

Editor's Note: The following information has been gleaned from issues of The Earthen Vessel and Christian Record from the 1858 issue. This material came after the 49th letter and before the 50th letter in that issue starting on page 277. The original query from "James" is found on page 242 from the Oct. issue.

Objection to the Epistles to Theophilus and the reply to the same

Why is the Gospel to be preached universally?

Dear Mr. Editor – I shall take it as a great favor, if you or any of your correspondents will reply to the following query, which I beg you will insert in your VESSEL.

Query, - That if, there is no offer in the gospel to all men, and all men have it not in their power to receive it, is not the message, 'preach the Gospel to every creature,' a tantalizing one? I have the honor to be your's faithfully in Christ, JAMES [We leave this open to correspondents first. – ED.]

To The Editor.

Dear Mr. Editor,—I have been for some time past desirous to call the attention of yourself, and the readers of the Earthen Vessel, to the unscriptural character of the lengthened series of 'Letters to Theophilus' that continue to appear in your Magazine. The question that is left open to correspondents, in your October number, gives me the opportunity to not only to answer the query of 'James,' but also to bear my testimony against the huge body of divinity which 'A Little One' is rearing in your pages; and which I fear is but another Babel, built upon sand and daubed with un-tempered mortar; and which, while professing to raise its top to heaven, and penetrate the plans and purposes of the Most High, will but bring confusion and perplexity into the minds of writer and readers. And, in the first place, I would exhort James (and all your readers,) to approach such questions with a right appreciation of the infinite perfection and the glorious majesty and power of that God whose dealings with man he will scrutinize. We surely sin much in the glib business-like way in which we discuss those matters in which the Eternal God is concerned: let us remember, that we are but of yesterday; that we carry about with us a body of sin and death, as a clog upon the action of our renewed spirits; and see but in part; and that we can know nothing of God but what he is pleased to reveal to us; and that much of the heavenly mysteries, if we saw them, would be 'impossible for man to utter.' In the spirit therefore of meekness, as a disciple to be taught, as a child at his father's knee, I would advise 'James' to approach that written Word of God, in which he has taught us all we are to know in this dispensation of the works and ways of God.

'James' will there learn that God made man upright, but he sought out many inventions. He will read the address to the church of old, 'O, Israel thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thy help.' He will find that man is altogether become unprofitable; that there is 'no whole place in him;' but that Christ is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him: and from Genesis to Revelation, he will see all good ascribed to the Creator, and all evil to the creature. I do not think he can take a safer guide through all the

many walks of modern theology, than to give God the glory for every good thought, desire, or action in himself and others, and to take to himself confusion of face for everything of sin and unrighteousness. In heaven the saint shall praise God for all the mercy that brought them there; while the bitterest portion in the cup of the lost, shall be that it was their fault, their own grievous willful fault, that they are in that place of torment.

Look at the gospel in this light: man sinned, and merited eternal death. God sent his Son, 'that whosoever believeth in him should have everlasting life.' The sin of man was entirely his own; the gift of God was of his own free grace and mercy. But further, the Savior must be loved, received, and trusted, that the benefits of his passion may be secured; in order to this, he must be made known: 'How can he hear without a preacher?' Provision is made for this; Christ preached himself, 'Come unto me;' and he appointed his apostles and servants in all ages to proclaim his gospel through the wide world, and 'Whosoever believeth and is baptized shall be saved;' but, 'Whosoever believeth not, shall be damned;' justly condemned for his willful unbelief, because that 'light having come into the world, men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil;' because 'he will not come unto Christ that he might be saved.'

Now that all men without distinction are to have the gospel proclaimed to them is clear; not only from the text 'James' quotes, but from numerous others. Christ and his apostles in their sermons preached the gospel to all, and commanded all men everywhere to repent. And what is the gospel? Is it not the good tidings of salvation through the blood of Christ? 'The Spirit and the bride say come; and let him that heareth say come; and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.' The New Testament is as express upon this point as upon any, that the gospel was preached, and was intended, and commanded by Christ to be preached to all men; that all men were to be called upon to repent, believe and obey him, whom God hath set forth for a propitiation for sin;' and that if they despised the message, and refused to submit to the authority of the Savior, it was their own fault, for which they receive and shall endure the everlasting wrath of God.

But, can men receive the gospel? Of themselves, no. They cannot repent; but Christ is exalted to give repentance, and all else that is needed, they cannot even pray, but he will give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him; and is himself not only the hearer, but the inspirer of prayer:

'All the fitness he requireth
Is to feel your need of him;
This he gives you.'

