

## SERMON VII & VIII

### On the new birth.

By

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John 3:3.

Jesus answered and said unto him, verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

#### The First Sermon on this text.

You will easily observe, that these words are a part of that most surprising conference, which our Lord held with a certain Jew, who is described by his name, Nicodemus, by the party he espoused, he was a man of the Pharisees, as also by the public office he sustained, he was a ruler of the Jews <sup>1</sup>, or a member of the Sanhedrim or great council of that nation, as appears I think very plainly from the 7th chapter, of this gospel ver. 50<sup>th</sup> : where an account being given of a meeting of the chief priests and Pharisees in a judicial capacity, he is said to be one of them. He having heard the same of Jesus, and perhaps, seen some of the miracles which he had wrought; it is said the same came to Jesus by night, to escape, as it is probable, the resentment of his countrymen, who had agreed to reject every one who appeared to espouse his cause, or receive his doctrine. Then, we have the manner of his addressing our Lord; he says, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: in which he speaks the sentiments of others, as well as himself. Christ had some friends, it is not unlikely, who did not publicly acknowledge him. His conduct, one would think, must needs gain him the favorable opinion of the more sober and judicious, though biased by temporal interests, they were afraid to venture all, and follow him. And what Nicodemus said, was not disagreeable to the general opinion of the people, nay, even to his enemies, as the apostle Peter observes, upon a very great and public occasion, *Ye men of Israel, says he, hear these words, Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you, by miracles, wonders, and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye your selves also*

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<sup>1</sup> John 3:1

*know*<sup>2</sup>. And as it was very customary to give the title of Rabbi to teachers or instructors, lest our Lord should receive it as a bare compliment, or testimony of civil respect, Nicodemus adds the reason of his addressing him in this manner: *For no man can do these miracles that thou dost, except God be with him.*<sup>3</sup> Many very surprising things may be done, which may carry a shew of being miraculous, without such a divine interposer. But the extraordinary works which were performed by our Saviour stand in no need of any appeal, carrying their own evidence that the arm of the Lord was with him. Works indeed so many in number, so excellent in their kind, and so great in their degree, that nothing less than resolute infidelity, or direct skepticism could, one would think, have shut the eyes of those, who had an opportunity of being acquainted with them.

In the text you have our Lord entering upon a most necessary and useful point of doctrine. The expression with which it is introduced, viz. Jesus answered and said unto him, seems indeed to be a reply to what was just before said by Nicodemus. But it is easy to observe many instances in the New Testament, where this mode of speech is used at the very opening of a discourse, and is rather a transition from one subject to another, than a direct answer to a question proposed. So that, as I take it, we are to understand by it no more than this; when Nicodemus had thus acknowledged Christ as a teacher come from, God, he sets immediately upon instructing him into the great things that concerned his everlasting peace, and opens the discourse with a very weighty sentence, *Verily, Verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born, again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.* You must have observed that when something of the greatest consequence and undoubted certainty, hath been delivered by our Lord, it was common with him to introduce it with this asseveration, *verily, verily, I say unto you,* intimating the weight and importance of it, and the attention it deserved. Now what he delivers here to this eminent person, was not merely for his own instruction and advantage, as is no other had any concern with it: for this certainly is one of those scriptures that are not of private interpretation. What therefore our Lord said unto him, he saith unto us all, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Accordingly you will observe, that it is laid down in an indefinite way, except a man—that is, let his character, or his circumstances, be what they will ; old or young, rich or poor, prince or subject, unless he is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of

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<sup>2</sup> Acts 2:22

<sup>3</sup> John 3:2

God. By being born again, I understand a spiritual impress wrought on the soul, or a divine principle implanted in it, which before was dead in trespasses and sins. By the kingdom of heaven, I understand either the kingdom of grace here, or glory hereafter, the state of the church militant, or triumphant. No man hath a right to church fellowship here, nor will ever have a part in the general assembly above, who hath not this new nature, or is not born again. The manner of our treating this subject, will be,

I. To offer some things which deserve our attention respecting this new birth, and,

II. To consider the reasons why those who are destitute of it, and die in such a condition, cannot see the kingdom of God. I begin,

I. With offering some things to your consideration concerning this new birth. And we have defined it to be a spiritual impress, wrought on the soul, or a divine principle implanted in it, which before was dead in trespasses and sins. Now, as a principle, it stands opposed to the particular exercise of grace, and is distinguished from it, as previously necessary to it. For as it is in nature, so it is in grace, a man must have life before he can move, or walk, or perform any of the offices of life: and thus in religion, the mind must first be made spiritual, and the soul be renewed, before it will either relish or breathe after any spiritual exercises or entertainments. Now in regeneration, or the new birth, you will observe.

