the Worshippers of the Father with the murder of the Son, and acquainted them with his resurrection and ascension, they were prick'd in their heart, and cryed out, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Nor could their anguish proceed from any other cause than a sincere and firm belief that the Person, whom they had crucified as a malefactor, was really the Son of God. Here was then (2) Faith in the Son. Peter, leading them on from Faith to Faith, exhorted them to make an open profession of their faith in Christ by being baptized for the remission of their sins; promising them that they should receive the Promise of the Holy Ghost; a Promise this, which is peculiar to those who believe in the Son (Compare John VII.38 with Act. II.38.) 3000 persons gladly receiv'd the word of this invitation, and no doubt the Lord Jesus confirmed the word of his servant by baptizing them with the Holy Ghost, for we find, that they all had the shining marks of those who have entered into the dispensation of the Spirit or the Fellowship of the Holy Ghost, as our church calls it: For, They were all of one heart and one soul, or (as our Lord expresses it) they were all made perfect in one; They had all things common: They did all their works with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God: In a word, Great Grace was upon them all. Here was then (3) a coming to the perfective dispensation of the Holy Ghost.

§§ The same steps of faith are seen even in the rapid progress of Cornelius's faith: He was a devout man fearing God with all his house, who gave much alms, and pray'd to God alway. Here was then (1) faith in the Father. When Peter preached Christ to him, and said All the Prophets witness, that whosoever believeth in him, shall receive the forgiveness of sins, the readiness with which Cornelius had expressed his eagerness to hear all things commended to him of God, leaves us no room to doubt but Faith in Christ came by hearing about Christ. Here was then (2) Faith in the Son: And it was true faith too, for it was immediately sealed by the Spirit of truth, since (before Peter ended his Sermon) the Holy Ghost fell on all them who heard the word: Act. X.44. Here was then (3) The Fellowship of the Holy Ghost, or a passing into the economy of the Spirit. Nor let any one say, that the quickness with which the Church in Cornelius's house passed from the faith in the Son, to the faith in the Holy Ghost, is a proof that the distinction between those two dispensations is imaginary. To

assert this would be as absurd as to suppose, that no meridian line separates the East from the West, because our Lord tells us, that the lightning shines from the East to the West in a moment.

§§ The candid Reader will discover, in the conversion of the Ephesians, the three steps of faith which I contend for: Paul writing to them, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ: who had Helped them in Christ, whence we may infer, that they had faith in the Father; for those who believe in a Mediator between God and man, must first believe in God, who has kindly commissioned such a Mediator. The Apostle next observes to them, that After they heard the gospel of their salvation they believed in Christ: Here was then (2) Faith in the Son: And then he adds, After that ye believed in Him (Christ) ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise: Eph. I.3,13. Here we see (3) Faith in the Holy Ghost. And so strong is the line, which separates the Son's economy from that of the Spirit, that the Apostle, coming to Ephesus, where some unexperienced Apollos had preached and finding there certain Disciples (of John) said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? As their answer shew'd they were strangers to the dispensation of the Spirit, and had been improperly baptized, he preached to them Jesus; and upon their believing in him, he baptized them. These disciples had then, by this time, true faith in Christ, or the Apostles would not have baptized them in the name of the Lord Jesus: Here was then, secondly Faith in the Son. And after they had thus by baptism made an open profession of their faith in Christ, he laid hands on them, praying that they might be admitted into the dispensation of the Spirit. His prayer was heard, and the Holy Ghost came on them, not only in floods of righteousness, peace and joy, but also in some extraordinary gifts; for they spake with tongues and prophesied, that is, spake in various languages the wonders which God had done for their souls: Act. XIX.6. Here we see the dispensation of the Spirit open'd in their souls with a divine seal broad enough to convince the most stupid, that this dispensation is a glorious reality.

§§ An other proof of this important distinction shall be produc'd from the manner in which Christianity was established in the city of Samaria. Philip preached the Gospel there, with great success: For when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the Kingdom of God [Here was (1) Faith in the Father] and concerning the name of Jesus Christ, [here was (2) Faith in the Son] they were baptized both men and women,—and there was great joy in that city: Act. VIII.8,12. What follows strongly draws the line between the dispensation of the Son and that of the Holy Ghost. Now ladds St. Luke when the Apostles, who were at Jerusalem, had heard that Samaria had received the word of God [but that none of the Believers had yet receiv'd the other Comforter] they sent to them Peter and John, who, when they were come down pray'd for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost [or that the dispensation of the Spirit might be open'd in them] For, as yet, he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus: Then laid they their hands on them [on these imperfect Believers] and they received the Holy Ghost, in his sanctifying and glorifying graces, and probably in some of his extraordinary gifts too.

