

Gospel Evidences of
Saving Faith



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Gospel Evidences of Saving Faith

John Owen

Edited by
Brian G. Hedges



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Gospel Evidences of Saving Faith

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Preface

John Owen was born in 1616, the same year that William Shakespeare died. While Shakespeare is justly famous as the greatest playwright in the history of the English language, Owen is arguably our greatest theologian. The son of a minister himself, Owen lived through both the highest and lowest points of the Puritan era. He served as Oliver Cromwell's chaplain in the 1650s. He opposed the move to make Cromwell king in 1657. And after the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, he faced persecution for being a nonconformist, which significantly curtailed his influence and changed the course of the rest of his life and ministry.

Though he was raised in a Puritan household, Owen did not come to a settled assurance concerning his own salvation until 1642. He attended a church service at St. Mary Aldermanbury, London, and expected to hear the famous Edmund Calamy preach. But a substitute, whose name Owen never discovered, filled the pulpit instead and preached from the text "Why are ye

fearful, O ye of little faith?” (Matt. 8:26) God used this sermon to bring Owen to assurance of his salvation.¹

Owen published his first book the next year, beginning a writing career that would span four decades. He wrote more than eighty books, some of which were published after his death. Many of these books have endured as spiritual classics and have been republished in recent decades. These include his well-known trilogy on sin, recently republished as *Overcoming Sin and Temptation*; his substantial defense of particular redemption in *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*; his devotional exposition of Trinitarian spirituality in *Of Communion with God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*; his magnificent *Meditations and Discourses on the Glory of Christ*; and his magnum opus, *Pneumatologia: A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*. *Gospel Evidences of Saving Faith* is one of the lesser-known gems in the vast treasure trove that fills the twenty-four volumes of Owen’s collected *Works*.²

1. For a brief biography of Owen, see the entry in Joel Beeke and Randall J. Pederson, *Meet the Puritans: With a Guide to Modern Reprints* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2007), 455–63. For a full-length biography, see Peter Toon, *God’s Statesman: The Life and Work of John Owen* (Exeter, England: Paternoster Press, 1971), or Crawford Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism: Experiences of Defeat* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

2. *The Works of John Owen*, ed. W. H. Goold, 24 vols. (1850–1853; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1966). Subsequent citations of Owen’s *Works* are from the Banner of Truth edition. The trilogy on sin is comprised of three books: *Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers*; *Of Temptation: The Nature and Power of It, Etc.*; and *The Nature, Power, Deceit and Prevalency*

The Value of This Book

Few topics are more vital to vibrant Christian living than faith. The Scriptures teach not only that we are justified by faith (Gal. 2:16), but also that we are sanctified by faith (Acts 26:18), receive the Spirit by hearing with faith (Gal. 3:2, 5, 14), and become children of God by faith (John 1:12–13; Gal. 3:26). The righteous are said to live by faith (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:22). Without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6). We walk by faith, not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). We live by faith in the Son of God who loved us and gave Himself for us (Gal. 2:20). And whatever does not proceed from faith is sin (Rom. 14:23). The whole life of the Christian is to be a life of faith.

But sometimes there is great confusion concerning the nature and evidences of genuine faith. We know from Scripture that there is such a thing as dead faith

of the Reminders of Indwelling Sin in Believers, all in *Works*, vol. 6. These volumes have been published together as *Overcoming Sin and Temptation*, ed. Justin Taylor and Kelly M. Kopic (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2006). *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* is found in *Works*, vol. 10 and has been published separately with an introduction by J. I. Packer by Banner of Truth. *Of Communion with God* is found in *Works*, vol. 2 and has been republished as *Communion with the Triune God*, ed. Justin Taylor and Kelly M. Kopic (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2007). *Meditations and Discourses on the Glory of Christ* is found in *Works*, vol. 1; and *Pneumatologia: A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *Works*, vols. 3–4. A number of Owen's books have also been published in paperback abridgements and modernizations. The original title of the present work was *Gospel Grounds and Evidences of the Faith of God's Elect*. It is found in *Works*, 5:401–57.