[i]. That God is the author of it, and that man is entirely passive, in the first reception of this divine principle. I say, the work is altogether the Lord's, and man is only the recipient, and not the origin of it, or co-ad-jut-or in it. What is observed of our first creation is true of our regeneration. Know ye, says the psalmist, that the Lord he is God, it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture <sup>4</sup>. And to this purpose the apostle John says, *But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name : which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God*<sup>5</sup>. Compare with this some other passages of the New Testament: *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works* <sup>6</sup>. *Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be*

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<sup>4</sup> Psalm 100:3

<sup>5</sup> John 1:12-13

<sup>6</sup> Ephesians 2:10

*a kind of first fruits of his creatures*<sup>7</sup>. *Blessed be the God, and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever*<sup>8</sup>. *Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God*<sup>9</sup>. And as this is the current language of the inspired penmen, in the New Testament, so it is also agreeable to the ancient promises of the covenant of grace, under the old. *But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel, after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, and will be their God, and they shall be my people*<sup>10</sup>. A new heart also will give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh<sup>11</sup>. The work is therefore the Lord's, and the glory of it must be ascribed to him. Should it be objected to this, that we are commanded to cleanse ourselves, as in that passage, wash ye, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, cease to do evil<sup>12</sup>. And again, cleanse your hands, ye sinners, and purify your hearts, ye double minded<sup>13</sup>. We answer to this, that these and such like expressions, are not to be opposed to the many scriptures we have already quoted, as though they were inconsistent with them : but they are to be understood rather as intimations of our duty, than of our ability ; of what we ought to be, rather than what we are capable of being, by any might or power of our own ; and at most they can signify no more, on our part, than the actual exercise of divine grace when received, and that under the influence of him that gave it. For Job says, If I wash myself with snow-water, and make my hands never so clean; yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me<sup>14</sup>. And the wise man adds, who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin<sup>15</sup>? Which will yet further appear, is we proceed to consider, not only that God is the author of this work, but that man is entirely passive in the first reception of this divine principle. I allow, that after we are born again, it may properly enough be said that we believe in Christ, the act is ours, though even then

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<sup>7</sup> James 1:18

<sup>8</sup> 1 Peter 1:3, 23

<sup>9</sup> 1 John 5:1

<sup>10</sup> Jeremiah 31:33

<sup>11</sup> Ezekiel 36:26

<sup>12</sup> Isaiah 1:16

<sup>13</sup> James 4:8

<sup>14</sup> Job 9:30

<sup>15</sup> Proverbs 20:9

the effectual influence and assistance is God's. But in our first conversion, the change which we receive in regeneration, is altogether of God, the creature has no share in this work. Which will more fully appear, is we consider,

[ii]. The state in which we are found, when God begins the good work in our hearts. This the scripture hath represented by a variety of metaphors, all which imply the greatness of our corruption and defilement. We are said, you know, *to be dead in trespasses and sins*<sup>16</sup>, to be blind, nay even darkness itself, as the apostle writes to the Ephesians. *For ye were sometimes darkness*<sup>17</sup>. And it is said, the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned<sup>18</sup>. We are also called the servants of sin<sup>19</sup>, and said to be enemies in our minds by wicked works<sup>20</sup>; yea enmity itself: The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God neither indeed can be<sup>21</sup>(w) Romans 8:7, since we cannot of ourselves so much as think a good thought. Nay it is said of man, that every imagination of the thought of his heart was only evil continually.

Now this is really the state of our case, we may as well pretend to create a world, as to convert ourselves. And so far are we from helping in our conversion, or assisting in it, that we universally make all the head we can against it, and oppose the Spirit of the Lord in his first motions, with respect to this work, till, by the almighty power of sovereign grace, he gains the victory. As to the sum of what might be offered on this head, read at your leisure the third chapter of Paul's epistle to the Romans, and I persuade myself, comparing it with your own experience, you will have reason to conclude, that is ever you are converted, you must be entirely God's workmanship.