From this particular account we may draw the following Inferences: (1) The dispensation of the Spirit is the highest, and the hardest to be entered into.—(2) Some

believers may be for a considerable time true worshippers under the Dispensations of the Father and the Son, and yet remain as great strangers to the dispensation of the Spirit, as the Apostles were before the other Comforter was sent to them on the day of Pentecost.—(3) As a peculiar degree of possession cannot be cur'd but by prayer and fasting, so the peculiar degree of sanctification, which is offer'd to believers in the Promise of the Father, cannot, in general, be received but by the mighty faith and prayer of two or three apostolic men: Hence Philip, who had been able, under God, to open the dispensation of the Son, in the church of Samaria, was obliged to send to Jerusalem to desire that some apostolic souls might come and help him to open the door of the Spirit's economy. But I return to consider the proofs of our doctrine.

§§ Timothy's conversion to Christianity confirms also this doctrine. His mother Eunice was a pious Jewess, and so was his grandmother Lois, by whom he was from a child instructed in the Holy Scriptures of the Old Testament: He had then from a child that first degree of faith, which I call faith in God, or faith in the Father, unless we suppose that he was from a child instructed in atheism out of the Scriptures. When St. Paul came to Lystra, we read Act. XVI.1. that Timothy's mother believed, and that he also became a disciple of Christ; hence the Apostle calls him his own Son in the Faith: Here was then (secondly) Faith in the Son. It was a custom of the Apostles and Elders in the primitive Church, adopted by our own church, to pray that young Believers might be rooted & grounded in the faith, or, as our church expresses it in her Office of Confirmation, that they might be strengthened with the Holy Ghost the Comforter, and fill'd with the Spirit of God's holy fear for ever. Now that Timothy was raised to this glorious dispensation of grace, not in word only (as most modern believers) but in power (as the primitive Christians) is evident from what the Apostle writes to him: Stir up the gift of God which is in thee by the putting on of my hands, for God hath not given us the Spirit of fear; but of power and love—That good thing which was committed unto thee, keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us: 2 Tim. 1.6,7,14. Here we see then (thirdly) the Dispensation of the Holy Ghost, or a particular faith in the Promise of the Father, seal'd with what St. Paul calls the Holy Spirit of promise.

§§ As no conversion is so fully described in the Scriptures as that of St. Paul, it affords us the clearest description of the three degrees of faith pointed out in these sheets. (1) No body will deny his having had faith in God before his conversion to the Christian faith, for he had profited in the Jews religion above many, in so much that, touching the righteousness of the law, he was blameless: See Phil. III.6, & Gal. I.14. Had he been void of faith in the Father, far from being a blameless Jew, he would have been abhor'd by all his nation. He had then faith in God, without any proper faith in the Son, whom he even blasphemed in unbelief: 1 Tim. I.13. (2) When the Lord appear'd to him in the way to Damascus, striking him and his unbelief to the earth; and when from the dust he had made that fine confession of his obedient faith in Christ, Lord; what wilt thou have me to do? He had undoubtedly true faith in the Son; but, as yet, he was so far from knowing the other Comforter, and walking in the comforts of the Holy Ghost, that he continued three days in the greatest distress, and neither did eat nor drink. After these days spent in the dispensation of the Son, as it is

contradistinguished from the dispensation of the Holy Ghost, he was introduced into the economy of the Spirit, by Ananias, who came to him, and putting his hands on him; as on a fellow believer, said, Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus has sent me to thee, that thou mightest be filled with the Holy Ghost: Act. IX.17. Nor was he a perfect Christian and an able minister of the spirit, till having thus gone on himself from faith to faith, he could lead sinners from the Father to the Son, and from the Son to the Holy Ghost, who alone can make imperfect believers, Masters of the divine arts of believing and loving.

§From this scriptural view of the experiences of the first Christians, I conclude that the steps of the conversion of the primitive Churches, gathered from among the Jews, the Samaritans, and the Heathens as well as the steps of the conversion of the Evangelists and the Apostles, prove both the antiquity and the solidity of our Doctrine, and the frivolousness of the first Objection generally brought against it.