Then, it is clear that there is nothing 'tantalizing' in the proclamation of the gospel to every man; he is told, 'Jesus is set forth by God as a propitiation through faith in his name.' 'Believe and be saved.' 'Repent and live.' But I cannot, I am weak and sinful: 'he will give his Holy Spirit to those who ask him;' all that is wanting he will supply; all he asks is, 'Wilt thou be made whole?' If thy heart responds, 'yea Lord,' thou art saved. The desire of salvation is salvation; for no one ever felt it but God implanted it; and he that hath begun a good work will complete it.

The proclamation of the gospel to men is a bond fide one; it is no formality; it is not to mock their misery, but to point them to the way of salvation, but they reject it, and will not hear the voice of the charmer; they love sin and hate Christ, and will not come to him that they might have life: and so would all have done—and we sit, and wonder, and sing,

'Why was I made to hear thy voice,
And enter while there's room,
"While thousands make a wretched choice,
And rather starve than come?'

For our choice would have been theirs; we feel it; we know it; but

"'Twas the same love that spread the feast
That sweetly forced us in;
Else we had still refused to taste,
And perished in our sin"

And the question 'why me' Lord? why me?' must be left until faith is swallowed up in sight, and we shall know as also we are known.

Thus, I think I have answered the query of 'James,' or rather, the Word of God has done, it; and will explain to him this and many more things too, if the Spirit shall help him to study it: and the same Spirit will lead him to that humble dependence on the will of Christ that shall make him not desire to be wise above that is written. If man's responsibility and God's sovereignty seem to him irreconcilable; if there be depths he cannot fathom, and heights he cannot scale, let him wait.

'For, Oh! my soul, if truths Bo bright
Should dazzle and confound thy sight,
Yet still the written Word obey,
And wait the great decisive day.'

But, now, dear Mr. Editor, a word or two with Yourself, with your readers, and with 'A Little One.' We are all Baptists—as baptized into the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; we have pledged ourselves to be governed, controlled and directed entirely by God; we have renounced self-will and creature dependence. The Father is to be our alone Father; the Son our only Lord and Master; and the Spirit our only Teacher and Guide. We have been baptized, not unto Paul nor Apollos, but into Christ. And it is because of this submission of action, will and judgment entirely to Christ, that we take our stand as Baptists, in opposition to all who retain rites and ceremonies, doctrines or traditions from men, good or bad, whether Papists, Reformers or Puritans. The authority of Calvin, or Luther, or Knox, is nought to us: this Word of God is our sole authority in faith and practice. Therefore, brethren, is it that I claim to be heard in my protest against systems of theology, human systems, learnt by tradition from the fathers, or fabricated in the most 'free-will' corner of some modern human heart. What to us are Gill, or Brine, or Fuller? for what business is it of ours to attempt to mold the mysteries of God into a harmonious, symmetrical body of divinity? Do we not know in part and prophesy in part? Bid we in our pledge of devotion to Christ, take his Word, not to be believed and acted on as it was, but to be cut, and maimed, and twisted into such a whole that shall please and satisfy our carnal reason? Out upon such system-makers; be it far from us while our Leader and Captain is absent, to make a calf in the wilderness with the notions, opinions and prejudices of our fallen hearts; rather let us take the Word of God as we find it, and in submission to the Spirit's teaching, obey its precepts, embrace its promises, and study its doctrines; and when we cannot comprehend its wonders, or see into the glory where opposite truths meet, let us hold fast that to which we have already attained; and where we cannot understand, let us humbly and meekly adore. It is our being Baptists that aggravates the offence of such letters as those to Theophilus. The Papist claims the right for his church of propounding forth doctrines, and ordaining new ceremonies. If an

Episcopalian had put forth such letters we would have left him to his bishop; our dissenting brethren we should have grieved over; but as they still cling to the skirts of human tradition, we should not have been so much surprised. But for Baptists to wrest, twist, and alter, to concoct a lot of theological dogmas, to fill up and harmonize, and make symmetrical the revelation contained in God's Word. For Baptists to do so! Oh, tell it not in Oath, lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice. We, who hold one Lord, one faith, one baptism; we, who profess to raise no yea and nay preachments; to talk about two faiths, two repentances, two gospels; Mr. Editor, I beseech you give me space: for four years has poor Theophilus been drugged with human reasoning, man-made systems, creeds cut and carved to suit the carnal mind. I beseech you hear the Word of the Lord; go back to the pattern shewed in the mount.

'Oh how unlike the complex works of man,
Is heaven's easy, artless, unencumbered plan.'

The charge that I bring against this 'another gospel,' taught by 'A Little One' is, that it contains dogmas invented by men to explain those things which God has left veiled; and that it flatly contradicts the Word of God, especially in the following particulars.