(James 2:14–26). And we have examples in Scripture of some who “believed” but proved, in the end, not to be true disciples of Jesus after all (see, for example, John 2:23–25; 8:31–37). Few things are more important than to understand the essential nature of saving faith, to have the skills by which to discern the evidences of saving faith in our lives, and to know how to exercise our faith so as to thrive spiritually. Rare is the book that accomplishes these pastoral, diagnostic functions while at the same time keeping our eyes steadily fixed on the object of faith—namely, Christ Himself. In this short book originally titled *Gospel Grounds and Evidences of the Faith of God’s Elect*, John Owen did both. There are four specific reasons why this book remains valuable to the church today.

First, *Owen highlighted the difference between gospel, or evangelical, Christianity and all other systems of religion.* This difference is not always obvious, especially in books addressed to the practical lives of Christians. Many books (and sermons) abound with moral directions and practical exhortations, yet fail to distinguish gospel Christianity from mere religion.

It is now in vogue to use “gospel” as an adjective. Books on “gospel” holiness or being “gospel centered” or “gospel driven” fill our shelves. Perhaps some readers are even beginning to tire of this trend, viewing it as little more than a passing theological fad. I offer no comment on these titles; my point is only that Owen predated

the gospel-centered movement by three and one-half centuries! It is not uncommon to find “gospel” used as an adjective in Owen’s works. Indeed, he did so in this book at least nine times, as he wrote six times of “gospel holiness,” twice of “gospel repentance,” and once each of “gospel graces” and “gospel ordinances.”

Then, there is the original title itself, *Gospel Grounds and Evidences of the Faith of God’s Elect*. It is possible that the publishers gave it this title rather than Owen himself, as the treatise was not published until 1695, some twelve years after Owen’s death. Nevertheless, the title accurately describes the content of Owen’s book, as he examined both the grounds and the evidences of saving faith and gave considerable space and effort to distinguishing true saving faith from that which is false. Owen’s intended audience, as the historically savvy reader might well guess, included Roman Catholics, Quakers, and Socinians. Owen was deeply concerned with the formalism, superstition, and legalism of Roman Catholicism; the mysticism of the Quakers; and the rationalism of the Socinians. Over and against them all, he maintained that true saving faith was distinctively grounded upon and shaped by the gospel, which he defined as “the divine declaration of the way of God for the saving of sinners, through the person, mediation, blood, righteousness, and intercession of Christ.” In Owen’s thinking, the very essence and life of faith consist in the soul’s discerning and giving hearty consent to

God's way of saving sinners through the Son's work on the cross. True faith consents to this way of salvation as that which both most glorifies God in all of His holy and gracious attributes, and most satisfies and delights the regenerate mind and heart. Where this evangelical conviction is lacking, saving faith is absent.

Driven by this firm conviction, Owen was not content to exhort readers merely to test themselves by external moral, behavioral, or religious practices. Instead, he pressed upon his readers the necessity of a real, inward work of grace in the soul, leading it to renounce all other hopes and means for salvation and so cast itself on God's grace revealed in Christ alone. This, for Owen, was true evangelical Christianity, the full embrace of which is the first evidence of saving faith.

Second, *this naturally leads Owen to demonstrate the true nature of saving faith in a way that avoids the errors of both legalism and antinomianism.* Although Owen did not use the words "legalism" and "antinomianism" in this work, he did show that the truly regenerate person can be distinguished from both "profligate sinners" on one hand, and "those who are under legal convictions" on the other. The difference lies in the regenerate soul's undying desire for God's glory in all things, which inclines the heart to a deep and abiding approval of God's holiness. "The first beam of spiritual light and grace," said Owen, "creates an indefatigable desire for the glory of God in their minds and souls."

It is this desire for God's glory that preserves the believing soul from both the Scylla of legalism and the Charybdis of antinomianism. The believer so deeply desires God's glory that he or she can embrace no way of salvation as suited and fitting for a holy God except the way proposed in the gospel; namely, salvation through the mediatorial work of Jesus Christ. This keeps the soul from legalism—that is, from trusting in his or her moral merits or performance of the law as an adequate ground for acceptance by God. But this same impulse and inclination of the regenerate heart for God's glory also preserves the believer from antinomianism—that is, from dishonoring or disregarding God's law (“antinomian” derives from two Greek words: *anti*, against; *nomos*, law) and thus turning grace into a license for sin. The same spiritual light that creates a desire for God's glory is also “the spring and principle” of gospel holiness.