Objection Your Discussions between the Dispensations of the Father, and of the Son and of the Spirit, only tend to puzzle and distress the Simple.

This Objection is in the mouth of so many Parishioners that it deserves a variety of answers: For it is certain that what is needless and mischievous ought not to be advanced and supported.

Answer (I) This Objection is leveled at the three Creeds, which agree to show that the full Christian Faith takes in the three degrees I contend for: And it particularly attacks St. Paul, who declared that God's plan of redemption is reveal'd in the Gospel from Faith to Faith. Rom. I.17.

Answer II Proper Distinctions far from puzzling the Simple, are the best means of restoring order, preventing confusion, and helping the weak capacity of the Simple. We would pity a Schoolmaster who for fear of puzzling his scholars with needless distinctions would teach them that A, B, C, are one letter, because there is but one english alphabet: and I cannot admire a Divine who for fear of puzzling his hearers tells them that Faith in the Father, in the Son and in the Holy Ghost is one and the same degree of faith, because he never heard but of one Christian Faith. The Objector himself, in love as he may be with confusion, would wonder at an Architect so simple as to tum a stately Building into a confused heap of stones, or to flatten it into a ground-story, lest the inhabitant should lose himself in a Palace three stories high.

(3) A Distinction in the life of faith, founded on matters of fact, can no more be puzzling and idle, than the natural distinction of human life into nonage, age, and old age: To prove that this comparison is just, I need only observe that as some persons die in their nonage, others after they are come of age, and others in old age; so some sincere Worshipers, like Melchizedec and Socrates, die without any explicate faith in Christ, and we some times see sincere, tho' weak Christians die with a bare and trembling hold of Christ; whilst others depart full of that Power from on high and that glorious joy, which are peculiar to the Spirit's dispensation.

(4) The Objection I answer is not only injudicious, but mischievous beyond expression. To prove it, I have recourse to a parable. About 1700 years ago a King founded a large College, over which presided 12 masters and 70 Fellows. By their diligence, and the King's constant inspection, it so flourished, that some years after 3000

Scholars were made Doctors of Divinity in one day, after July, tho' rapidly passing thro' the academical examinations to be undergone by those examinations to be undergone by those who take their Degrees. This Establishment was to subsist for ever: but in process of time some Scholars, who would not or could not, go thro' their exercises, began to cry down the distinction between Scholars, Masters of arts and Doctors, as puzzling and needless: it be abolish'd, said they, and henceforth let all Scholars have the Degree of Doctor without examination or trial; we read in our old records, that 3,000 Scholars took a Doctor's degree in one day. Who does not see that idleness, ignorance, and conceit will prevail in the College, as this absurd doctrine will spread therein?

I need not make the application of this simile to the Church founded by our Lord: The Reader will easily see that sloth, pride, and an almost general ignorance of the power of God, will prevail among Christians, till the important distinctions I contend for are admitted again. The Lord's Vineyard will remain a wilderness, till the old landmarks are found out, and it is again properly cultivated and enclosed.

Objection Did not the sincere worshippers of the Father in all ages believe in Christ to come by the help of the Spirit? If they did, were they not all under the Dispensation of Father, Son, and Spirit? And if they were, why do you trouble us with this distinction of dispensations?

Answer I grant that Believers under the Father's dispensation, had some implicit knowledge of the Son and of the Spirit for no man can come to the Father and believe in him but by the help of the Son considered as the light that enlightens every man who cometh into the world and the Spirit had in all ages more or less helped the infirmities of believers, who are not able of themselves to think a good thought. But the objection must grant me, that there was a time, when the Father was chiefly known, and then the knowledge of the Son, or of God manifest in the flesh to redeem us from all iniquity, but very imperfect, and the sanctifying influences of the Spirit, (excepting a few cases) were comparatively weak and transitory. And therefore, let the three following Declarations be once for all.

(1) The Father's Dispensation does not exclude the agency of the Son and Spirit, but chiefly points out the Father, whom it reveals as a righteous and gracious Governour of his Creatures, and the writings of the very Heathen, as well as the Old Testament, there is such a Dispensation.

