

THE
DOCTRINE OF EFFICACIOUS GRACE,
ASSERTED AND VINDICATED:

Preached at Lime – Street.

By

MR. SAMUEL WILSON.

SERMON I & II

Philippians ii. 13.

It is God who worketh in you, both to will and to do, of his own good pleasure.

In the beginning of this chapter, the apostle recommends to the saints, at Philippi, mutual forbearance, affection, humility, and condescension, as the great ornament of the Christian character. To this end, he reminds them of their common fellowship of the Spirit; and their joint relation to, and interest in, the blessed Jesus; who, as he observes, in the days of his flesh, exemplified these graces, in a very distinguishing manner: so entirely was his heart set upon advancing his Father's honour, and so prevailing the affection which he bore for his people, that, *"Though he was in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God, yet he made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and, being found in fashion as a man, humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."*¹ Now, says the apostle, you profess to be the disciples of this Jesus, you call him Lord; keep in view then his temper and conduct, and copy after him: "Let the same mind be in you that was in him;" and so much the rather give diligence herein, as I, who when present with you, was serviceable, as an healer of your breaches, and an helper of your faith and joy, am now providentially

¹ Verse 6, 7, 8.

removed from among you: *"Wherefore; my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but how much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."*² God is calling you to duty, diligence, and circumspection; give no occasion for the reproach that your zeal declined upon my leaving you; but remember what is before you, a crown of immortal glory, and run with patience and constancy the race that is appointed you; and, in your way to the prize, let there be no other contention, but who shall soonest reach the goal, and first lay hold of eternal life. And lest they should, conscious of their own spiritual impotence, be discouraged, he adds, *"For it is God that worketh, in you,"* &c. Your work, indeed, is great, your difficulties many; but if God is with you, he will give you a will, and furnish you with power to perform what is acceptable to him.

Perhaps it will be said, that the words under consideration, relate to saints already renewed in the spirit of their mind, and so cannot, with propriety, be produced as an argument for the necessity of a divine agency, in the conversion of a sinner. To this it might be answered, that it is no unusual thing, in theological inquiries, to borrow a passage of Scripture, as an illustration, where it is not insisted on as a direct proof; but the instance before us, admitting it primarily may belong to believers, the consequence will be this, that either the sinner has more will to, and power for, that which is good, than the saint, or the same God, who works in the one, must also in the other, both to will and to do of his good pleasure. If a good man, who knows so much of his duty, who has been so long accustomed to the discharge of it, and so often tasted the sweets of communion with God, whilst engaged in his service; if in the midst of all his advantages, experience, and hope, he cannot of himself will or perform any thing that is spiritually good; much less the sinner whose heart is carnal, who is a slave to his lusts, and under the tyranny of the god of this world.

The word **ἐνεργεῖω** which we translate *worketh*, is expressive of power, yea, of mighty power; it supposes a difficulty in the performance, and perfection of superior strength in the agent. It is not barely our setting our hand to a work, but the doing of it thoroughly, or to purpose. Accordingly, when the arm of the Lord is revealed, the sinner is born again, *by the exceeding greatness of that power, whereby he subdues all things to himself.*³ There is an energy on God's part, and a change on ours.

² Verse 12.

³ Philippians 3:21.

This working of the Almighty is further described to us as internal: He worketh *in us*, and that both to *will*, as well as to *do*. Ministers preach to us, but God worketh in us. The best of means, applied with the utmost skill, will not of themselves soften the hard, or cleanse the impure heart: God only has access to the spirits of men, so as to secure this desirable event, and he can do it on whom and when he pleases; For "*He worketh in us*, of his own good pleasure;" a phrase which has in it the ideas of sovereignty and of kindness. God gives his grace at pleasure, to whom, and in what degree, he thinks fit, dividing to every man as he will: and as this grace is his own image, and leads on to the glorious enjoyment of himself, it must needs be a favour of inestimable value.

The words being explained, give us an occasion to observe,

"That when a sinner is born again, there is a change wrought in his soul, by the mighty power of God."

By this change I do not understand an alteration of profession or character barely; for as the apostle tells us, circumcision avails no more than uncircumcision, where the new creature is wanting. The change we intend is real, not nominal; a change of the subject not of the name only. A man may professedly renounce idolatry, submit to baptism, as a badge of Christianity, and attend the worship of God, in the assemblies of the saints; call himself, and be deemed by others, a believer; and yet be a stranger to the change we are treating of. Again, we distinguish the grace of God in the renewing of a sinner, from reason, or the improvements of it, when its dictates are supposed to be duly attended to. Reason belongs to us as men, and is common to our nature, as raised above the beasts that perish: but this is not sufficient to make us wise unto salvation. Where is the person of whom it may be said, that, after a course of sin and impiety, he brought himself by bare reasoning, to forsake the evil of his way, to love the Lord his God with all his heart, to believe on the Lord Jesus, to worship God in the Spirit and to persevere in these things unto the end? Experience tells us, that sin and Satan so entirely possess the sinner's heart, that there must be something more than the care and improvement of our reason to make room for Christ and holiness. Nor further, do we mean by this change that which is merely the result of presenting certain truths to the understanding, in a strong and engaging light; so that whereas formerly they were either not at all, or very little, attended to by us, now we are brought, with proper application, to reflect and meditate on them, and so are by deductions from them, engaged

in the choice of virtue, and the hatred of vice. This, indeed, we allow to follow upon this change, as a fruit of it; but till the soul is spiritually enlightened, we suppose it to be incapable of judging aright of spiritual truths, or of forming practical conclusions from them.

In contradistinction to these accounts of regeneration, we assert that it is the implanting of a principle of spiritual life, or the forming of the divine image in the soul, in which the soul itself, as to the substance of it, remains the same, but the qualities of it are altered; the understanding, from being darkened, becomes light in the Lord; the will, which before was rebellious against God, is now brought into subjection to him; and the affections, which before were wholly carnal, and determined on sensual objects are now purified and refined, and fixed on heavenly things. In a word the change is real and universal, the power which effects it is divine, the fruits many and discernible, and the great efficient Jehovah the Spirit.

A particular account of the exact way in which the Spirit accomplishes this great work is not to be expected, after our Lord has told us, that as "*the wind bloweth where it listeth, and we hear the sound thereof, but cannot tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth, so is every one that is born of the Spirit,*"⁴ so that we are to attend only to the proof of the fact: that what the Scripture calls the new creature, or a principle of grace, is formed or wrought in the soul by the power of God, in a way of efficacious grace. I choose to call it the *new creature*, as distinguishing between regeneration and conversion, the one being previous to, though necessarily connected with the other. In regeneration, we are passive, and receive from God; in conversion, we are active, and turn to him; we repent, believe, and obey: but this supposes we have been his workmanship; and, by his power, have been renewed in the spirit of our mind.

Here I shall in some measure, pursue the very same method which a late celebrated writer,⁵ on the other side of the question, admits to be just, and which he therefore keeps in view, in all his reasoning on the subject; and so begin,

I. With those arguments which may be taken from the *Scripture account of the work itself* which is represented to us in such terms, as lead us

⁴ John 3:8.