(2.) Add to this the consideration of the exceeding greatness of that power, which the scripture represents as exerted in our conversion; Thus it is stilled a creation, and we are said, in the passage just now mentioned, to be created in Christ Jesus unto good works. As also it is called a resurrection, or

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<sup>16</sup> Ephesians 2:10

<sup>17</sup> Ephesians 5:8

<sup>18</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:14

<sup>19</sup> Romans 6:17

<sup>20</sup> Colossians 1:21

<sup>21</sup> Romans 8:7

believers are said to be risen with Christ <sup>22</sup>, and God promises he will take away the stony heart out of our flesh, and that he will give us an heart of flesh <sup>23</sup>. It is called a being drawn by the Father <sup>24</sup>, a receiving the Spirit <sup>25</sup>. And there are other expressions of the same kind, made use of, which imply the utmost degree of power. You have a very remarkable passage to this purpose, in the apostle's prayer for the Ephesians; he prays that they may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints; and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power; which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead <sup>26</sup>&c. The apostle seems here to want words to express the sense he had of the greatness of that might, which is exerted in the conversion of a sinner. How much think you did Lazarus contribute towards his own resurrection? No more can a sinner towards his conversion. The tree must first be made good, before it can produce the least good fruit.

(3.) This will yet more fully appear, if you consider, that, to suppose the creature hath a hand in his first conversion, is so far to oppose the main design of the gospel, which is, that God should have all the glory, whilst we have all the blessings of salvation. If a sinner could say, thus far, he changed himself so far he would have matter of boasting, as having something of his own, that he had not received. And thus the honor of our conversion must be divided between the creature and his Maker and an easy answer might then be given to the apostle's question, who maketh thee to differ from another? And what hast thou that thou didst not receive <sup>27</sup>? Upon the whole then, is the condition of the human nature is as the scripture represents it, is the work of conversion requires such power as no created being is possessed of, and is the design of the gospel will not admit of the creature's having any part in the work of his own regeneration, we may justly conclude that God alone is the author of it, and man the subject; and not assistant in it. Let a man but seriously look into his own soul, and consider how closely he is attached to sin, and he will find abundant reason to join in the prophet's question, can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil <sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> Colossians 3:1

<sup>23</sup> Ezekiel 36:26

<sup>24</sup> John 6:44

<sup>25</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:12

<sup>26</sup> Ephesians 1:18-19

<sup>27</sup> 1 Corinthians 4:7

<sup>28</sup> Jeremiah 13:23

Having thus considered God as the author of this work, I should have proceeded to have treated on the extent of it. But I shall leave that to a future discourse, and close this with two or three reflections, on what has been said. And then,

1, Is our assertion be just, that this whole work is the Lord's, we may very evidently see that mere moral suasion, or objective light, is not sufficient to convert a sinner. Some divines have been ready to think, that it is enough for God to set before us the reasonableness of religion, the beauty and Excellency of godliness, which, if the mind is made thoroughly sensible of, it will of itself be inclined to pursue it. But alas! We find that Though Paul, nay even Christ himself were the preacher, the gospel would be a dead letter, unless clothed with the power of God. Many persons of the brightest capacities, and of the most eminent character for seriousness and morality, have yet remained ignorant of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, and have, with Nicodemus, been stumbled at the first principles of true spiritual religion. When our Lord called to Lazarus, to come forth from the grave, all must acknowledge it was not the mere force of words, but a secret divine power that went with them, which affected the miracle. Thus we may hear the voice of the Son of God externally, all our days, and yet, be strangers to that secret and victorious power which attends it, when it brings life and salvation to the soul. And farther,

2. From hence we may also see, that if God will work, none can let it. Truly the new creation is too much for us to perform. But with the same ease, that the Lord commanded the light to shine out of darkness, he can shine into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ.<sup>29</sup> The apostle Paul was, you know, an eminent instance of this. He went on raging in his malice against Christ and his people, and doing his utmost, is possible, to destroy his interest in the world. Yet, of an enemy, he is immediately made a friend; from a persecutor, he became a preacher of the gospel, and the chief of Christ's apostles, as a glorious monument of victorious grace. And, for my part, I cannot read without wonder, what we meet with among the mighty successes that are recorded in the acts of the apostles, at the first publication of the gospel, that