As Owen demonstrated in the second chapter of his book, the second evidence of genuine faith is precisely this: habitually approving of the holiness and obedience that God requires, both because it honors God, who is holy, and also because it is that for which He created us. We were, after all, originally created in God's image, and it is according to His image that we are now being renewed (Eph. 4:24). Holiness is, therefore, that “which gives...rectitude and perfection to our nature of which it is capable in this world.” And true believers, though they may often fall due to the temptations of sin and the

weakness of the flesh, are never satisfied with anything less than their ongoing growth in holiness, their continual and progressive transformation into the glorious image of Christ.

Third, Owen provided practical direction for believers regarding repentance and the pursuit of assurance. His aim throughout is to show the grounds of saving faith and the chief and primary evidences of it. But his purpose was not to provide a manual by which we could discern these evidences in others as much as to test ourselves.

Owen chose to highlight four evidences, to which the four chapters of the book roughly correspond. The first evidence, as mentioned above, is embracing and approving of God's way of saving sinners through Christ as that which most glorifies God, satisfies our own souls, and honors God's law. I have also already given attention to the second evidence—namely, the approval of the holiness and obedience that God requires.

In the third and shortest chapter of the book, Owen discusses the evidence of “consistently endeavoring to keep all grace in exercise in all ordinances of divine worship, both private and public.” By “grace in exercise,” Owen means the inward workings of evangelical graces such as faith, hope, and love—what Jonathan Edwards would later call “religious affections.”³ There is a dif-

3. Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, ed. John E. Smith, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2 (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1959).

ference between simply going through the motions of prayer and worship and sincerely directing our hearts toward the Father through Spirit-empowered faith in Christ. Owen was concerned with the dangers of formalism and superstition in worship and viewed the internal exercises of grace as the chief preservative against apostasy from genuine gospel worship. His directions are as practical as they are brief. Consistently applied, they will prove helpful to any believer who struggles with formality and coldness of heart in either private devotions or public worship.

But in chapter 4 Owen excels in giving practical advice to the struggling, doubting Christian. For, as the fourth evidence of saving faith, Owen proposed a special state of repentance in which the believing soul could give focused effort to exercise faith and bring the heart into a spiritual frame. Owen took pains to clarify that he did not mean here evangelical repentance, which must characterize all believers (although the repentance he intended is not different in *kind* from gospel repentance). Instead, he meant a particular *degree* of repentance that he deemed necessary for six sorts of people, whom he carefully described. Seven specific ingredients or requirements necessary for this special state of repentance followed. This is Owen at his pastoral best, as he provided seasoned counsel for struggling Christians and urged upon them the necessity of detachment from the world, godly sorrow for sin, mortification of the flesh,

watchfulness over their hearts in times of solitude, longing for deliverance, and abounding in spiritual thoughts. This program will prove immensely helpful to any backslidden or doubting believer as well as to pastors and counselors who are trying to help them.

Finally, *Owen excelled in describing and diagnosing the spiritual experience of a believer.* This, of course, is related to the previous point, but it bears special mention. For Owen, like few other physicians of the soul, was able to use the scalpel of God's Holy Word to probe the inner recesses of the saint's thoughts, inclinations, and affections.

Owen was especially skillful in helping believers understand the complexities of their own hearts. He recognized that apparently contradictory thoughts and desires coexist in the hearts of the regenerate. For example, Owen showed that "there is no inconsistency between spiritual joy in Christ and godly sorrow for sin." Indeed, he contended that mourning for sin is necessary to the maintenance of "solid joy" in the heart. "Yes," he wrote, "there is a secret joy and refreshment in godly sorrow, and a great spiritual satisfaction, that is equal to the highest of our joys."

In like manner, Owen demonstrated that the believer is characterized by both "the deepest humiliation" as well as "a refreshing sense of the love of God and peace with him." Again, the true Christian experiences "trouble and anxiety of mind" concerning his sins; but

this kind of anxiety “is not...opposed to spiritual peace and refreshment.” In fact, as Owen wrote in the final paragraph of his book, it is “those who have the lowest thoughts of themselves, and are most filled with self-abasement” who “have the clearest views of divine glory.”

