

practical one,—to establish the fact of their guilt and condemnation, in order that they might feel their need of such a salvation as the Gospel proclaims ; and if that fact, when established, is applied to prove that ‘by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified,’ this inevitable inference from it is designed to drive them out of those ‘false confidences,’ or ‘refuges of lies,’ which men are so prone to construct for themselves, and to direct them, as convicted and condemned sinners, to ‘flee for refuge to the hope which is set before them.’

This is the great desideratum still. All error on the subject of Justification springs from the defective views which prevail almost universally among men of the spiritual requirements of God’s Law ; for these are invariably connected with a slight sense of sin, and a false or exaggerated estimate of the virtues of their personal character. Many speak of ‘good works,’ without considering what is required to make any ‘work’ really ‘good,’ according to the rule of God’s Law. A ‘work,’ to be really ‘good,’ must be itself in conformity to the precept of His law,—it must be done in obedience to His will,—it must spring from a right motive,—it must be an expression of love, supreme towards God, disinterested towards men,—it must be directed to God’s glory as its end. If any work be a violation of the precept of His law, it cannot be a ‘good work,’ whatever may be the motive from which it springs, for the motive cannot consecrate a sin, nor can the end justify the means : if it be not done in obedience to His will, it may be in conformity with the letter of His law, but is utterly destitute of its spirit ; for a godless morality, which places conscience on the throne of God, and creates an autonomy within, independent of Him who is the supreme Law-giver, Governor, and Judge, may indicate some sense of

duty, or at least of prudence, while those who practise it have ‘no fear of God before their eyes,’ and may never have yielded, in any one action of their lives, a dutiful submission to His authority;—if it be not done from a right motive, the work may be materially good, and yet morally evil; for prayer to God, almsgiving to the poor, and fasting for the mortification of sin, are actions which are good in their own nature, and yet if they be done ‘to be seen of men,’<sup>1</sup> they are utterly desecrated by that corrupt motive, and become examples of abominable hypocrisy;—if it be not an expression of real heartfelt love, supreme towards God, and disinterested toward men, it has no right to a place among the duties of either table of God’s Law; for ‘the first and great commandment is, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart;’ and the second is like unto it, ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself;’<sup>2</sup>—and if it be done with no regard to God’s glory, it is a dereliction of our chief end; for in our most virtuous actions we may ‘come short of the glory of God.’<sup>3</sup> If men could only be brought to understand and believe, that these are really the requirements of God’s Law, and if they would then apply them seriously as tests of their conduct and springs of action, their own conscience would ‘bear witness’ against them, and no other argument would be needed to prove that, as sinners, they cannot be justified by Works.

PROP. XXIV. Justification by ‘works,’ such as are really ‘good’ and ‘acceptable to God,’ is also excluded in the case of believers, excepting only as it may be manifested or declared by them.

This statement includes or implies several distinct truths of great practical interest and importance, which

<sup>1</sup> Matt. vi. 1-6, 16-18.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. xxii. 37, 39, 40.

<sup>3</sup> Rom. iii. 23.