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<sup>29</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:6

a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith,<sup>30</sup> persons of all others most prejudiced against it. But,

3. Let not sinners, think it a light or easy matter, on the one hand, or an impossible thing on the other, to be born again. Satan hath often served his turn with both these suggestions: some apprehending conversion, to be nothing but an external reformation of life, have rested in a partial amendment, or in cutting off some branches, while the root or stock has remained entire. Corruption must be destroyed in the principle as well as the produce; and this is a work too hard for you. On the other hand be not discouraged, what is impossible with man, is possible with God.

4. Let not the Christian be disheartened, who perhaps cannot assign any particular season, or remember exactly the manner in which God wrought this mighty work upon his soul. It is enough for us is we are conscious of the blessed fruits of the Spirit. As to the manner of the operation, it is described to be like the wind, of which we know very little. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit<sup>31</sup>. And,

To conclude, is you have good reason to hope that you are born again, remember what you owe to God for such a mercy ; let him have all the glory of his own work ; remember what was his design in it ; examine your hearts, and watch over your lives; that you may be able to make it appear that this great design has taken place in your souls, and that you are cleansed from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> Acts 6:7

<sup>31</sup> John 3:8

<sup>32</sup> 2 Corinthians 7:1

## SERMON VIII.

### On the New Birth.

#### John 3:3.

*Jesus answered and said unto him, verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*

#### **The second Sermon on this text.**

AFTER I had in a former discourse considered, that the particular view of our Saviour, in these words, was to instruct a master in Israel in the important doctrine of regeneration; I proposed, more largely, to explain the privilege itself, and then to attend to our Lord's reasoning upon it: that except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Accordingly, in order to explain the privilege, I observed,

1. That God is the author of this blessing, and that man is entirely passive in the first reception of it: or that this is one of those gifts which descends from the Father of lights, and in the bestowment of which, he will alone be exalted. This I endeavored to confirm by several arguments, and closed with some practical reflections. I proceed now,

2. To consider the extent of this privilege, which I apprehend is universal, as reaching to the whole soul. As the soul was created after the divine image at first, so it was defaced in every faculty, by our apostasy from God and this image is renewed in part, in the whole mind, when we are born again, and effectually engaged to turn unto the Lord. The work indeed is not perfected at once, or complete in its degree. But as it is genuine in its kind, it must be universal in its extent. Hence you find the Spirit of God, when speaking of this blessing, uses indefinite terms. We read of being renewed in the Spirit of our mind, that is, in the whole soul. And again it is called the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness; <sup>1</sup> plainly intimating, its author, influence, and extent. Thus, as the whole compass of corruption is comprised in this term, the old man, so, the entire work of grace is represented by the new man. And as the poison of the

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<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 4:23, 24.

one, so the influence of the other is diffused through the whole soul. Some are so mistaken, as to confine the work of conversion to the understanding, as though it were sufficient to denominate a person a servant, that he knew his Lord's will. Others mistake as much, when they limit it to the affections, as though a zeal for God, though never so blind and ignorant, was to worship him in spirit and in truth. But how much they are both deceived, we may learn from the instance of Paul on the one hand, who, in zeal for God, persecuted the church, and blasphemed the name of Christ, till he was renewed by the divine power; and then from Judas on the other, who could not be said to perish for want of knowledge, but yet was involved in ruin, his heart being untouched by the efficacy of sovereign grace. The light thrown in upon the understanding, if it is distinguishing and saving, is always attended with suitable impressions on the affections, whence the soul is at once improved and delighted, grows in grace, and advances in useful knowledge. Agreeable to this, we find the apostle speaking of the spirit of wisdom and revelation, in the knowledge of Christ, by which the eyes of the understanding being enlightened, ye may know what is the hope of his calling, <sup>2</sup> &c. And, you know, it is said of our Lord, with respect to his disciples, that he opened their understanding, that they might understand the scripture. <sup>3</sup> Observe, it is not said that he opened the scriptures to their understanding, or, by a suitable paraphrase or comment, he explained the great and spiritual import or design of them, though it may be well supposed he did that: but he opened their understanding: the work was internal, and the soul entirely passive in the reception of it. From whence we may gather, by the way, that objective evidence is not sufficient to enlighten the mind of a sinner. The Vail must be taken off from the understanding, and the mind cleared from darkness and prejudice, before it will rightly apprehend, or receive the things of the kingdom of God. David, even after his conversion, prays to this purpose, open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law. <sup>4</sup> Moreover, as the new man is renewed in knowledge; so also in holiness. Thus, you know the description we have of conversion in the covenant of grace, where God says, I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.<sup>5</sup> It is a removing the obstinacy and enmity of our nature, and a bringing us into subjection to