Owen also explained how a believer’s faith can evidence itself in the darkness of temptation and sin. After having argued that the second evidence of saving faith is its unwavering approval of the holiness and obedience God requires, Owen showed that faith evidences itself by the “self-dissatisfaction and humiliation, which it stirs up any time the mind falls short of this holiness.” Far from leading the true believer into the agony of doubt, Owen showed that genuine faith is the root of “holy shame” for sin. So, even in “the disquieting conflicts” waged by sin “in and against our souls” and the “decays we may fall into...as long as inward holy shame and godly sorrow for sin is preserved, faith is evident in us.”

Perhaps the best example of Owen’s insight into spiritual experience comes from the first chapter of the book, where he stated that a “soul enlightened with the knowledge of the truth, and made aware of its own condition by spiritual conviction, has two predominant desires, by which it is wholly regulated.” The first of those desires is that “God may be glorified.” The second, “that the soul itself may be eternally saved.” “These desires are inseparable in any enlightened soul,” said Owen. This distinguishes the true believer from others.

For unlike the profligate or the religious hypocrite, a regenerate person cannot desire his or her own salvation apart from the desire for God to be glorified. But the gospel—God’s way of saving sinners through Jesus Christ—“brings these desires into a perfect consistency and harmony [and] also causes them to increase and promote one another.” Owen asserted,

The desire for God’s glory increases the desire for our own salvation; and the desire for our own salvation enlarges and inflames the desire for glorifying God in it. These things are brought into a perfect consistency and mutual usefulness in the blood of Christ.... For this is the way that God, in infinite wisdom, has planned to glorify himself in the salvation of sinners.

Such is the spiritual perception that pervades all of Owen’s writings, including this book. When blessed by the Holy Spirit, such observations not only instruct but also help to cultivate in our hearts the spiritual graces of faith, repentance, brokenness, humility, joy, and peace.

A Note on the Editing

Owen is notoriously difficult to read, which is perhaps one reason why this particular book has not been separately published in the last century. In editing this book, my goal has been to preserve the structure and substance of Owen’s argument while making it more accessible

to modern readers. This has involved replacing many archaic terms with more familiar words. For example, “approbation” has been replaced with “approval,” “displacency” with “dissatisfaction,” and “disquietment” with “anxiety.” But making Owen accessible has also involved simplifying his syntax: breaking long, complex sentences into shorter, simpler ones; changing verbs from the passive to active voice; removing redundancies; clarifying (and occasionally supplying) references to Scripture; and arranging sentence structure so as to best facilitate ready understanding on the part of the reader.

I have also sought to make the overall structure of Owen’s work more transparent to the reader. Owen, like many of his contemporaries, could get carried away with numerical points, subpoints, sub-subpoints, and even sub-sub-subpoints. Sometimes it is difficult for even the most attentive reader to know which points go with which! In the case of this book, I have not reordered the argument itself, but I have tried to make the actual structure of the argument more transparent to the reader. I have done this in several ways: by providing a table of contents that shows the basic outline of the book in its main divisions (although not in every digression); by adding numbered division headings into each of the four parts; by smoothing out and, in some cases, slightly expanding Owen’s transitions; and, in some places, by replacing pronouns with their antecedents in order to make Owen’s points more apparent.

I believe that the final product retains both the substance and tone of Owen's book, making it more accessible to twenty-first-century readers. My hope and prayer is that new readers will discover in Owen the same spiritual nourishment that I have found.

—Brian G. Hedges

Introduction

It is vitally important, for both the glory of God and the advantage of believers through the gospel, that believers obtain spiritual comforts, for God abundantly desires that all the heirs of promise should receive strong consolation, and He has provided ways and means to give this comfort to them. Their share in this comfort is their most basic concern and their highest priority in this world. But the power of remaining sin, along with other temptations, stands in opposition to believers' effective and refreshing enjoyment of these comforts. And so, in spite of their right to enjoy these comforts, believers often lack a gracious sense of them and consequently lack the relief these comforts can provide through all the believer's duties, trials, and afflictions.