⁵ Dr. Whitby.

necessarily to conclude, that the soul is passive in it, and that it is brought about by the arm of the Almighty. Thus

1. The apostle tells us, "If any man be in Christ, he is a *new creature*,"⁶ And again, "*Neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature*,"⁷ And so we are said to be God's *workmanship created*: and yet more expressly, the new man is said to be "*created after God in righteousness and true holiness*."⁸ I don't find it disputed whether these passages refer to the subject before us; and if they do, it must be allowed that either the metaphor is ill chosen, and wrongly applied, or it must be expressive of the same power in the new birth, with that which was exerted in creation, or the making of something out of nothing.

To this it is objected,⁹ that the term, *create*, does not always suppose the persons or things said to be created, to be wholly passive, or the power to be so great as we pretend; for God is said to create and form the church of the Jews,¹⁰ which must be understood of their stipulating with God, as well as of his engagements to them; in which their covenanting with him they were active. To this we answer, It is certain, whether the phrase is to be understood in a natural or political sense, it stands connected with two other instances of God's goodness, (*viz. redeeming them, and calling them by their name*) in which they had no concern but what was purely passive: and, if we consider how often God upbraids that people with their breach of covenant, it will not so well agree with the design of the place, which is evidently their encouragement, that this circumstance should be introduced, which must necessarily affect them with shame and fear. I cannot but think there was so much sovereignty in God's choosing Abraham, and so much power in his raising his family, from so small a beginning, to be so great a people, as might abundantly justify the prophet in the use of the terms *create* and *form*, without having any regard to their promissory or covenant engagements.

It is further objected,¹¹ against this argument, that God is said to create that which he brings into a new and better state: thus David prays, *Create in*

⁶ 2 Corinthians 6:17.

⁷ Galatians 6:15.

⁸ Ephesians 4:24.

⁹ See Dr. Whitby's discourse of sufficient and effectual grace, page 272.

¹⁰ Isaiah 43:1.

¹¹ Dr. Whitby, P. 273.

me a clean heart,¹² and God is said to *create new heavens*, and a *new earth*,¹³ and to create Jerusalem a rejoicing,¹⁴ As to the case of David, it is plain, his fall had so far convinced him of the plague of his own heart, that he despairs of healing it himself, and therefore cries to God, Create in me a *clean heart*. It might be a doubt with him; very probably, after so dreadful a backsliding, whether he had ever been truly converted; and if so much power, as would justify the expression, was necessary for his recovery, we may easily conclude what is needful for the renewing of a sinner, wholly dead in trespasses and sins. As for the other passage mentioned, what difficulty soever may attend settling the exact meaning of it, the following expressions in the chapter, abundantly warrant the use of the metaphor; for, according to the prophet, "There is then to be *no more an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days, for the child shall die an hundred years old; the wolf and the lamb are to feed together, and the lion to eat straw like a bullock;*"¹⁵ events altogether supernatural and miraculous. As to the Greek fathers speaking of the new creature as a change for the better only, if it should be allowed that this is their sentiment, I do not see how it affects the argument; for the question is not, whether the change is for the better, but what power is necessary to it, and to whom it is to be referred, to God or the creature.

2. Another Scripture representation of regeneration, is that of our being *quicken*ed by the great God, when *dead in sins*:¹⁶ And what the power is, whereby we are quickened, the apostle tells us, "That ye may know 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."¹⁷ Whatever may be the fact the apostle had in view, the terms are as strong and expressive, as language will admit. Great pains are taken by our opponents,¹⁸ in expounding this place of the resurrection of the body, in the last day, which they allow to be a work of almighty power; but it is impossible to prove this to be the meaning of it, because there is not a word of the resurrection of the saints in the text. The natural meaning of the place is evidently this: the apostle prays that God would enlighten them into that mystery of mercy, the work of faith in their

¹² Psalm 51:10.

¹³ Isaiah 65:17

¹⁴ Verse 18.

¹⁵ Verse 20 & 25.

¹⁶ Ephesians 2:1, 5.

¹⁷ Chapter 1:18, 19.

¹⁸ Dr. Whitby, p. 272

souls, begun and carried on by the same power, which raised his Son from the dead; and whereas he speaks of those who did believe, it is to acquaint them, that faith, in the exercise and increase, is from the divine power, as well as in the first principle.

How far this power is consistent with Scripture exhortations and persuasions, will be considered in its place.

3. We are said, in Scripture, to be *born from above*,¹⁹ to be *born of God*, and *not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God*.²⁰ In regeneration, the agency is removed from the creature, and ascribed to the great Creator. To this it is objected,²¹ that we are said to be "begotten by the word of the living God, and that faith comes by hearing," and the apostle tells the Corinthians, "he begot them by his gospel;" which must, say our opponents, be understood in a way of moral suasion, and not in that supernatural, all-powerful way we contend for. To this we reply, that though "faith comes by hearing, yet it is not of ourselves; it is the gift of God." Ministers preach, and whilst they preach, and with their preaching, God works, and so it is that men are turned unto him; otherwise even a Paul may plant, and an Apollos water, but there will be no increase; for, as the apostle observes, they are only ministers, by whom we believe: "Neither is he that planteth any thing, nor he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase."²² So that we conclude, the metaphors, which the Scripture makes use of, in representing the renewing of a sinner, carry in them plain marks of a divine interposure, and that in a way of infinite and almighty power. And to understand them otherwise, is to charge the Holy Spirit with what is allowed to be a blemish in all writers, the using of words without meaning, or of figures widely distant from, and disproportionate to the subject.

II. If we consider the Scripture account of the *sinner* before this change passes upon him, it will serve as a further proof of the necessity of efficacious grace, in our being born again.

1. We are said to be "dead in trespasses and sins,"²³ that is, by reason of sin, to be altogether impotent to that which is good. As the organs of the body at death cease to perform their usual functions, so the unrenewed

¹⁹ John 3:3

²⁰ Chapter 1:13.

²¹ Dr. Whitby, p. 274.

²² 1 Corinthians 3:5, 6, 7.

²³ Ephesians 2:1 Colossians 2:13.

sinner is *without God and without Christ in the world*; he is lost to his duty, and estranged from every thing that is spiritually good.

To this it is objected,²⁴ that common convictions, especially where they are strong, prove that the sinner, even before conversion, is not void of all sense, as a dead body is; so that the argument, according to us, if it proves any thing, proves, say they, too much. To this we answer that all convictions are originally from God, and the sinner, under the greatest fear of punishment, may have no apprehension of the excellency of his duty, nor any spiritual desire after communion with God; witness Judas, who, though he had a hell in his conscience, was utterly a stranger to the grace of God.

It is further objected, that the places cited concern only the *Gentile* world, held under the government of *Satan*, but have no relation to the proselytes of justice, much less to the Jew, and least of all to the baptized Christian. To this it is sufficient to reply, that the apostle was quite of another mind, or he would not have said, "*Among whom we all had our conversation in times past;*"²⁵ and, in another epistle, where he is professedly considering the difference between Jew and Gentile, he says: "What then, are we better than they? no, in no wise; for we have before proved both Jew and Gentile, that they are all under sin," Rom. iii. 9; and therefore he uses that phrase to the church of Corinth, after an enumeration of the greatest sinners, "Such were some of you,"²⁶. And he puts himself into the number, in what he says to Titus: "*For we ourselves also were some time foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts.*"²⁷ Now, it will easily be granted, that the apostle, before his conversion, was restrained from grosser sins; none suppose that he ran into all excess of riot, but had escaped the pollutions which were in the world through lust; and if that is allowed, it will be difficult to assign a reason why he should thus put himself into the number of the chief of sinners, if there had not been something common to them all; I mean, an impotence to good, and a propensity to evil.