1. In affirming that man is damned solely for original sin. This, explain it how you will, makes infants as open to perdition as others.
2. In affirming that man, without the grace of God, can do anything acceptable to God; and that love, faith and obedience may take their growth in the fallen heart or man without the preventing grace of God.
3. In affirming that men will be accepted of God here, and rejected by him hereafter.
4. In affirming that Christ and his apostles preached a repentance that was not unto salvation; and that the Israelites were exhorted merely to a temporal faith and obedience.
5. In affirming that the gospel preached to men who shall be finally lost, is a benefit to them, if they obey its precepts; and does not increase their condemnation.
6. In affirming that men are not to be blamed, nor will be condemned, hereafter for not believing in Christ to the salvation of their souls.

There are other points I should have liked to have noticed, but confine myself to these as the most conspicuous; promising, with God's help, if you will allow me space in your December number, to prove that 'A Little One,' in the six particulars, is departing from the Word of God; and introducing into the church of Christ an unnatural mixture of Pelagianism and ultra-Calvinism, which can but disquiet and confuse the minds of the children of God.

I am, dear Mr. Editor,

You're obedient Servant,

Joseph Foster. So. 4, 8t. Peter Street, South,

Hackney Road. October 11th, 1858.

ANSWER TO THE ABOVE.

The reader will easily recognize the school to which the writer of the above belongs; as also, the staleness of his carnal reasoning's; the points of which (if they have any point in them,) have been refuted a thousand times twice told; take, for instance, the old cry against system making; and yet there are not under the whole range of heaven, greater sticklers for System than the disciples of that duty-faith school to which this correspondent belongs. And what sect or party has not its system? One says, he belongs to no sect. Well, sir, that is your system. Another says, I live above all sectarianism. Well, sir, that is your system. Another says, I take the Bible just as it is, without attempting to harmonize anything. Well, sir, that is your system. Another says, well I have no system. Well sir that is your system: that is to say, your system is to have no system. Take whatever position you may, you cannot get away from the fact, that you have your system. And so, when this correspondent tells us, "to approach the Bible very reverently, and not attempt to scrutinize the plans and purposes of the Most High," the real meaning of this correspondent is, that we are to approach his creed, his system, very carefully; and not scrutinize the plans and purposes thereof; but, like a child at his father's knee, to take his word for it, that both himself, and his creed, his system, are all right; and it is, of course, very presumptuous in these hypens to call in question anything said by these system-makers, seeing what they say is so plain from the letter of the word, say nothing about the sense of the word. And we must not search; we may read (simply because they cannot hinder us,) we may read the Word, but we must not search the scriptures; but we are by this correspondent ordered to adore, we know not what.

But here we stop just to say, that we will (d.v.) answer next month the former part of the above communication; we proceed now just to answer his charges against the doctrines of the 'Little One'?

1st. That man is damned solely for original sin, &c. But where has 'Little One' ever said this. We believe nowhere. That man, by the fall, is brought into a lost condition; and that infants are as much exposed to perdition as others, are truths to us too clear to be for one moment disputed. If it be true, that all sinned in Adam; and that all died in Adam; if in this solemn matter, the Bible makes no distinction; then by what authority, can we make a distinction? If there be any branch of the human race who are not exposed by the fall to condemnation, then we have read the 5th chapter to the Romans, and other scriptures upon this matter, in vain; and if the salvation of infants depend not upon electing grace, not upon mediation, not upon the quickening power of the Holy Ghost, but upon their freedom from practical sin; or, if their freedom from practical sin entitles them to salvation with eternal glory, we shall be obliged to this correspondent, if he will give either a 'thus saith the Lord,' or one scripture that clearly implies such a doctrine.

We believe in infant salvation, but not on the ground suggested by this correspondent.

We hold, that by the fall men are in a lost and spiritually helpless condition; and but for free grace, most independent of any one practical sin whatever, be forever lost. But we hold, also, that the personal sins of every lost man will be brought against him; and that some are greater practical sinners than others; some will receive a greater damnation than others. We believe the 'Little One' does not hold that man is damned solely for original sin; so that John Foster may draw his pen across his first charge. But we come to charge the