True and saving faith—the faith of God's elect—is the root on which all genuine comforts grow. These comforts, therefore, are ordinarily shared by believers in proportion to the evidences of true faith in their lives. Spiritual comforts cannot be maintained without these

evidences. Therefore, in order to help believers either establish or recover a sense of these comforts, I will ask, what are the principal acts and operations of faith by which it demonstrates its genuineness in the midst of all temptations and storms that befall believers in this world?

In my answer I will insist on only those evidences that will bear the severest scrutiny by Scripture and experience.

These evidences are as follows:

1. Choosing, embracing, and approving God's way of saving sinners through the work of Christ alone
2. Habitually approving of the holiness and obedience God requires as revealed in Scripture
3. Consistently endeavoring to keep all grace in exercise in all ordinances of divine worship
4. Bringing the soul into a special state of repentance

CHAPTER 1

First Evidence: Choosing, Embracing, and Approving God's Way of Saving Sinners through the Work of Christ Alone

The most basic act of saving faith is choosing, embracing, and approving of God's way of saving sinners by the mediation of Jesus Christ, relying on Him alone, while renouncing all other alleged ways and means of salvation. This is what I will explain and prove.

Saving faith is our *believing the record* "that God gave of his Son" (1 John 5:10). "And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son" (v. 11). This is the testimony which God gives, that great and sacred truth which He Himself bears witness unto: namely, that He has freely prepared eternal life for those who believe. He has provided a way of salvation for them. And what God so prepares He is said to *give*, because of the certainty of its bestowal. So God promised and gave grace to the elect in Christ Jesus before the world began (2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 1:2). And this grace is to be given to the elect, in and by the mediation of His Son

Jesus Christ, that it is the only way by which God will give eternal life unto anyone.

Grace is therefore wholly in Christ Jesus: it is obtained by Him and received from Him. Our eternal safety or ruin absolutely depends on our approval of this testimony, upon our approval and praise of this way of saving sinners or our refusal of it. And it is reasonable that it should be so: for, by receiving this testimony of God, we “set to [our] seal that God is true” (John 3:33). This is how we ascribe to Him the glory of His truth and, in this, all His other holy attributes. This is the most prestigious duty of which we are capable in this world. If we refuse this testimony, we make Him a liar (1 John 5:10). This is virtually equivalent to denying His existence altogether.

The solemnity with which this testimony is announced is very remarkable. “There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one” (1 John 5:7). The divine Trinity, acting distinctly in the unity of the same divine nature, give this testimony. They do so by their distinct operations of salvation. The gospel declares these divine acts. To this is added a testimony that immediately applies this sovereign testimony of the Holy Trinity to the souls of believers. This is the witness of grace and all sacred ordinances: “There are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one” (1 John 5:8). These are not the same in

nature as are the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, yet they all agree in the same testimony. And they do this by their effectiveness in the souls of believers in assuring them of this truth. Life and death are solemnly and gloriously set before us in this record. Embracing this testimony is the work of faith that secures for us eternal life. Only in these terms is reconciliation established between God and men. Without this, men must forever perish.

So our blessed Savior affirms: “This is life eternal, that they may know thee” (the Father) “the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3). To know the Father as the only true God, to know Him as He has sent Jesus Christ to be the only way and means saving sinners, and to know Jesus Christ as sent by the Father for this purpose, is that grace and duty that gives us a right to eternal life and gives us possession of it.

Further Explanation of the Nature of Saving Faith

But these things need to be more carefully explained.

1. The way by which sinners may be saved is the fundamental issue that distinguishes religions from one another. Other differences about religion arise from men’s varying perceptions of salvation. And the first thing that engages men to be really concerned with religion is this question: How may sinners be saved? What shall we do? What shall we do to be saved? What is

the way of acceptance with God? (see Acts 2:37; 16:30; Mic. 6:6–8).

Once the conscience raises this question, it must have an answer. The prophet says, I will “see...what I shall answer when I am reprov’d” (Hab. 2:1). And there is all the reason in the world why men should consider a good answer to this question; without it they will perish forever. For if they cannot answer themselves here, how do they hope to answer God hereafter? Therefore, without a sufficient answer to this question always in hand, no one can have any hopes of a blessed eternity.