2. A further account, which the Scripture gives us, of our condition before conversion, is, that *our understanding is darkened*; that we are alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in us, because of the *blindness of our hearts*,²⁸ yea, we are said to be *darkness*²⁹. And the

²⁴ Dr. Whitby, p. 276.

²⁵ Ephesians 2:3.

²⁶ 1 Corinthians 6:11.

²⁷ Titus 3:3.

²⁸ Ephesians 4:18.

apostle tells us: "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:³⁰ so that if we are made wise unto salvation, "God, who commanded light to shine out of darkness," must, in the same way, and by the same power, "enlighten our understandings, to give us the knowledge of his glory, as it shines in the Person of his Son."³¹ Till this is the case, the gospel, though in itself the *wisdom of God*, will be accounted *foolishness*.³²

As to what is objected, that these passages only describe the case of the willfully blind, who love darkness rather than light, we answer, they are evidently delivered in too general terms to admit of such an interpretation; yea, we are expressly told, "There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none that understands; there is none that seeks after God."³³

3. Another argument may be taken from our Lord's words: "*No man can come unto me, except the Father, who hath sent me, draw him.*"³⁴ By coming to Christ, we understand receiving him, or believing in him: by the Father's *drawing*, his work of power upon the heart of a sinner, when he is brought to Christ. Now, without this, says our Lord, *no man can come unto me*; not the wise and prudent, the learned or ingenious, any more than the ignorant and illiterate, the obstinate and rebellious: the event is alike impossible to them all; "*no man can come except the Father draw him.*"

To this it is objected,³⁵ that, if this is the case, there is nothing praiseworthy in our faith, or blameworthy in our unbelief; since when God draws, there is no resisting; and where he is not pleased to do it, we cannot move, in a spiritual sense. To this we answer: it is as true, that before conversion, we will not, as that we cannot come to Christ: though we may not be condemned for a mere impossibility of believing, yet we may very justly, for strengthening ourselves in our prejudices against Christ, and the way of salvation by him. That the Scripture expressly tells us, faith is not of ourselves, it is the gift of God³⁶; and yet we are required to believe. Nor do I see any such contradiction in some men's being judicially, as a punishment

²⁹ Verse 8.

³⁰ 1 Corinthians 2:14.

³¹ 2 Corinthians 4:6.

³² 1 Corinthians 1:23, 24.

³³ Romans 3:10, 11.

³⁴ John 6:44.

³⁵ Dr. Whitby, p. 280.

³⁶ Ephesians 2:8.

for their sins, *shut up in unbelief* and their condemnation for *loving darkness, rather than light*.

Again,³⁷ it is objected, that this drawing of the Father is to be understood only or principally of God's persuading, and prevailing upon us to come to Christ, by the consideration of the miracles, or mighty works, which were done by him? as an evidence of his being the Messiah, and by the promise of eternal life upon our coming. To this we answer, that supposing (though we can by no means allow it) this were the genuine sense of the place, we might urge it as an argument in the case before us; for if we cannot, but as taught of God, consider the nature and evidence of Christ's miracles, which are barely facts, supposed to be done by him, in confirmation of his mission, much less can we, without a divine interposure, renounce our darling corruptions, quit our most beloved iniquities, and heartily embrace Jesus, as our Saviour and our King. In short, the tree must first be made good, before it can produce any good fruit; for "the carnal mind," whilst it continues so, "is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be."³⁸

III. Our next general head of argument is taken from God's *challenging this work as his own*, speaking of it as performed by him, and in such terms, as manifestly exclude the creature's agency: thus we read, "The Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul," Deut. xxx. 6. This is thus explained by the prophet Ezekiel: "*I will give them one heart, and I will put a new Spirit within you, and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes*"³⁹. A like promise we have in these words: "*Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean. From all your idols will I cleanse you; a new heart also will I 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 a heart of flesh; and I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes,*"⁴⁰. And so the prophet Jeremiah, giving an account of the new covenant, does it in these terms: "*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 I will be their*

³⁷ Dr. Whitby, p. 280, 281.

³⁸ Romans 8:7

³⁹ Ezekiel 11:19, 20.

⁴⁰ Chapter 26:26, 27, 28.

God, and they shall be my people." ⁴¹ And more fully in the following words: "I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear for ever."⁴² Now, can it be thought that, by all these expressions, God intends no more than that he will assist and succeed our endeavours to renew and convert ourselves? Is this the meaning of his putting his Spirit within us? Of his taking the stone out of the heart, and giving a heart of flesh? Why does he promise so often, I will do this for you, if the work were divided between him and us? So that, according to the language of the Old Testament, we are to expect renewing grace from God, as his own proper work.

To this it is objected,⁴³ that the passages mentioned out of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, refer to the Jews in the end of the world, and therefore are wrongly produced in the question before us. To this we answer, that if that be the case, it proves, however, their conversion will be of God. Besides, these promises contain blessings, which are inseparable from salvation, and what every saint is in the experience of.

The apostle, in his epistle to the Hebrews,⁴⁴ quotes them, and applies them to Christ, as the surety of this covenant, and so uses this as an argument of the superior excellency of the gospel, above the Jewish dispensation. That *the covenant is better, established upon better promises*, would have been foreign to this design, if it relates only to the recovery of the Jews, in the end of the world.

In the New Testament we read, that God opened *the heart of Lydia*;⁴⁵ that *faith is not of ourselves, it is his gift*.⁴⁶ He gives it to some to believe; he must draw, or there will be no coming to Christ.⁴⁷ Paul preaches and prays, but God opened Lydia's heart. He must prepare the heart for the seed, and cause the seed to take root, and to bring forth fruit to his glory: and therefore the apostle distinguishes between the gospel, and the power that renders it successful; "*Our gospel came to you, not in word only, but also in power*".⁴⁸ Life and immortality are, indeed, *brought to light by the gospel*; but God only can make it unto us a savour of life unto life; and this he does, when he makes it his power unto salvation. But to proceed,

⁴¹ Jeremiah 31:33.

⁴² Jeremiah 32:39

⁴³ Dr. Whitby, p. 291.

⁴⁴ Hebrews 8:8. &cc.

⁴⁵ Acts 16:14.

⁴⁶ Ephesians 2:8.

⁴⁷ John 6:44.

⁴⁸ 1 Thessalonians 1:5.

