

NATURAL AND SPIRITUAL BIRTH.

A SERMON

PREACHED BY MR. HAZELTON,
AT MOUNT ZION CHAPEL, CHADWELL STREET, CLERKENWELL,
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"But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood."—Gal. i. 15, 16.

WHEN the Lord had saved Saul of Tarsus, He sent Ananias to visit him and deliver an important message. Ananias offered some objection at first, which however, was wholly removed by Saul's saving Lord, who assured him, "that Saul was a chosen vessel unto Him, and that He would show him how great things he must suffer for His name's sake." His grace led him in a trying and thorny path to his heavenly home. Saul first suffered in relation to his own personal interest in Christ, then in relation to his brethren; then in relation to the churches of Jesus Christ, the care of which rested upon him from day to day. The apostle was meek, no doubt, and when it was necessary he dealt very gently with the people of God; but he was also a very earnest, courageous, and faithful man. He loved the honor and character of his blessed Master, and the glorious gospel of the blessed God was very dear to his heart; and hence he said, "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." He then deemed it necessary to advert to his unregeneracy in connection with his regenerated state and condition. The gospel he says, which I preach, I received not from man, "I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." Then he adverted to his former state and condition: " You have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how beyond measure, I persecuted the church, of God and wasted it."

"But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood."

Now let us look at this portion of the word, more especially in connection with ourselves. Paul by grace had experienced the revelation in his own heart which he sets forth here; but in this respect, all the people of God, more or less generally, resemble him.

I desire in the first place to call your attention to the two births. "But when it pleased God who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by His grace." I shall have an observation, perhaps, to make upon effectual calling; but I want now to draw your attention to these two acts of God,—separated from the womb, and called by grace. Most of my hearers are aware that I do not care so much as I used for critical preaching ; for criticisms in the pulpit are not, I think, on the whole, meat and drink. Yet it is important that we should distinguish between things that differ; and when certain points should be distinguished from each other, it appears to me to be necessary that a minister should not pass lightly over them. "Who separated me from my mother's womb." He here refers to his natural birth. "Called by His grace," refers to his spiritual birth. Every living child of God is, as such, twice born. To be born naturally is common to all men; to be born spiritually is limited to a number known to God alone. When we look at this mighty London, and see in its streets many thousands of people, and hear their conversation, and observe their conduct, the thought arises in our mind, they have no fear of God before their eyes. Oh what filthy conversation, what sinfulness, what depravity, what wickedness, and what abomination prevail among our fellow citizens generally! "God is not in all their thoughts," or "All their thoughts are, There is no God," (as the margin reads.) All these have been born into this world, and born to die; but few, very few comparatively speaking, have been called by the grace of God. Now in our congregation this morning, is it too much to express a hope, a belief, that most of my hearers have been called by Divine grace. If, my dear friends, we have not been called, it were in many respects better that we had never been born naturally. Our Lord said concerning the traitor, "Well would it have been for that man had he never been born." To be separated from our mother's womb, and left in that condition is to be in and of the world ; and to be under the reign, power, and dominion of sin, and under the law of God which is broken, and therefore under the curses of that law. If, however, in addition to this natural birth, we have been born again, and effectually called by grace Divine, we have been brought into connection with God's church, and with the kingdom of heaven. To be separated from our mother's womb connected us with this world; but called by grace we became connected with heaven, and were brought into - vital and experimental connection with God's dear Son. Born into this world naturally, we appeared as creatures only; but called effectually by God's

grace, we appeared as new creatures. "If any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature; old things are passed away, and all things are become new." Born into this world, we are born into the kingdom of nature; and there, if uncalled, we shall live and die, and find nothing but eternal death and woe; but by effectual calling we appear not merely in nature, but in grace. By the new birth we obtain a standing, yea, a seat and resting place in the kingdom of grace. Called out of darkness into God's marvelous light; translated from the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God's dear Son. Born naturally we are in sin; born spiritually we are in a state of holiness. Born naturally we are sinners; born spiritually we are saints of the Most High God. If I have been born only once, I shall die twice: if I have been born twice, I shall die only once. If I know nothing of the new birth, I shall die a temporal death and an eternal death; but if born spiritually, I shall die a temporal death only, and on me the second death will have no power. Paul was as a Pharisee, as a persecutor, as a bitter hater of the Lord Jesus Christ, going hellward; but he says here somewhat triumphantly, "It pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb," and who even then had thoughts of life, love, and mercy towards me, to reveal His Son in me. And when that revelation took place in his heart, his enmity fell down dead, and he ceased for ever to persecute the church of God. The glorious gospel of the blessed God became new to him altogether. Old things passed away, and behold, all things became new. The first and the second birth; a natural, a spiritual one. Born of the flesh, and born of the Spirit. Born for this world naturally, and born spiritually for the world to come. Under my first birth I appeared as a son of man, as a child and descendant of Adam, and no one knew what God might do for me. Born again the second time, regenerated by the Spirit and grace of God, I appeared as one that was united to the second Head, the second Adam, the Lord from heaven. In the first Adam we appeared as his children and descendants; polluted, because our ancestor was so, guilty because he was so, fallen because he was our fallen head. And when it pleased God, who separated us from our mother's womb, and called us by His grace, to reveal His Son in us, then we appeared vitally connected with Christ the Head of grace. As Adam was and is the head of nature, so Christ is the Head of grace, the Head of life, the Head of peace, the Head of salvation, and the Head of all the called and uncalled Church of the Most High God.