The answer people give to themselves is according to the influence of one of the two divine covenants upon their mind: the covenant of works or the covenant of grace. These covenants, taken absolutely, are inconsistent and give answers in this case that directly contradict one another, as the apostle Paul declares in Romans 10:5–9. The one says, “*The man that does the works of the law shall live by them; this is the only way in which you may be saved.*” The other wholly renounces this answer and places all *faith in Christ Jesus*. Thus there is a great difference in the answers men give to themselves on this inquiry, for their consciences will only speak and hear that which agrees with the covenant to which they belong. These things are reconciled only in the blood of Christ (Rom. 8:3). The majority of convicted sinners seem to adhere to the testimony of the covenant of works—and so perish forever. Nothing will

save us, though, “but the answer of a good conscience toward God...by the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 3:21).

2. The way God has prepared for the saving of sinners is the fruit of infinite wisdom. It is powerful and effectual in accomplishing its purpose. As such it must be either received or rejected. But it is not enough to simply agree with the concept. We must also perceive the divine wisdom and power of this way in order to safely entrust ourselves to it. Some look upon God’s way of salvation and embrace it as the power and wisdom of God. Others reject it as foolish and weak, not worthy of being trusted. This difference results in an eternally distinguishing difference among men. Paul describes this difference in 1 Corinthians 1:18–24. It is mysterious that the same divine truth is, by the same way and means, at the same time, proposed unto different persons, all in the same condition, under the same circumstances, all equally concerned in that which is proposed in the truth, yet received entirely differently. Some receive the truth, embrace it, approve of it, and trust themselves to it for life and salvation. Others despise it, reject it, do not value it, and do not trust themselves to it. To the one it is *the wisdom* of God, and *the power* of God; to the other, *weakness and foolishness*. And it must necessarily be one or the other—there is no middle consideration. It is not a good way unless it is the only way. It is not a safe way if it is not the best way, or

if there is any other way, for this way is eternally inconsistent with any other. It is the wisdom of God, or it is downright folly. Only eternal sovereign grace makes the distinction between those who are given the gospel, and the almighty power of actual grace in curing the unbelief that blinds the minds of men, so that they see only folly and weakness in God's way of saving sinners. This unbelief still works in the majority of those to whom the gospel has proposed God's way of salvation. They do not receive it as a result of infinite wisdom, nor as powerful and effectual to salvation. Some recklessly feed their lusts and disregard the gospel. To others the words of the prophet apply, "Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish" (Acts 13:41, quoting Hab. 1:5). Some are under the power of darkness and ignorance; they do not comprehend the mystery of the gospel: "The light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not" (John 1:5). Satan, the god of this world, has blinded some, filling their minds with prejudice and their hearts with the love of present things, so that the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, cannot shine into them. Some mix the gospel with their own works, ways, and duties, which belong to the covenant of works and which are eternally irreconcilable unto God's way of salvation (Rom. 10:3–4). This is how unbelief eternally ruins the souls of men. They do not, they cannot, approve of God's plan of salvation as the gospel proposes it. They do not see it as an effect of infinite wisdom and

power, to which they could safely entrust themselves in opposition to all other ways and means that allegedly bring salvation. Understanding this will give us light into the nature and actions of saving faith.

3. The whole Scripture, and all divine institutions from the beginning, testify that God's way of salvation for sinners is by an exchange, substitution, atonement, satisfaction, and imputation. This is the language of the first promise and all the sacrifices of the law that are founded on it. The Scriptures teach that there is a way whereby sinners may be saved, a way that God has appointed. Now, since the law is concerned with sinners, we might expect their relationship to God to be wholly determined by what they can do or suffer in respect to the law. "No," says the Scripture, "it cannot be so; for 'by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in [God's] sight'" (Rom. 3:20; also see Ps. 143:2; Gal. 2:16). Neither shall they save themselves by paying the penalty of the law that they have broken. For they cannot, but must perish eternally: for, "if thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" (Ps. 130:3). There must be another way of salvation that is of a different nature. If not, then Scripture's revelation of God's mind is inadequate and misleading. But the main purpose of Scripture is to declare that there is another way: the substitution of a mediator in place of the sinners. This mediator shall bear the penalty of the law incurred

by those sinners and fulfill the righteousness which they could not attain.