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<sup>2</sup> Ephesians 1:17, 18.

<sup>3</sup> Luke 24:45.

<sup>4</sup> Psalm 119:18.

<sup>5</sup> Ezekiel 36:26.

Christ. Agreeable to this, it is promised by the Father to him, in the covenant, that his people should be willing in the day of his power. <sup>6</sup>

Nor is this blessing confined to the understanding and affections, but the judgment is rectified and established; conscience maintains its authority and the memory becomes a treasury of sacred truth, and a repository of spiritual experience. No faculty is indeed without impression, but all are changed and altered. This is the new birth or regeneration. But,

3. I would farther observe, that the privilege of regeneration is most valuable, not only in itself, but on account of the blessings which attend it. Its author bespeaks its Excellency. Every thing that comes from heaven, must be divine, and highly deserving our attention. What subject should so much challenge our admiration and esteem, as the reparation of the divine image in the apostate creature? But is you add to this, the many precious advantages, which necessarily arise from, or are closely connected with this heavenly blessing, they must needs increase our apprehensions of it. And here allow me to be a little particular, in the following instances. And,

(1.) In our conversion or regeneration, a Vail, of worse than Egyptian darkness, is taken away, and we immediately become light in the Lord. What more melancholy, than to be deprived of natural sight? Every such object awakens our concern, and engages our compassion. But, by how much the interest of the soul, and the affairs of eternity, exceed those of time, and the body, by so much the more wretched is the condition of every un-renewed, ignorant sinner. Nor is it the least part of the misery of men, in this sad condition, that they cannot say, Is their not a lie in our right hand? <sup>7</sup> Now in conversion, as the apostle expresses it, ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord. <sup>8</sup> It is a change, not more excellent, than surprising: hence the apostle calls it marvelous light. <sup>9</sup> It is hardly possible to conceive with what a transport of joy a person, who had been long confined to darkness, would welcome the returning light. Nor is it otherwise with an heir of salvation, when he looks back and observes, how wise he was to do evil, and how ignorant of, as well as averse to the paths of holiness and duty. The very review of his case affects him with horror, as the apprehension of its alteration strikes him with the most pleasing satisfaction. How ready is he to

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<sup>6</sup> Psalm 110:3.

<sup>7</sup> Isaiah 44:20.

<sup>8</sup> Ephesians 5:8.

<sup>9</sup> 1 Peter 2:9.

acknowledge, "Alas, I lately knew nothing comparatively of myself, or my Saviour, my misery through sin, or remedy through grace? All was dark and gloomy; and had not grace prevented, would certainly have led me to the world of utter darkness and confusion! "