Now in the second place, let us say a word or two upon effectual calling. I said some minutes ago, I did not care for criticisms in the pulpit; and yet I will just observe here that it may be necessary for my hearers to distinguish, when they read the Bible, between regeneration and calling. They are not identical, or the same thing. Regeneration and calling are not synonymous

terms. I know persons put two or three important branches of Divine truth together, and newer distinguish between them, as conversion and regeneration, and regeneration and conversion. With them regeneration is effectual calling, and effectual calling is regeneration. But, my dear friends, they are three distinct and different forms of truth, and the children of God are more or less experimentally acquainted with each. Regeneration is the first act that God performs upon the heart of a sinner, and when the new birth really takes place it is perhaps almost impossible to say. I do not know when I was born naturally, only as I am told, I have no experience or recollection, or any personal experience in connection with that event; and yet I know it took place. Neither do I know precisely when the Holy Ghost secretly and silently entered into my heart. "Oh," you say, "when you were converted." No, conversion follows regeneration. Then you say, "When you were effectually called." No, effectual calling follows the new birth. In regeneration a new life from God is dropped into the soul; and what then follows? The eyes are opened, the ears are unstopped, the dead heart lives, and the insensible spirit becomes sensible. In the new birth there comes that which subsequently realizes that one is a sinner, that he is lost and ruined, that nothing but the intervention of almighty grace can save him, he becomes sensible of all this, and his sensibility is the result of life. Life precedes everything. "Ye must be born again." "But God calls the dead, sir?" I do not think so; for "If any man have ears to hear, let him hear," God first gives life, and then there is an ear to hear, and God calls, Come unto Me. Effectual calling follows regeneration, and conversion follows calling. Conversion is a visible and outward change, a change of course and character. The world sees the conversion, the heart hears the heavenly call, and the God of all grace is viewed as the author of the vital, living principle of religion within. Calling is threefold, or it was so in Paul's case. First, he was called to be a saint; secondly, he was called to preach the word, and thirdly, he was called to the apostleship. First, Paul was called to be a saint, a holy one; and he says, "Immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood." God always makes Himself heard, He never calls the sinner in vain. Paul was called up out of the depths of sin and bitter enmity against Christ, into another state. He was called up from the abomination in which he had naturally lived, into fellowship and communion with God. Oh what a contrast between Saul on the knee of prayer before the mercy-seat, and Saul of Tarsus the Pharisee and bitter persecutor! He now preached the faith which he once destroyed. No man that ever lived knew better than Paul, what it was to be a new creature in Christ Jesus. And then again, some of God's people,—but I shall not tarry here, because it is a somewhat personal matter,—some of God's people are called to preach the word. And do you know, if not, I will assure you, that I

have rather strong feelings concerning a Divine call to preach the gospel. "No man taketh this honour upon himself." I believe that a Divine call to preach is absolutely essential to the acceptable, proper, and useful preaching of the word. All are not preachers. God converts a sinner into a saint, and then, if He intends he should preach His word, He gives him in some special way a call to the work of the ministry. Every minister of the gospel should be able to say, I am where my Saviour has placed me, I am what He has made me, and I am doing what He has called me to do. Paul was called to preach the word, and so were many others. Paul, however, was called to the apostleship, called to be an apostle. He was not therefore, the pastor of a church, nor was he permanently settled anywhere. It was his work, as one of the apostles of Jesus Christ, to fly abroad as it were in the world with the everlasting gospel of God. Nevertheless he presided over other ministers, and exercised a very important and necessary influence over the churches of Jesus Christ. He had, however, a conscience void of offence in the sight of God and before man, in relation to his preaching, and his apostleship also, for he could always lay his hand as it were upon the order which he had received from heaven, to occupy the apostolic office, and to preach the glorious gospel of God's grace. Some of my hearers know that it occasions much trouble and trembling of mind and heart, when we are not satisfied that we are following the Lord, or when we doubt whether God called us into the position we occupy. Sometimes I think our heavenly Father permits us to stray and wander for the purpose of embittering things to us which are contrary to His own mind and will. When this is the case, He keeps His eye upon us, and hence as we stumble on in the dark, having no nearness to the throne, and no fellowship and communion with our God, we are very depressed and distressed. Oh there is true peace only in the path in which the Lord leads His people! Paul called to be a saint, a preacher of God's word, and an apostle of Jesus Christ.