This is God's way of saving sinners, whether men like it or not. Romans 8 explains,

For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. (vv. 3–4; see also Heb. 10:5–10)

In 2 Corinthians, Paul writes, "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (5:21).

Unbelief has prevailed upon many in our time to reject God's glory, revealed in the gospel, but we have vindicated the truth against them sufficiently elsewhere.¹

4. There are several prerequisites to having a clear view of God's glory in, and as a result of, His plan of salvation. These are a due consideration of the nature of the fall of our first parents and our resulting apostasy from God. I will not stop here to discuss all of the nature and implications of the fall, for we cannot fully understand

1. See especially John Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae; or, The Mystery of the Gospel Vindicated and Socinianism Examined*, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. W. H. Goold (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1966), 12:1–616.

them, much less express them. I will only say this: unless we have due apprehensions of the dread and terror of the fall and apostasy of our first parents, of the invasion sin made on the glory of God, and of the confusion the fall brought upon creation, we will never see why rejecting the way of personal righteousness and embracing mediatorial salvation is both reasonable and glorious. A right sense of our infinite distance from God and the impossibility of our approaching Him is of the same consideration. We must also consider man's inability to do anything that may satisfy the law, or the holiness and righteousness of God in the law; that is, our universal lack of conformity in our natures, hearts, and their actions to the nature, holiness, and will of God. Unless we have a sense of these things in our minds and on our consciences, we cannot believe rightly or comprehend the glory of this new way of salvation. Mankind has had a general notion, though not a clear understanding, of these things (or of some of them); many people have grasped that some kind of satisfaction or atonement is necessary in order for sinners to be freed from God's displeasure. But when God's way of salvation is proposed to them, they reject it because "the carnal mind is enmity against God" (Rom. 8:7). When sharp and lasting convictions fix these things on the soul, however, they will enlighten it with a true perception of the glory and beauty of God's way of saving sinners.

5. The gospel is a divine declaration of the way of salvation through the person, mediation, blood, righteousness, and intercession of Christ. The gospel reveals, declares, and offers a way of salvation to sinners, if they will only believe. As this is contained in the first promise, so the truth of every word in the Scripture depends upon it. Without this there could be no more fellowship between God and us than there is between God and devils. The gospel declares that this way is not by the law or its works (that is, by the first covenant or its conditions, or by our own doing or suffering), but it is a new way, discovered in and proceeding from infinite wisdom, love, grace, and goodness. This way is through the incarnation of the eternal Son of God, His assuming the office of a mediator, and His doing and suffering as mediator whatever was needful for the justification and salvation of sinners, unto His own eternal glory (see Rom. 3:24–27; 8:3–4; 2 Cor. 5:19–21).

The gospel also says that the only way of obtaining an interest in this blessed plan of salvation through Christ's substitution (the surety of the covenant), the imputation of our sins to Him, and of His righteousness unto us, is *through faith in Christ*.

This is the test of faith after which we inquire. Salvation being proposed, offered, and tendered in the gospel, true and saving faith receives it, approves of it, and rests in it. Saving faith renounces all other hopes and expectations and rests all of its confidence in this

way of salvation through Christ alone, for God does not present this way of salvation to us merely as a notion of truth to be assented to or denied (in which case anyone who merely assented to the historical facts of Scripture would be counted a true Christian). No, this way of salvation must be practically embraced. That is, we are to personally entrust ourselves to Christ alone for life and salvation. Therefore, I shall discuss how saving faith approves of this way of salvation and manifests itself to the comfort of believers.

Saving Faith Approves of God's Way of Salvation as That Which Most Glorifies God

How, then, does saving faith approve of God's way of salvation? On what basis and to what end? First, faith approves of this way as fitting for God to plan and give. Paul notes this in Hebrews 2:10: "For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." Only that which corresponds to God's infinite wisdom, goodness, grace, holiness, and righteousness is worthy of God. And this is what faith discerns and approves concerning the way of salvation: that it is worthy of God in every way. It answers every aspect of His holy being. That is why Paul calls salvation "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6).