IV. Another argument for the efficacy of the grace of God in regeneration, may be taken from this consideration: that supposing infants are *polluted and defiled*, in consequence of what we call original sin, as many of these as die before the actual exercise of reason, must either be renewed by the immediate hand of God, or be excluded from salvation, since our Lord has told us, "*Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God;*"⁴⁹ nor will it be disputed, that without habitual holiness, at least, no man can see the Lord. As for infants, we take it for granted, in the present argument, that they are *conceived in sin, and shapen in iniquity*; that which is *born of the flesh, is flesh*; that they are, by reason of the disobedience of the first man, sinners, and so unworthy of and unmeet for the heavenly glory, and must be excluded from it, unless washed in the blood of Jesus, and sanctified by the Holy Spirit. To suppose them all, or indeed any of them, to perish, is to be cruelly wise above what is written; and to imagine they are so holy, as to need no cleansing, or that any thing defiled can enter into heaven, is directly flying in the face of Scripture; so that though we are not told positively what is their portion, yet we may safely determine that they are made meet, if in heaven, for that inheritance, which is incorruptible and undefiled. And, if this is the case, we cannot suppose they contribute anything to it themselves; it must be from the abundant mercy and powerful grace of a compassionate God. Now, can it be thought that persons grown to years of maturity, who have for a great while accustomed themselves to do evil, and whose vicious habits are hereby confirmed and enlarged, will be more easily wrought upon? It is true, they have some degrees of reason and conscience; but as these are in the service of sin, the bias will be ever to evil, till it is altered by the grace of God. If it should be said, *Secret things belong to God*; and, as he has not expressly told us what will be the final state of infants, no argument can be fairly drawn from premises, which are in themselves uncertain: we answer, no more is intended by it, than what will be easily granted by those who allow the doctrine of original sin: and where this is denied, we agree it is of no force.

We might now produce some eminent instances of the grace of God, in the renewing of sinners, as they stand recorded in Scripture; from which we may conclude, that in their case, however, the happy change was from God, and the immediate effect of his almighty power. Thus, in the story of Zaccheus, it does not appear that our Lord said any more to him than this, "*Make haste and come down; to-day I must abide at thine house,*"⁵⁰ Luke

⁴⁹ John 3:3.

⁵⁰ Luke 19:5

xix. Yet presently a change was wrought in his soul, and the fruits of it appeared in an ingenuous confession of his former iniquities, and, in an humble resolution to pursue the contrary paths of justice and mercy. Now, what can this, so great and sudden an alteration, be attributed to, but the powerful influence which the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ had upon his mind? We cannot suppose there was an opportunity for a great deal of discourse or reasoning with him; but if there was, we may easily judge how far words alone are sufficient to engage a rigorous oppressor in acts of righteousness and mercy; so that, from the effects, we may judge of the cause, and conclude, that so great a change could not have been made at once upon such a heart, but by the same power whereby God is able to subdue all things to himself. Another instance, which might be mentioned, is that of Saul, who was not proselyted to Christianity under a sermon, or at a religious conference,⁵¹ but when his mind was under the strongest and most settled prejudice against it; when his zeal in persecuting the church was heightened into a kind of fury or madness: under these unpromising circumstances, he is made to hear the voice of the Son of God, and live: and, in the humble language of a disciple, to say, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" instead of going on, as he had designed, in making havoc of the church. We might add the ease of the thief on the cross, who either went to heaven without holiness, or received it immediately from that Jesus, who said to him, "*This day thou shalt be with me in paradise.*"⁵² If it is said, These are extraordinary cases; we answer, Whatever difference there may be in the circumstances of sinners, the power is the same in the renewing of them all; for the enmity, which is in every sinner's heart against Christ and holiness, can only be removed by an act of omnipotence.

⁵¹ Acts 9.

⁵² Luke 23:39, &c.

SERMON II.

Of Efficacious Grace

Preached at Lime - Street

Philippians, 2:13.

It is God who worketh in you, both to will and to do, of his own good pleasure.

The doctrine which we endeavoured to state and establish, in the preceding discourse, was to this effect: that when a sinner is born again, there is a mighty change wrought in his soul, by the efficacious working of the Holy Ghost. His being quickened, and made spiritually alive, is the effect of God's power, which works in him, as well to will as to do, of his own good pleasure. This we attempted to prove from the Scripture representations of the work itself, in which it is called a new creation, a resurrection, and a being born again; terms expressive of power; in the exertion of which the Almighty is, and cannot but be alone, and the creature manifestly passive. Again, we observed, from the said infallible oracles, that the state of man before this change passes upon him, is such, as will by no means admit of the supposition of an ability to renew himself, since he is described as "dead in trespasses and sins, having his understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in him, because of the blindness of his heart;" inasmuch as he is said to be *darkness* itself; and it is affirmed of him, that he "receives not the things of the Spirit of God, but accounts them foolishness." On these accounts, our Lord might well say, "That no man can come unto me, except the Father, who hath sent me, draw him." Further, we observed, that God challenges this work as his own, and speaks of it in the Old and New Testament, as brought about by his power; and the promises which he has made concerning it, conclude him to be equal to the work, as well as gracious to his chosen; and are as entirely silent, as to the agency, as they exclude and set aside the merit, of the creature. Moreover, we hinted that this must be the case with infants dying before the exercise of reason, supposing them to be under the pollution of original sin, unless we exclude them all from salvation. If they are regenerated, it cannot be in the way of moral suasion, but of internal and almighty efficacy.

We now proceed to another consideration, to prove the necessity of efficacious grace, in the renewing of a sinner; and that may be taken,

V. From the *difficulty* of the work, as it consists in conquering the strongest prejudices, mortifying the most corrupt habits, and in the implanting of a principle of grace and holiness to which the sinner is entirely averse; and, in opposition to which, Satan; who maintains the throne in his heart, uses his utmost endeavours. There is a greater distance between the terms, sin and *holiness*, *corruption* and *grace*, than betwixt those of *something* and *nothing*. In creation, something is formed out of nothing; but in

regeneration, (as one strongly expresses it,) hell is changed into heaven. In creation there is no assistance, but then there is no opposition; but regeneration is like the stemming of a rapid stream, and turning it into a contrary course; in which as there is nothing to help, so there is every thing to hinder. The sinner is not barely destitute of the divine image, and with out strength for the performance of what is good, *but "every imagination of the thoughts of his heart, is evil continually."*¹ He is so far from the fear of the Lord, and any concern about communion with him, that the language of his heart unto God is, "Depart from me, I desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty that I should serve him? And what profit should I have if I pray unto him?"² And, whilst he is wilfully pursuing a course of rebellion, and strengthening and enlarging his vicious habits, we may well ask, with the prophet, "*Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?*" Then, and not till then, may the sinner, "*who has been accustomed to do evil, learn to do well.*"³ Can any created finite power, at once, in a moment, change the fierceness of a devouring lion into the meekness of a lamb? If this calls for omnipotence, how much more to reduce the stout-hearted sinner, who is far from righteousness, to the obedience of faith, and a delight in the law of the Lord, after the inward man. Go and try the experiment, treat with the rebel, who, for a course of years, has had pleasure in unrighteousness, whose heart is in league with Satan, and strongly attached to sin; use the most moving and persuasive arguments to convince him of the folly of his way: see whether he will be brought by all your reasoning, to quit his darling lusts, and walk in the ways of the Lord; no, after all your advice, though mingled with tears, he loves his idols, and after them will he go. Satan has such an interest in the hearts of the children of disobedience; he leads them captive to that degree, that none but the Almighty can dispossess him, and break the chain: and therefore, when the apostle is speaking of this mercy, he uses a word strongly expressive of power; "*Giving thanks unto the Father, who hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints of light: who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, hath snatched us out of the power or hand of the devil, and translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.*"⁴

An excellent and most judicious divine⁵ has a passage pertinent to our purpose, in his discourse on Regeneration: "The new birth," says he, "is a change of nature; of a nature, where there was as little of spiritual good, as there was of being in nothing before the creation. It is the change of a stone into flesh, of a heart, that, like a stone, has hardness and settledness of sinful parts, a strong resistance against any instrument, an incorporation of sin and lust with its very nature; where the heart and sin, self and sin, are cordially one and the same. None can change such a nature but the God of all grace. No man can change the nature of the meanest creature in the world: Now, to see a lump of vice become the model of virtue; him that drank in iniquity like water, to thirst after righteousness, to crucify his darling flesh, to be weary of the poison he loved, for the purity he hated, speaks a supernatural grace, transcendently attractive, and powerfully operative." So that as he somewhere else observes, "We have no reason to wonder that

¹ Genesis 6:5.