(2.) In our conversion, we shake off the fetters of the worst of tyrants, and take upon us the yoke of the best of masters. Thus you read of the gospel as an instrument in the hand of the Spirit, not only to open our eyes, and to turn us from darkness to light, but also, from the power of Satan unto God.<sup>10</sup> Satan's power is so great in every un-renewed heart, that he may be said to rule and govern there, to have the ascendant in the affections, and the chief influence on the will. As his design is the ruin of mankind, so he suits his temptations to their corruptions ; and while they ignorantly propose satisfaction to themselves, they are really, treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath, pursuing that which, at the best, will not satisfy, and, if the mercy of God do not interpose, must certainly end in their destruction. Now this is the case of every one of us by nature, as the apostle describes it to the Ephesians, Wherein, says he, in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.<sup>11</sup> And from this sad and deplorable condition we are not delivered, till the Spirit of grace rests upon us, and breaks the union between us and this great adversary of God and our souls. There is then such a discovery made of his wickedness and malice, as begets a special and abiding fear of him, and aversion to him in the soul; and thus, renouncing the former subjection to him, the soul is engaged in the service of another, even the Lord Jesus Christ whose service is not only our duty, but our honor and happiness, for the ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.<sup>12</sup> Satan treats his greatest votaries with deceit and treachery; whilst our Lord is not only just, but gracious and merciful: his yoke is easy, for he assists us to bear it; and he treats us as friends, and not merely as servants. And is it a valuable blessing to be delivered thus from the cruel tyranny of the hardest of all masters, and to be engaged in the service of a most just and bountiful benefactor? Such then is the happy alteration the soul passes under, that is delivered from the captivity of this enemy, and subjected to the free and gracious government of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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<sup>10</sup> Acts 26:18.

<sup>11</sup> Ephesians 2:2.

<sup>12</sup> Proverbs 3:17.

(3.) In our regeneration, we arise from a death in trespasses and sins, to a life of holiness and religion. So says the apostle, you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins.<sup>13</sup> The mere light of nature teaches us the preference of good to evil, but it is revelation only which hath fully instructed us into the amiable Excellency of grace, and the vile deformity of sin. Now as death spreads itself through the whole animal frame, so sin by nature entirely possesses the soul, and we are as lifeless and inactive in the things of God, as one, who is naturally dead, is in the affairs of this world. The removal of which is the great end of our conversion. Hence the apostle, writing to the believing Romans, observes, that the design of God in calling them was, that they should be saints, or holy persons. He writes his epistle to all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints And he uses the same phrase, in his salutation to the church at Corinth. To them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints.<sup>14</sup> And agreeable to this, our calling is said to be an holy calling,<sup>15</sup> not only as it is the work of the Holy Ghost, but as it is holy in its tendency: and thus the grace of God, where it is received in reality, the same apostle says, will teach us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world.<sup>16</sup> And the apostle John adds, that whosoever is born of God, doth not commit sin;<sup>17</sup> i. e. in the same way, or in the same degree, with those who are in the world. Thus such a one receives that instruction of the Holy Ghost by the apostle Peter, who says, As he who hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation ; because it is written, be ye holy, for I am holy.<sup>18</sup> But again,

(4.) In our conversion we exchange a burdensome conversation with vain company, and unsatisfying enjoyments, for spiritual and delightful communion with the Father, Son, and Spirit, with the saints, and with the world above. Perhaps before conversion, none more greedy after the world, or more earnest in the pursuit of sensual pleasure and carnal company. But when the mind is changed and renewed, instead of saying, to the world, Who will shew us any good? We are seeking for the light of God's countenance; being instructed in some measure, that the world hath nothing suitable to our spiritual nature, or sufficient to make us truly and eternally happy. The character of unconverted persons, you have in short in that of the Ephesians,

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<sup>13</sup> Ephesians 2:1

<sup>14</sup> Romans 1:17.

<sup>15</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:2.

<sup>16</sup> 2 Timothy 1:9

<sup>17</sup> 1 John 3:9.

<sup>18</sup> 1 Peter 1:15, 16.

That at that time, they were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world. <sup>19</sup> But the end of our conversion you may read in those words of the apostle, to the church at Corinth, God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. <sup>20</sup> Now what greater honor or happiness than to have Christ manifesting himself unto us, as he doth not unto the world? But,

(5.) In our conversion, from being under the curse as children of wrath, we visibly become entitled to heaven and glory. I believe I need not go far to prove that he that believeth not is condemned already: <sup>21</sup> and that, whilst a sinner is un-renewed, he is, according to scripture, to look upon himself as under the curse. Now, in our conversion, one considerable part of our happiness is, that we are called not only unto grace, but unto glory also; as the apostle exhorts the Thessalonians, to walk worthy of God, who had called them unto his kingdom and glory. <sup>22</sup> So likewise the apostle Peter speaks of the God of all grace, who hath called us into his eternal glory. <sup>23</sup> And here I might add,

(6.) And lastly, the consideration of the permanency of this divine principle, and that it shall not be lost, as another infinite advantage that belongs to it. And this might be argued from the decrees of God, from the unchangeableness of his nature and his other attributes, from the account we have in scripture of the everlasting covenant, from the character and satisfaction of the great Saviour, and the interest the believer has in him and his salvation, from what he has already experienced, and what the faithful and powerful intercession of Christ, together with the promises of the gospel, give him leave to hope for. But as I intend to treat more particularly on this doctrine of the saint's everlasting safety from another text, I shall proceed,

II. And very briefly, to consider, why none, but such who are born again, shall ever see the kingdom of God. And,

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<sup>19</sup> Ephesians 2:12.

