The Works of John Owen

Owen, John

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This faith in the person of Christ, which is the foundation of all that divine honour in sacred adoration and invocation which is assigned unto him, may be considered two ways. First, As it respects his person absolutely; Secondly, As he is considered in the discharge of the office of mediation.

First, In the first sense, faith is placed absolutely and ultimately on the person of Christ, even as on the person of the Father. He counts it no robbery herein to be equal with the Father. And the reason hereof is, because the divine nature itself is the proper and immediate object of this faith, and all the acts of it. This being one and the same in the person of the Father and of the Son, as also of the Holy Spirit, two things do follow thereon. 1. That each person is equally the object of our faith, because equally participant of that nature which is the formal reason and object of it. 2. It follows also, that in acting faith on, and ascribing therewithal divine honour unto, any one person, the others are not excluded; yes, they are included therein. For by reason of the mutual inbeing of the Divine persons in the unity of the same nature, the object of all spiritual worship is undivided. Hence are those expressions of the Scriptures, "He that hath seen the Son hath seen the Father; he that honoureth the Son, honoureth the Father, for he and the Father are one."

And to clear our present design, three things may be observed from hence; namely, that the divine nature, with all its essential properties, is the formal reason and only ground of divine faith. As—

1st, That the Lord Christ is not the absolute and ultimate object of our faith, any otherwise but under this consideration, of his being partaker of the nature of God,—of his being in the form of God, and equal unto him. Without this, to place our faith in him would be robbery and sacrilege; so is all the pretended faith of them who believe not his divine person.

2dly, There is no derogation from the honour and glory of the Father—not the least diversion of any one signal act of duty from him, nor from the Holy Spirit,—by the especial actings of faith on the person of Christ; for all divine honour is given solely unto the divine nature: and this being absolutely the same in each person, in the honouring of one, they are all equally honoured. He that honoureth the Son, he therein honoureth the Father also.

3dly, Hence it appears what is that especial act of faith on the person of Christ which we intend, and which in the Scripture is given in charge unto us, as indispensably necessary unto our salvation. And there are three things to be considered in it.

(1st,) That his divine nature is the proper formal object of this faith, on the consideration whereof alone it is fixed on him. If you ask a reason why I believe on the Son of God—if you intend what cause I have for it, what motives unto it—I shall answer, It is because of what he hath done for me, whereof afterward. So doth the apostle, Gal. ii. 20. But if you intend, what is the formal reason, ground, and warrant whereof I thus believe in him, or place my trust and confidence in him, I say it is only this, that he is "over all, God blessed for ever;" and were he not so, I could not believe in him. For to believe in any, is to expect from him that to be done for me which none but God can do.

(2dly,) That the entire person of Christ, as God and man, is the immediate object of our faith herein. The divine nature is the reason of it; but his divine person is the object of it. In placing our faith on him, we consider him as God and man in one and the same person. We believe in him because he is God; but we believe in him as he is God and man in one person.

And this consideration of the person of Christ,—namely, as he is God and man—in our acting of faith on him, is that which renders it peculiar, and limits or determines it unto his person, because he only is so,—the Father is not, nor the Holy Spirit. That faith which hath the person of God and man for its object, is peculiarly and distinctly placed on Christ.

(3dly,) The motives unto this distinct acting of faith on his person are always to be considered as those also which render this faith peculiar. For the things which Christ hath done for us, which are the motives of our faith in him, were peculiar unto him alone; as in the place before quoted, Gal. ii. 20. Such are all the works of his mediation, with all the fruits of them, whereof we are made partakers. So God, in the first command, wherein he requires all faith, love, and obedience from the church, enforced it with the consideration of a signal benefit which it had received, and therein a type of all spiritual and eternal mercies, Exod. xx. 2, 3. Hence two things are evident, which clearly state this matter.

[1st.] That faith which we place upon and the honour which we give thereby unto the person of Christ, is equally placed on and honour equally given thereby unto the other persons of the Father.
that nature which is the formal object of divine worship, and wherein he wrought all those things which are the motives thereto, is the object of this faith; which gives its difference and distinction from faith in God in general, and faith in the person of the Father, as the fountain of grace, love, and power.