² Job 21:14.

³ Jeremiah 13:23.

⁴ Colossians 1:12, 13.

⁵ Mr. Charnock. Vol. 2. 208.

creation is only ascribed to the hand of God, when, in regeneration, his arm is supposed to be revealed." But to proceed,

VI. If we consider the different success of the gospel, as dispensed by several persons, or by the same person, at different times, it will be evident that there must be the power of God attending it, or it will not be successful to salvation, or prove a savour of life unto life. Peter's hearers, and those to whom Stephen ministered, appear to be equally ignorant of and alike prejudiced against the gospel; the apostles deliver themselves with the same plainness and faithfulness, upon the subject of the guilt contracted, by shedding the innocent blood of the Son of God: three thousand are converted, baptized, and added to the church, from a single sermon, delivered by Peter; whereas Stephen's hearers blaspheme and stone him. Paul again finds hearts and houses open to him, in one city, and is obliged to escape for his life in another.

Now, how can this be accounted for, but upon the apostle's principle, "Neither is he that planteth any thing, nor he that watereth, but God that gives the increase?" Nay, how common is it for the same person, who has, perhaps, for years, sat unmoved under the ministry of a learned, faithful and affectionate preacher, at length in the day of God's power, under means far less likely to answer the end, to be awakened, convinced, and renewed? And are there not many instances of persons, of the same family, education, and advantages, attending the same means, and one is taken, and he perhaps the most profane or obstinate, and the rest left to a bare outside profession, or an hypocritical formality? *Why should the same gospel in one hand, thus run and be glorified; and, in another, no less valuable, be a savour of death unto death?* Why should the same preacher, at one time, see of the travail of his soul to his satisfaction: at another time have occasion to complain, *Who has believed our report?* If the weapons of our warfare were mighty in themselves; why not equally, and at all times successful? But the event makes it evident, they are only so through God; and when his power is put forth, he can easily, and he only can, bring down every high thought and imagination, and reduce the stubborn hearts of rebellious sinners to a subjection to himself.

VII. Another argument for the efficiency of the grace of God in regeneration, may be taken from the consideration of the *concern* which God has in the whole world. If we reflect on the various parts of the creation, we shall find, that, in the vegetable, animal, rational, and intellectual world, all first or natural principles are derived from God; and the actual exercise of those principles, whatever concurrent circumstances may attend, is constantly under his providential influence. And is this the case in universal nature? And can we suppose that in regeneration, one of the noblest works of God, he is left out as having little or no concern? How strange, how unaccountable, would this be?

Our natural philosophers readily allow, that every thing that is necessary for the growth and improvement of vegetables, is from God; that he, as the great Author of nature, has given it to the seed, to receive the fattening influence of the earth, the moisture of the rain, and the enlivening genial rays of the sun: nor will they dispute the sun itself had never been what it now is, the great fountain of light and heat to the universe, but by the will and power of the Creator. They will tell you the rain descends at

his appointment, and that he orders and determines its extent and usefulness; that there is an equal display of his power, wisdom, and goodness, in the growth of the grass, in the flourishing of plants, and the increase of corn: all is from him, and under the immediate influence of his providence. Moreover, in the animal world, or among the beasts of the field, the fowls of the air, or the fish in the sea, they will allow a principle of life and motion is from God, and the actual exercise of it in a dependence upon him. What we call sometimes instinct, or nature in them, is confessedly not of themselves, but from him, who hath appointed their situation in the order of creatures, and furnished them with all their powers, sensations, and appetites; whence they are directed to collect their proper food, and reject what would be hurtful and destructive to them. And none but an atheistic skeptic will deny, but that, in the rational world, we have our souls, with all their capacities of reasoning, reflection, judgment, and memory, from God; that he made us by his power, and continues us by his providence, wiser than the beasts of the field, and of more understanding than the fowls of the air: and who will not allow, that the angels, creatures of the highest order, have all their intellectual powers from God? Now, shall we admit that every creature has its being from, and lives, and moves, and acts in a dependence upon the glorious Creator; and suppose that the saint receives a principle of grace from himself, and continues a believer, by the strength of his own reasoning, and the vigor and constancy of his own resolution? Is it from God that I am a reasonable thinking creature? And from myself that I am a Christian, holy and spiritual? Am I not insufficient for the least action in common life, but as upheld by his power, and under the influence of his providence? And will it be said, I can renew myself, and cleave to the Lord, with full purpose of heart, by my own strength? What is this but to allow a dependence in the less, and to deny it in the greater? What Adam possessed in paradise, as to the perfection of his nature, the felicity he enjoyed, and his power to serve, worship, and adore the Creator, he had confessedly from Him who made him, after his own image. Now, if the first impress of the divine likeness on his soul, was the produce of God's wisdom and power, certainly the restoring that image, when lost or impaired, can be no less the work of the Almighty. If the care and skill of an artificer is requisite to the first making of a machine, or any curious piece of work, it must be equally necessary to the repair of it, when its principal springs are broken, and every thing out of order. But we go on,

VIII. To consider the *gross absurdities* which manifestly attend the denying the efficacy of the grace of God in regeneration; as,

1. This would be to furnish Christians with an easy and ready answer to that question of the apostle; "*Who made thee to differ from another? What hast thou, that thou didst not receive?*" Now, if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?"⁶ Such a one might boldly reply, upon the scheme of our opponents, My own reflection and judgment; my reason and choice made me to differ: the means were, indeed, the same, what I enjoyed in common with others; but the success was the effect of my own care, diligence, and attention, whilst they missed of it through their own heedlessness and carnality. It is objected to this,⁷ that the apostle is here speaking of gifts

⁶ 1 Corinthians 4:7.