<sup>20</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:9

<sup>21</sup> John 3:18.

<sup>22</sup> 1 Thessalonians 2:12.

<sup>23</sup> 1 Peter 5:10.

The necessity of it is fixed, first in the divine will, and secondly, in the reason of the thing itself.

I. In the divine will, God hath determined that without holiness no man shall see his face.<sup>24</sup> He hath certainly a right to determine under what circumstances we shall enjoy eternal life, or to insist on what he pleases, as requisite to it. And he hath said, the wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.<sup>25</sup> They that die in an unbelieving and unsanctified condition can have no portion in the land of purity, and eternal bliss. Old things must pass away, and all things must become new<sup>26</sup>, before we can ever have any foundation to hope for an enjoyment of the blessedness of that world. As those only who have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the lamb, can stand before the throne of God, and serve him in his temple;<sup>27</sup> so it is the unalterable decree of heaven, that, nothing that defiles shall enter into the new Jerusalem<sup>28</sup>, but they only that do God's commandments have a right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city<sup>29</sup>. So that had we no other evidence but this, it might be sufficient to convince us, that God hath settled the way to everlasting life, in all ages of the world ; and that where he gives glory, he always first gives grace as preparatory to it. But add to this,

2. The reason of the thing itself. A man without this supernatural change, would be absolutely unfit both for the employment and happiness of a better world. Holiness becomes, the habitation of God's house, and the place where his honor dwells.<sup>30</sup> and certainly then, to admit a man, in his carnal, ignorant, and corrupt state, into the general assembly of the church of the first born, and even into the palace of the divine Being, would be most dishonorable to God, and most unfit in itself. Isaiah was not only a regenerate and spiritual man, but, I think, it is not to be doubted, had as much acquaintance with God, and conformity to him, as any one of his time ; and yet, under a sense of the imperfect circumstances which attend the best of men in this world, when he was brought nigh to the throne of God in a vision, and saw the Seraphim's bowing before it, and heard them, crying to one another, and saying, Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of Hosts, the whole

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<sup>24</sup> Hebrews 12:14.

<sup>25</sup> Psalm 9:17

<sup>26</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:7.

<sup>27</sup> Revelation 7:14

<sup>28</sup> Chapter 21:27

<sup>29</sup> Chapter 22:14

<sup>30</sup> Psalm 93:1.

earth is full of his glory, he said, Woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips : for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts <sup>31</sup>. Such is the holiness of God that angel's veil their faces and elders cast their crowns before his throne, <sup>32</sup> and acknowledge that heaven is not clean in his sight, <sup>33</sup> and that, in their most: perfect condition, he may justly charge them with folly<sup>34</sup>. Now, what could a sinner, sinner, in his un-renewed state, do in such a world? What part could a man, dead in trespasses and sins, bear in such pure and spiritual services as these? The attention of an hour in this world to divine things is a grievous burden to a carnal mind, and the more spiritual the service is, the heavier is the burden: what then must such a man endure, through a long eternity, in the midst of the most exalted devotion, and the most holy and refined conversation ? He could have no competent knowledge of the manner in which God is to be worshiped, no capacity for his service, nor any relish for the enjoyment of him. The company of angels would be wearisome to him, and he must needs be uneasy in the society of the spirits of just men made perfect. In a word, to such persons, heaven would be a most disagreeable place, instead of affording them any satisfaction and delight. Well therefore might our Lord say, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. But, to draw to a close, from what hath been said,