Secondly, Faith is acted on Christ under the formal notion of mediator between God and man. So it is expressed, 1 Peter i. 21, "Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God." And this acting of faith towards Christ is not contrary unto that before described, nor inconsistent with it, though it be distinct from it. To deny the person of Christ to fall under this double consideration—of a divine person absolutely, wherein he is "over all, God blessed for ever," and, as manifested in the flesh, exercising the office of mediator between God and man—is to renounce the Gospel. And according unto the variety of those respects, so are the actings of faith various: some on him absolutely, on the motives of his mediation; some on him as mediator only. And how necessary this variety is unto the life, supportment, and comfort of believers, they all know in some measure who are so. See our exposition on Heb. i. 1-3. Sometimes faith considers him as on the throne; sometimes as standing at the right hand of God; sometimes as the mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. Sometimes his glorious power, sometimes his infinite condescension, is their relief.

Wherefore, in the sense now intended, he is considered as the ordinance, as the servant of God, "who raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory." So our faith respects not only his person, but all the acts of his office. It is faith in his blood, Rom. iii. 25. It is the will of God, that we should place our faith and trust in him and them, as the only means of our acceptance with him—of all grace and glory from him. This is the proper notion of a mediator. So is he not the ultimate object of our faith, wherein it rests, but God through him. "Through him have we access by one Spirit unto the Father," Eph. ii. 18. So he is the way whereby we go to God, John xiv. 6; see Heb. x. 19-22. And this also is faith in him, because he is the immediate, though not the ultimate, object of it, Acts xxvi. 18.

This is that which renders our faith in God evangelical. The especial nature of it ariseth from our respect unto God in Christ, and through him. And herein faith principally regards Christ in the discharge of his mediating office. For although it is also the principle of all obedience unto him in his other offices, yet as unto fixing our faith in God through him, it is his mediating office and the effect of it that we rest upon and trust unto. It is through
him as the high priest over the house of God, as he who hath made
for us a new and living way into the holy place, that we draw nigh
to God, Heb. iv. 14-16, x. 19-22; 1 John i. 3.

No comfortable, refreshing thoughts of God, no warrantable or
acceptable boldness in an approach and access unto him, can any
one entertain or receive, but in this exercise of faith on Christ as
the mediator between God and man. And it, in the practice of re-
ligion, this regard of faith unto him—this acting of faith on God
through him—be not the principle whereby the whole is anima-
ted and guided, Christianity is renounced, and the vain cloud of natural
religion embraced in the room of it. Not a verbal mention of him,
but the real intention of heart to come unto God by him, is required
of us; and therefore all expectation of acceptance with God, as unto
our persons or duties, is resolved.

We have had great endeavours of late, by the Socinians, to set
forth and adorn a natural religion; as if it were sufficient unto all
ends of our living unto God. But as most of its pretended orna-
ments are stolen from the Gospel, or are framed in an emanation of
light from it, such as nature of itself could not rise unto; so the
whole proceeds from a dislike of the mediation of Christ, and even
weariness of the profession of faith in him. So is it with the minds
of men who were never affected with supernatural revelations, with
the mystery of the Gospel, beyond the owning of some notions of
truth—who never had experience of its power in the life of God.

But here lies the trial of faith truly evangelical. Its steady
beholding of the Sun of Righteousness proves it genuine and from
above. And let them take heed who find their heart remiss or cold
in this exercise of it. When men begin to satisfy themselves with
general hopes of mercy in God, without a continual respect unto the
interposition and mediation of Christ, wherewith their hope and
trust is resolved, there is a decay in their faith, and proportionally
in all other evangelical graces also. Herein lies the mystery of
Christian religion, which the world seems to be almost weary of.

CHAPTER XI.


II. All holy obedience, both internal and external, is that which
we proposed as the second part of our religious regard unto the person
of Christ. His great injunction unto his disciples is, "That they
keep his commandments"—without which, none are so.