⁷ Dr. Whitby, p. 296.

only, and of such as were miraculously and immediately infused, without human industry, and conferred on the primitive Christians, without any co-operation of their own faculties: so that as this kind of ministration of the Spirit has, for a while ceased in the church, an argument cannot fairly be drawn from it, in our inquiries about the more standing and ordinary dispensations of it. To this we answer, that, admitting the apostle is speaking of gifts, renewing grace is undoubtedly one of those gifts, and not the least valuable of them, which came down from the *Father of lights*; for when we are born again, it is not of "the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God;" and we are no more to ascribe to our own agency the difference between us and others in the gifts of grace, than the apostles or primitive Christians could in the miraculous endowments which were bestowed upon them. Moreover, is it not evident that the difference between a sinner and a saint is a great deal more, both in the nature and consequence of it, than between a person possessed of gifts, and one who is destitute of them? Gifts are useful to others, but grace prepares for heaven; gifts may obtain and enlarge a reputation among men, but grace only disposes for an intimacy with God here, and the enjoyment of him hereafter. Is it God who makes the difference in the one, and man in the other? The apostle determines how it was in his own case; "And last of all," says he, speaking of our Lord Jesus Christ, "he was seen of me, as one born out of due time; for I am the least of the apostles, and am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God; but by the grace of God I am what I am."⁸ The alteration is marvelous, the change surprising, from an enemy to a friend, from a persecutor to a preacher: but I ascribe it not to myself, but to the grace of God; and this grace, which was bestowed upon me, was not in vain: so far from it, that under its influence, "I labored more abundantly than they all." And so fearful was he, lest God should not have all the glory, that he adds, "*Yet not I, but the grace of God, which was with me.*"

2. Another absurdity which attends the denying of the grace of God in regeneration, is its *contradicting* and *opposing* the general design of God in salvation, which is, that no flesh should glory in his sight, but that he who glorieth, should glory in the Lord. That doctrine which gives the creature room to boast, that his own arm, either in the whole or in part, brought him salvation, cannot be of God. If our will is to give the turning point, and the balance is placed in our own hands; and, after all the provision which God hath made, and the pains he is supposed to be at, the creature is himself to determine the matter by his own choice or refusal; to be sure, the honour ought to go with the agency. And of this our opponents seem to be so sensible, that some of them allow, that it is of preventing grace that we will and choose what is good, and refuse what is evil; of assisting grace, that we are enabled to perform that will, and persist in that choice; and of mercy, when we have done all, that we are accepted; a way of expressing themselves, not a little contradictory to their scheme, and which, at other times, they are far from being fond of. It is objected, that glorying, or boasting, in some instances, is not unlawful: that the apostle was found in the practice himself, and declares, with a good deal of vehemency, that, "It were better he should die, than any man make void his glorying;" and that elsewhere he speaks of rejoicing or boasting in the testimony of a good conscience.⁹ To this we answer; it must be proved, before the objection will be of

⁸ 1 Corinthians 15:8, 9, 10.

⁹ 2 Corinthians 1:12.

any force, that the apostle is speaking in those places of the grace of God in regeneration; whereas, in the one, he is speaking of the high opinion he had of the gospel, in opposition to the contempt it met with from an ungodly world; and in the other, of the fruits, not of the principle of grace; which fruits he ascribes to a divine influence, when he says, "Not by fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God," he and the rest of the saints had their conversation in the world: and where is the inconsistency of this with that general direction; "*Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, nor let the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord, which exercise loving kindness, judgment and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, saith the Lord.*"¹⁰

3. Another absurdity arising from the supposition of the creature's *agency*, in his own regeneration, is, that it would then be uncertain whether any would be renewed at all; very possible that none might, and, all circumstances considered, absolutely impossible that any should. Suppose the best external evidence were produced, and the most weighty arguments made use of, if the issue depends upon the will of man, and that will be as liable to refuse as to choose, the event must needs be uncertain till the creature has determined; nor could it be certainly known, were this the case, whether any one would determine right: but, if the Scripture account of man, before conversion, may be depended upon, if he is dead in trespasses, darkness, and enmity against God; his will, being averse to good, and prone to evil, would necessarily determine in favour of sin, and in a rejection of holiness. One would have thought, that when the apostle Paul came to Athens, the seat of learning, the wise men of that place would have patiently heard what he had to offer, and duly weighed and considered the nature and importance of his doctrine, and that at least the major part of them would have embraced the gospel evidence, which attended it. But, instead of this, we find that he met with more success in Corinth, a city remarkably dissolute and wicked, than he did among the learned philosophers of Athens; and, upon his attempt to reclaim the Athenians from their gross superstition and idolatry, they mocked and derided him, as a base fellow, and rejected the doctrine of salvation as foolish and irrational.. So true is it What our Lord said, that. "*these things are hid from the wise and prudent, and revealed unto babes; neither can flesh or blood reveal them to us; but our Father who is in heaven.*"¹¹

We shall now inquire whether the grace of God, in the renewing of a sinner, may be frustrated, or set aside, by the opposition of the creature. And here we are to remember it is God's work, and therefore must be perfect, since he can and will do all his pleasure. To say that he cannot, though he would, change the sinner's heart, by an immediate act of his own power, is to challenge his omnipotence: so that the question is not whether God can do this, or no; but whether it is worthy of him, and how far it is really the case. And this may be determined,

(1.) From the inviolable and inseparable connection of the several parts of that golden chain mentioned by the apostle: "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son. *Moreover, whom he did*

¹⁰ Jeremiah 9:23, 24.

¹¹ Matthew 11:25. and Chapter 16:17.

*predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified;"*¹² that is, as many as are ordained unto eternal life, either are, or shall be called and sanctified by the grace of God, as their meetness for it, and be justified by the righteousness of Christ, as their title to it, as well as, at length, be glorified in the enjoyment of it: accordingly we are expressly said "*to be chosen unto holiness.*"¹³ Now, if the purpose of God, in election, is supposed to stand, then those whom he thus loved, with an everlasting love, shall be effectually drawn by the cords of it, agreeably to what our Lord says: "*All that the Father giveth me, shall come unto me; and him that cometh, I will in no wise cast out.*"¹⁴

(2.) This may be further argued, from the purchase which our Lord, by the merit of his obedience and death, has made of his people, with respect to their present safety and future felicity. The Scripture represents him not only as redeeming them from wrath, when he died for their offences, but as purchasing them to himself, as having a fulness of grace for their supply in this world, and as having obtained a glorious inheritance for them in the other. Accordingly, in the prospect of his approaching death, he prays, first, that "they might be sanctified through the truth, and be kept from the evil one;" and then adds, "*Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me may be with me where I am, that they may behold the glory which thou hast given me.*"¹⁵ Grace and glory are, indeed, blessings altogether unmerited by the saint: but they are due to his surety, upon an engagement on the Father's part in the counsel of peace to the Son, that if he would *make his soul an offering for sin*, he should have a seed to serve him, and see of the travail of his soul to his satisfaction.¹⁶ Now our Lord Jesus Christ having done his part to the abundant satisfaction of the Father, which was declared in his resurrection and session at his right hand; it would be unfaithful in the Father, and contrary to mutual stipulations, if any for whom he died should fall short of eternal life. And this must be the case, if any of these are supposed fully and finally to resist the grace of God. But,

(3.) We may consider God's chosen people, as *committed* to Christ, as his charge and trust, for which he is accountable to the Father; and accordingly he speaks of that part of them who were as yet uncalled, as his *other sheep*, whom he must bring in, and who should hear his voice.¹⁷ *Other sheep* I have, that is, I have their names in the book of life, their persons within the view of mine omniscience; these I must bring in; there is a necessity laid upon me; not on their part, but as I would approve myself to Him, who appointed me. It would be greatly inglorious to the Mediator, should he, when giving up his accounts to the Father, say, here are some only of the children whom thou hast given me; or, some of these, after all the pains I have been at, are yet unrenewed, and so unfit for eternal life. Besides,

¹² Romans 8:28, 29.

¹³ Ephesians 1:4.

¹⁴ John 6:27.

¹⁵ Chapter 17:17, 24.

¹⁶ Isaiah 53:11.

¹⁷ John 10:16.