(2) The Son's Dispensation by no means excludes either the Father's grace, or the Spirit's influence, but it principally points out the Son of God manifest in the flesh to live for our instruction, to die for our sins, and to rise again for our judgment. Of this dispensation the New Testament plainly speaks in such places as these: God, who in times past spake to our Fathers by the Prophets, hath in the last days spoken to us by his Son—who hath brought life and immortality to light by the Gospel: Heb 1.1-2, 1.10. And St. Mark expressly mentions The Beginning of the Gospel (or Dispensation) of Jesus Christ, which Beginning he fixes at John's preparing sinners for the Saviour, by preaching in the wilderness the baptism of repentance: Mark 1.5.

(3) The Spirit's Dispensation does not set the Father's love and the Son's grace, but principally points out the Holy Ghost as the Comforter and Helper by whose almighty

power believers can love the Father as the law demands, and believe in the Son as the Gospel enjoins. And that there is such an Economy of the Spirit is evident from the Annals of the Christian Church, and from such Scriptures as these: In the last days, says God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: Act. II.17. When Jesus was upon earth, The Holy Ghost (promised to believers as rivers of living water) was not yet given (in that large measure) because Jesus was not yet glorified: John VII.39. Hence our Lord said to believers some time before his death, I tell you the truth, it is expedient for you that I go away, for if I go not away the Comforter will not come; but if I depart, I will send him; and when he is come, he will abundantly reprove the world, &c. John XVI.7-8.

(4) This full and special Dispensation of the Holy Ghost is so distinct from the Economies of the Father and of the Son, that when it was open'd the Father's Dispensation had taken place above 4000 years, and that of the Son above 33 years if we date it from our Lord's Nativity. Again, the Father's Dispensation open'd in Paradise for Adam and all mankind, and privileges were confirmed to Noah and his posterity at Mount Ararat. The Son's dispensation was open'd for all who should be call'd to hear his Gospel confirm'd on the banks of Jordan, when our Lord was baptized: and the dispensation of the Holy Ghost was open'd at Jerusalem for the devout Jews, and at Caesarea for the godly Gentiles.—Once more, tho' all men are called to believe in the Father the Creator of the heavens and of the sun, which declare his glory to all the world, Ps. XIX.1, yet all men are not called to believe in the Son or in Christ crucified; for (says St. Paul) how shall they believe on him of whom they have not heard? Rom. X.14. Nor are all men called to receive that Gift of the Holy Ghost, which our Lord obtained for his disciples by his ascension: for St. Peter declares, that this Promise belongs only to such as shall be called to inherit it, that is, to the Believers in Christ to whom the Promise of the other Comforter is preached: Act. II.39. And therefore, it is evident, that whether we consider Times, Places, or Persons, there is the most striking difference between these three Dispensations.

Objection When our Lord had fulfill'd the Promise of the Father by enduing Believers with Power from on high on the day of Pentecost, the dispensation of the Son was to be so blended with that of the Spirit, as to be no more distinguished.

Answer 1. If a Friend had left me by his Will two sets of plate, one of silver, and the other of gold, and if a goldsmith, charged with bringing them to me pretended that the distinction between silver and gold was indeed well known when my generous Friend made his Will, but that it is now needless and fanciful; all modest goldsmiths having agreed that whosoever is possessed of the silver plate has also receiv'd that of gold, I should certainly question that tradesman wisdom if not his honesty. And I question at least the attention of those Doctors in Israel, who make us rest satisfied with the Son's dispensation, by declaring that whoever hath receiv'd Christ by faith has also receiv'd the Holy Ghost, and that the day in which Peter confessed Jesus to be the Christ, and was called Satan for not savouring the things of God, was the day in which he was endued with power from on high. See Mark VIII. 29, 33. When Scripture, and matter of fact so strongly assert the contrary.

(2) We come to ripeness of age in the spiritual life by rising from the dispensa-

tion of the Father, thro' that of the Son to the economy of the Holy Ghost: to pretend therefore that one of those dispensations is needless, is as absurd as to suppose, that we need no more rise from the weakness of childhood, thro' the bloom of youth, to the vigor of manhood.

(3) Till the Gates of hell prevail against the Church, some Believers shall rise from the fear of God, thro' the peaceful knowledge of Christ, into the joyous and perfect love of the Spirit; as 3000 Devout men did on the day of Pentecost: Now to suppose that these three degrees of faith or Christian experience are since that memorable day reduced to one, is as absurd as to suppose, that because, on a certain day, the thermometer rose to the point of great heat, we must hence forth destroy the scale of all thermometers and for ever confound the three points of temperate, warm, and very hot.