2nd. 'Affirming that man without the grace of God, can do anything acceptable to God.' &c. Well here, sir, you have the 'Little One;' and you have us with him too; for we still think that natural truthfulness and

honesty, and moral rectitude, is for what it is, acceptable unto God; and we somehow or another believe, that even Cain, if he had done well, as far as he as a man was capable of doing well, that he would have been accepted into the natural consequences of his well doing. And we believe, that even Nebuchadnezzar, if he had 'broke off his sins by righteousness, by shewing mercy to the poor,' it would have been a lengthening of his tranquility. And somehow or another, we cannot bring ourselves to believe that the repentance of the Ninevites was anything more than natural, and yet it was acceptable unto God: and we believe many an unregenerate man has a natural, common belief in the Bible, and that it has a moral influence upon him, and that he is not without a love to the ways of religion; and we believe, that all this, for what it is, is right in the sight of God; but that faith and repentance that accompany salvation are quite another thing; but so deluded are the disciples of the school to which this correspondent belongs, that they must either annihilate moral principle altogether, or else exalt the mere natural, conscientious doings of the natural man into evidences of eternal salvation; that themselves being deceived, they carry on the work of deceiving others. Devils are graceless, yet they believe, and tremble. Much, very much, more could we, did space admit, say upon this matter. But we come to charge the

3rd. 'Affirming that men will be accepted of God here, and rejected by him hereafter.' Ah! hapless 'Little One!' guilty again. We also believe, that there is such a thing as receiving a servant for a time—accepting him (not as a son but) as a servant; keeping him, paying him his wages, and dismissing him, not for any fault, but because he is no longer wanted; and when the inheritance comes to be apportioned, sons (not the mere servant) are to have the 'inheritance, and to abide in the house forever.' Ezek. xlvi. 17. But to charge the

4th. Ah, alas, guilty again. And we also believe that Christ, and his apostles, preached a moral as well as spiritual repentance. Yes, we believe, he wept over Jerusalem; and we believe that the things that belonged to their peace as a nation, were faith in the testimony of God by Jesus Christ; and that repentance which would have caused them to cease from persecuting the Savior; and we confess that we are so blind that we cannot see why, if the people of Sodom would have so believed and repented, that their city would have remained to this day. We cannot (we say) see why we are not to believe what the Lord himself says; he does not unite the salvation of the soul with such repentance; but the preservation of their city. Does not this look more like that which is moral and temporal, than like that which is spiritual and eternal? John Foster himself being our judge.

But to this charge again. The Israelites were exhorted merely to temporal faith and obedience. Now, let Mr. John Foster prove that coming out of Egypt was salvation eternal; let him prove that the Israelites did eat manna, and did not die; let him prove that conformity to the ceremonial law was spiritual; let him prove (as he may easily do from the 18th of Ezekiel, and other scriptures,) that, that justification by which the Israelites was righteous, was the same as that justification of the new covenant by which the saints of the Most High in all ages have gloried; let him prove that it required a spiritual man to obey a carnal commandment (Heb. vii. 16) let him prove that none but a spiritual man can obey carnal ordinances. (Heb. ix. 16,) So that even we believe that the old covenant was temporal, it waxed old, and vanished away; and that while it existed it required faith and obedience in accordance with its own constitution. We must leave this part for Mr. Foster to settle with the Lord himself and with his apostles. And come to

Charge the 5th, Affirming that the gospel shall be a benefit to those that are lost, if they obey its precepts,' &c. 'Little One,' guilty again. Only this point needs a word of explanation. We hold that men's moral responsibility is increased according to the light brought to them by the word of God; and we would hope that even John Foster himself, with all his attachment to the systems of his school, will not deny but that morality, temporally, and socially, that the Bible, even in these respects, is of incalculable value, and lies

at the foundation of England's greatness and stability. This is a fact too self-evident to require further proof. Well, then, taking into account the fact that the moral (not the spiritual,) responsibility of men is increased according to the light brought unto them by the word of God, we hold that those who shall be lost, who act conscientiously are universally benefitted in this world, unless we deem savagism and cannibalism with incessant cruelties, preferable to civilization, decorum, peace and plenty; together with the sacredness of all the relations of life and ties of nature. Who say then, the Bible, even morally, is a precious boon; and no man will have to suffer for sins which he does not commit, (excepting from this rule, original sin.)

But now to the 6th and last charge. This 6th and last charge will be a word next month, and will form a part of our answer to the former part of Mr. Foster's communication. Mr. Foster says that 'Little One,' is introducing to the Church of Christ, &c. The Church of Christ here, of course, means that section of Christendom—that school to which Mr. Foster belongs. Well, we are really glad that 'A Little One' has found his way into that Bable; and we hope some little ones may be brought out from Babylon—out of this duty-faith pestilence of the day, and we think that Mr. Foster has set his own system in such a light, he may be of great help In letting in the light upon the suicidal character of his own system ; and we shall have them gladly running over to us; and after putting them properly to the test of the law and the testimony; if they should prove to be Jews inwardly, we shall gladly receive them, never to return to Babylon again. Such would soon see that the mixture of Pelagianism and Calvinism, of which Mr. Foster speaks, is not with us, but belongs to his own system.