(4.) If the soul is *passive* in the implanting the principle of grace, as we have endeavoured to prove, then there can be no resistance in regeneration. Whatever opposition may be made by the soul to common convictions before regeneration, or what conflict soever between flesh and spirit afterwards, yet we may, with the apostle, be confident, that where the work is begun, it shall be carried on; where the arm of the Lord is revealed, the success will be answerable: so that we conclude, that God, in the renewing of a sinner, works so as none can hinder: otherwise he might be disappointed of his purpose, fail in his promise to his Son, or be overcome by the creature, in the exertion of the exceeding greatness of his power; either of which is unworthy of him, who is a God of truth, and whose arm is almighty.

Having thus established the doctrine proposed, we shall now attend to some of the principal *objections* which are advanced against it; such as,

1. It is said, by the opponents ¹⁸of efficacious grace, that God hath given sufficient grace to all men, upon the due improvement of which they may be saved, if it is not their own fault; and to assert the contrary, say they, is to wrong the fountain of goodness, and to represent him as a cruel, severe, and harsh Being, and so to make him the object of our dread and hatred, rather than of our love and reverence: and if all men have sufficient grace, what necessity for this mighty power of God, is there in the conversion of a sinner? And, to prove this, they quote these words: "*What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it; wherefore, when I looked it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?*" ¹⁹ To this we answer in the three following particulars:

(1.) If it can be proved that God originally furnished man with sufficient knowledge of, and ability for the discharge of his duty, and that man, by his chosen rebellion, forfeited this, in common with all other mercies, and exposed himself to the deserved vengeance of God: then there can be no more unrighteousness in God to deny the creature, thus fallen, what they call sufficient grace, than to reserve fallen angels in chains, under darkness, to the coming of the great day. There would be some appearance of reason in the objection, if man was now to be considered as innocent, and in the uprightness in which God originally made him; but the Scripture concludes him under guilt; a very material circumstance, which the objection takes no manner of notice of.

(2.) If by *sufficient grace* is intended that which is absolutely so in itself, without the industry and care of the creature, or some superadded aids from heaven, we deny that there is such grace given to all men; for if there was, the effect must be the same in all, and so none could miscarry. If it is said, the success depends on the will of the creature, then this grace is so far insufficient in itself, and the phrase improper: if on a divine interposure, the objection comes to nothing; since it is then agreed, with us, that let the supposed grace be never so sufficient, the event is determined by a divine agency. Besides, is it not evident, from the Spirit's striving with the ungodly world, in Noah's time, for a hundred years together, without success, and from the conduct of the Jews,

¹⁸ Dr. Whitby, p. 234.

¹⁹ Isaiah 5:4.

who, for so many ages, enjoyed the ministry of the prophets, and at length of the Son of God himself; that common convictions, attended with the best of external advantages, are insufficient to effect the great work of regeneration? But,

(3.) As to the place quoted from the prophet Isaiah, in which God is represented, as asking, "What could he have done more that was not done?" we are not to suppose that he speaks as having exerted himself, *ad ultimum sui posse*, or as if he could not have given grace; for, to be sure, he who made the vine, could make it as fruitful as he pleased. The phrase is evidently *more humano*, in which the Almighty stoops to expostulate with the creature, for the abuse of his mercies, and upbraids him with his ingratitude; but is far from giving the least countenance to his pride, in a false opinion of his own sufficiency. We might add, as a further proof, that what the objection calls sufficient grace, is not given to all; that the very means of grace are denied to many. The gospel revelation is entirely unknown to a great part of the world now, as it was to the greatest part of it, under the Jewish dispensation; and the declaration is express, that "there is salvation in no other but our Lord Jesus Christ, nor any other name given under heaven, whereby we can be saved; that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God;" so that we may ask, with the apostle, "*How shall they believe on him, of whom they have not heard*²⁰?" Such undoubtedly, have not the sufficient grace which our opponents contend for; and I need only add, with respect to others, who are favoured with the gospel, why do saints after conversion, beg so earnestly of God, that he would enlighten, assist, support, and sanctify them, if the means which they enjoyed were sufficient in themselves for this purpose, or might be rendered so, by their own care and industry? If we may judge of their sentiments by their petitions, they apprehended grace from God, as well as, and together with, the means, to be absolutely necessary to their spiritual improvement, and proficiency in holiness. But,

2. It is further objected,²¹ that if God has not given sufficient grace to all, why does he judge or condemn any for the want of it? To this we answer, with the apostle Paul, there will be two rules, by which the Judge will proceed in the great day; "*As many as have sinned without the law, shall also perish without the law; and as many as have sinned in the law, shall be judged by the law.*"²² I am far from believing that God will condemn the heathen, who never heard of Christ, for not believing in him, but conclude that they will be judged by that law which is written upon their hearts, which either excuses or accuses, according to the good or evil of their actions. And as for those who live under the sound of the gospel, and finally perish in unbelief, they will not, I humbly conceive, be condemned so much for their spiritual impotence, as for their hardening their hearts, and positively shutting their ears against Christ: and, if this is the case, "is God unrighteous, who taketh vengeance?" God forbid it. But,

3. It is objected,²³ that God commands us to make ourselves *new hearts*; that he says, "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?"²⁴ that we are exhorted to "cleanse our own

²⁰ Romans 10:14, 15.

²¹ Dr. Whitby, p. 243.

²² Romans 2:12.

²³ Dr. Whitby, p. 237.

hearts,²⁵ and the like. Now, say they, if this is impracticable by the creature, how does this reflect upon the wisdom and goodness of the Lawgiver! Upon his wisdom in requiring that of us, which he knows is only in his own power to bestow: and upon his goodness in deriding and mocking his creatures with their misery? What should we think of a prince, who should command his subjects, on pain of his displeasure, to measure out the ocean, or number the sands on the sea shore? Or should he require of them any thing else equally impossible, how unworthy would this be of him, and how injurious to them! And shall we impute this to him, who is infinite goodness, and immense wisdom? God forbid. To this we answer,

(1.) That if a command on God's part necessarily infers a *full* power on our part to comply with it, or fulfil it, then we must be supposed to have the same power to serve him, as the saints in glory have: and, in this respect, the difference between a state of imperfection and absolute perfection, would be lost; for God requires we should "love him with all our hearts, and with all our souls;" and the law admits of no abatement, and rigorously requires perfection, and threatens eternal death to him *who continues not in all things written therein to do them*²⁶: so that if this were a fair way of reasoning, we must conclude, that because God commands *we should be holy, as he is holy*²⁷, *walk as Christ walked*²⁸, therefore we might, by our own power, *cleanse ourselves* from every degree of *filthiness, both of flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in his fear*.²⁹ But,

(2.) The most that can be judged of commands and exhortations, in Scripture, is this: they are representations of our *duty*, not of our *strength*; declarative of God's *authority*; and right of dominion, and not of our *power* or ability. A command respects us as creatures, whether upright or fallen; it is equally obligatory on us: God hath the same claim to worship from us, and the same dominion over us, since, as before the fall. To which we add,

(3.) The design of God, in these commands, is to acquaint us with the *necessity* and *importance* of these things which he requires; particularly in the instances referred to, "That without holiness we cannot see his face; that except a man have a new heart, he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven:" and so they are intended, upon a conviction of our weakness and insufficiency, to lead us to him, who hath not only required them of us, but hath promised to bestow them upon us; so that the awakened sinner, comparing the command and the promise together, in the one, is led to contemplate the majesty, authority, and holiness of God; in the other, his grace and faithful-ness: the one is the rule of his duty; the other, the ground of his faith. From the one, he learns what he ought to be, and do, whilst he is led on, and encouraged by the other, to pray for that grace which is sufficient for him.