1. You will see, that there may be knowledge in the head, without grace in the heart. As many, in the present day, take pleasure in deriding the great fundamentals of religion, so others satisfy themselves with a bare speculative acquaintance with them. Suppose a man had the capacity of a fallen spirit, if he had his vicious nature too, would it not rather increase his misery, than be any ground of rejoicing? It is very possible for a person to have very distinct apprehensions of the gospel, and yet to retain his enmity to the Lord Jesus Christ. Would you know therefore, whether your knowledge is saving? Observe what influence it hath upon your hearts and lives whether in proportion to your improvement in knowledge, you grow in humility or whether you are not rather puffed up with a fond conceit of your own attainments whether your apprehensions of the evil of sin produce a growing abhorrence of it; whether this is attended with an increasing tenderness of conscience, and watchful diligence in your walk ; whether

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<sup>31</sup> Isaiah 6:1, 2, 3.

<sup>32</sup> Revelation 4:10.

<sup>33</sup> Job 15:15.

<sup>34</sup> Chapter 4:18.

your acquaintance with the gospel fills your hearts with love to Jesus Christ and, in a word, while you improve in a speculative knowledge of the other world, you die the more to the things of this ; and while your hopes increase respecting your interest in that blessedness, your confidence increases also in the merit of that Saviour, by which alone it is to be obtained.

2. Do not take a particular fit of zeal and affection, for this new birth. Many have seemed earnestly to set their hands to the plough, who have soon looked back. Some like the stony ground hearers, when they have heard the word, have immediately received it with gladness: but having no root in themselves, have endured but for a time.<sup>35</sup> And where this is the case with any, it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.<sup>36</sup>

3. What enemies are sinners to themselves, while they are unconcerned and thoughtless about this blessing, without which they cannot serve the Lord aright, nor have any well grounded peace in their own breasts, or enjoy even the blessings of this life, in a way of true comfort and satisfaction, and much less the hopes of a better ? O sinners, sinners, what are you pursuing! And what are you neglecting! Were you truly sensible of the deplorable condition you are in, you could neither eat your food, converse with your acquaintance, nor lie down on your beds with any composure. Or had you ever felt this saving change, had you ever seen a glimpse of pardoning love, or had a real taste of divine things, how unsatisfying would every vanity, in which you place your present hope, appear? Sad and deceivable state indeed, to seek the living among the dead! To sleep on the top of a mast, and sport on the brink of a precipice! And O what then will become of such who despise, and deride the efficacious operations of the Holy Spirit in the new birth! Who brand the whole of the Christian's experience, with the ignominious names of enthusiasm and delusion! Certainly our Lord was the best judge, and he says, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. To be strangers to the experimental power of this work upon their own hearts is bad enough surely, men need not enhance the misery of it, by such a daring contempt of its almighty Author, and of its genuine and gracious effects on the hearts of others. That word of Paul to the unbelieving Jews at Antioch may be very

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<sup>35</sup> Mark 4:16, 17.

<sup>36</sup> 2 Peter 2:21.

justly applied to such men, Beware lest that come upon you which was spoken of in the prophets. Behold ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which you shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you.<sup>37</sup> For, says the author to the Hebrews, He that despised Moses' law, died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he is sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace.<sup>38</sup> But to add no more,

4. What ground of strong consolation have those, who have fled for refuge to the Lord Jesus Christ? They have the purpose, covenant, promise, and oath of God the Father, with all his perfections, the merit of the Redeemer's blood, the power of his intercession, and his own glory, together with the honor of the Spirit, all interested in their happiness, and security. This should fill the hearts of God's people with joy, in the midst of all the afflictions they pass through in this life, give them courage in every danger, and raise their drooping spirits in their darkness hours. Happy indeed and only happy is he who is Gods workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works! In this blessing, we have all other blessings, let our circumstances otherwise be what they will: If God doth this for us, it is as much as our hearts can wish. This new nature makes the poor rich, the simple wise, and changes the sinner into a saint. This is food to the hungry, and clothing to the naked. And though we pass through a thousand afflictions in this life, and even through the valley and shadow of death, we are still going to take possession of a kingdom. We are entitled to promises and comforts, which will support us in the way, and being born from above, we shall shortly enter into our inheritance among the saints in light.

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<sup>37</sup> Acts 13:40, 41.

<sup>38</sup> Hebrews 10:28, 29.