²⁴ Ezekiel 18:31.

²⁵ James 4:8.

²⁶ Galatians 3:10.

²⁷ 1 Peter 1:16

²⁸ 1 John 2:6.

²⁹ 1 Corinthians 7:1.

The same may be said with respect to the expostulations which we meet with in Scripture: they are designed to work upon the minds of those to whom they are addressed, and are made use of by the Spirit of God in convincing of sin; and is there any impropriety in charging it upon a rebellious ungrateful generation, that whereas "the ox knows his owner, and the ass his master's crib"³⁰, they, by a neglect of duty to their daily benefactor, discover more stupidity and disingenuity, than the very beasts who perish³¹? May not the only wise God make use of the most moving and affecting language, in upbraiding his reasonable creatures with a contempt of his goodness, without supposing the sinner to be self-sufficient, and to stand in no need of his assistance?

4. It is further objected, that whereas we say the sinner is passive in regeneration, this is to destroy the freedom of the will, to subvert human liberty, and to reduce the reasonable creature to a mere machine, and so to take away the merit of virtue, by making it necessary, and not the result of choice. To this we answer; We are to distinguish between the nature of the will, and the qualities of it: the soul is the same, in all its faculties, after regeneration, as it was before; but the qualities of it are altered. The grace of God changes the corrupt, without invading the created nature of the will. Man's will, before the fall, was holy, as well as free, and so necessarily under a rational bias to every thing that was consonant to the divine Mind, and which was made known to him as such: but the will of man, as fallen, is impaired, not so much in its nature, or essence, as in its tendency; it is now most unhappily turned off, from spiritual to carnal and sensual objects; the will is the same in itself, or in its nature, now, as it was then; but the bias is very different: so that if we would judge aright of the freedom of man's will, we must consider the objects about which it is supposed to be conversant. If the worship, service, or love of God, are taken into the question, we assert, these were originally chosen objects of the delight of the innocent creature, but are now the matters of his aversion, whilst he continues in a state of unregeneracy; and, when he is renewed, and every high thought and imagination is reduced to a subjection to Christ, we never meet with a complaint from him of violence offered to his will, of being forced and compelled to the choice of holiness. True, he is sensible of the hand of God upon his soul; he feels, acknowledges, and adores the arm of the Lord in his conversion; but he is so far from thinking it any hardship, that he rejoices abundantly in the mercy: and whereas, now his soul is thirsting after God, and his delight is in the law of the Lord, he is sensible this wonderful change, in this case, was effected by his power, who "works in his people both to will and to do, of his own good pleasure:"³² he is far from desiring such a liberty, as would leave him as liable to apostatize and miscarry, as to persevere and be saved: no; he rather longs to be in heaven, among the spirits of just men made perfect, under a glorious necessity (if that may be deemed so, which is the matter of their constant choice and delight) of serving God, without weariness or interruption: if he might express the utmost of his ambition, it is to be with Jesus, in a world where to sin or to offend is impossible.

We may observe, that at the same time we assert, that God works immediately in implanting the principle of grace, we allow, that the renewed sinner is a proper subject of

³⁰ Isaiah

³¹ Psalm 49:12.

³² Philippians 2:13.

moral suasion; and that God deals with him, in promoting a work of grace in his heart, in an argumentative way, and enables him to compare and judge of things which are proposed to him, as proper to be pursued or avoided, and to choose, or refuse, as they appear desirable, or the contrary; though we conclude, in all this, the saint gladly esteems God's word as his only rule, and his Spirit, as his only guide. As to what is said concerning virtue, and the rewards which are supposed to be due to it, I apprehend, man, in his best estate, is vanity; his obedience, in its utmost spirituality and perfection, is a debt which he owes to his great Creator; nor can he be profitable unto God, so as to enter a claim, or challenge a reward from the Almighty; so that as we utterly disclaim the doctrine of merit on the creature's part, we need not inquire how far the grace of God, in the renewing of a sinner, destroys this idol, which the pride of man is so willing to set up and worship.

5. It is objected, if God works in us both to will and to do, and without his special grace we can do nothing, then we may even sit still, and do nothing, only wait carelessly till he shall excite us to, or assist us in our duty; and so this doctrine, say they, destroys all diligence and industry, and renders the sinner's endeavours, how sincere and serious soever, foolish and unnecessary. To this we answer, that the great God may certainly fix upon what order he pleases, in his conferring of favours, and bestowing undeserved blessings. Now, the order he has settled is this; that though he gives all freely, and not for our sakes, yet he will be sought to, and inquired of, by us for those spiritual mercies, which we want at his hand; the direction is, "*Ask, seek, and knock;*" *the encouragement lies in the promise, "Ye shall receive, ye shall find, and it shall be opened unto you"*³³. They who seek me early," says God, "*shall find me*"³⁴;" and such as wait on him, "*shall renew their strength;*"³⁵" so that it is in a way of duty that we are to expect his presence. God is not, indeed, tied up to means, he may be "found of them who seek him not;" but he has obliged us to a constant and diligent attendance upon them; and I would ask, is not his promise of meeting and blessing us, of his being in the midst of us, to assist and comfort us, a more rational and powerful motive to a close adherence to our duty, than a false imagination of a power, which we are not really possessed of, and so must necessarily disappoint us in all our ungrounded expectations from it?

Thus we have gone through the principal objections advanced against the doctrine of efficacious grace, and conclude, upon the whole, that we have Scripture and experience on our side, whilst we assert, that regeneration "*is not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*"³⁶ What remains, but a serious inquiry, whether we have tasted that the Lord is gracious; how far we have been quickened by the mighty power of God, *who were dead in trespasses and sins*³⁷? Without the new birth there is no entering into heaven, our Lord has expressly assured us³⁸. What can we then say of God's gracious dealings with us? Has he put his Spirit within us, *written his law in our hearts*³⁹, taken the

³³ Matthew 7:7.

³⁴ Proverbs 8:17.

³⁵ Isaiah 40:31.

³⁶ John 1:13.

³⁷ Ephesians 2:1.

³⁸ John 3:3.

³⁹ Jeremiah 31:33.

stone out of our hearts, *and given us hearts of flesh*⁴⁰? Have we been made to loathe and abhor ourselves; to prize, above every thing, the person, righteousness, and fullness of Christ? Have we fled for refuge to him, as ready to perish? and do we find a spirit of grace and supplication poured out upon us? Do we thirst after communion with, and aim at a resemblance to Jesus? Is this, or such like, the genuine experience of our souls? then let us call upon them, and all that is within us, to bless his name, whose workmanship we are. Let him have all the glory; and let it be our great concern, as well as prayer to God continually, that we may, in all things, walk worthy of his holy vocation, adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour, till we get safe to that world, where Father, Son, and Spirit, will be all in all, as the everlasting source of pure and perfect happiness; and where, as the great Jehovah, one God over all, they will, to endless ages, inhabit the praises of those who shall stand before the throne, perfectly cleansed from all filthiness, both of flesh and Spirit, and *whose robes shall be washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb*.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Ezekiel 36: 26.

⁴¹ Revelation 7:14.