Further, "And called me by His grace." This indicates three or four things. First, it indicates the source of Paul's salvation, the grace of God. Secondly, it indicates the peculiar power by which he was saved; the power of God's grace. Then it indicates the nature of the salvation; it is a gracious act. And does it not indicate the end of it "The Lord God is a Sun and Shield, He will give grace and glory; no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly." But He calls His people by His grace, and that indicates the source of salvation, which is God's free favor and sovereign mercy. Oh I have sometimes been melted—would that the melting were more frequent—under a consideration of the absolute sovereignty of Divine grace in my own

personal salvation! Pride—I cannot be proud as a saved sinner, for I am saved by grace. Stone my fellow creatures! I have not a stone to cast at any fellow creature; for I should have been in the depths of iniquity today, had it not been for undeserved mercy.

"Dissolved by Thy goodness, I fall to the ground,
And weep to the praise of the mercy I've found."

God might have withheld His mercy from me. There was no influence out of Himself that induced Him to save me. The reason of my salvation was in the breast of God, in the heart of Jehovah. He found the cause in His own everlasting love. What had Saul of Tarsus to present as a reason why God should save him? The blood of the saints was upon him; bitter enmity raged within ; he never mentioned the name of Jesus of Nazareth without feeling the deepest and bitterest contempt for that name ; and I think sometimes of what an old London minister used to say, "Jesus Christ saved Saul of Tarsus, it was just like Him to do so; but I would never have saved him." That was human and like sinful fallen man; but it is not like the God of grace and mercy. He called me by His grace. We must go to heaven as debtors, and also live as debtors here; for our own works are not once to be mentioned in connection with our salvation. And then, secondly, I want you to bear in mind that grace here indicates the nature of the power by which sinners are saved. God upholds all things by the word of His power, but He does not uphold all things by His gracious power. He made the world by power, not by gracious power. He blesses the springing of the earth; He has put power into the sun, which exercises an influence upon the world and upon the whole system of which it is the centre. These operations go on from day to day, and from year to year; but all that power, though it is of God, is not His gracious power, for that which saves sinners is grace. Omnipotence is in grace, and grace is in omnipotence. It is a power adapted to the sinner's mind, that arrests the heart, and produces a loathing of that which is naturally loved by sinful men. It transforms the sinner, and constitutes him a new creature; it crucifies him to the objects of his sinful love, and creates new tastes, new desires, new wishes, and new longings in his soul; so that although he is the same individual, he is a changed character; for he is saved by the grace Of God. And then, my dear friends, if you have been called by God's grace, your faces are towards heaven. Glory must follow grace. The grace of God in your hearts cannot be lost, and its operations upon you cannot become null and void. God's work will never be undone, the impressions made by grace can never be removed. "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance." In this dying world, where we are surrounded by the bitter circumstances of life,

how sweet a thought is this that we are going to heaven ; that our religion is of that nature, that it requires heaven to consummate it ! It cannot be finished in this world, and it cannot be left unfinished. It must be completed, not here, but there; not in this poor, dying state, but in a better world. Called by grace, not to occupy positions of uncertainty, not into a doubtful condition, but unto eternal salvation, being kept therein by God's mighty grace, until the end of life; and then called into eternity to possess all the bliss of being, for ever. Having been separated from our mother's womb, called by grace, and experienced a revelation of God's Son in us, we are going to rest, peace, and perfection on high.

Now one word more before I depart from this point, and that is this, that God's calls are always heard. He can make the sinner hear and obey also. He that is regenerated, and called by grace, is never left where he was, nor what he was. God is sure to overcome He never speaks nor works in vain. I do not care for the idea of a desire to save as applied to God. It is said, God desires you to do this, or that, or the other. Beloved friends, He calls effectually, and one hears and turns towards the God that calls him, and thus conversion follows His call, as I previously observed. When the regenerated believer is called by grace, and converted, he commences his journey towards heaven. He may be burdened, his heart may be broken, his eyes may be full of tears, he may be sorely distressed and deeply tempted; yet, having been regenerated and called and converted, he is now on his way to the heavenly world, and he feels that

“Through floods and flames, if Jesus leads,
I'll follow where he goes.”

Another thing that follows God's call is that the called one is justified in appropriating all that is good. "All things are yours, for ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." Now, have we been called? If so, the sweet promises of our God, and the precious doctrines of Divine grace, even all that God has treasured up in the person of His Son, are ours for ever. Take the whole volume of God, and press it to your hearts, for all the promises revealed therein are yours for ever, for God has called you by His grace.

Now, thirdly, the revelation. "It pleased God, who called me by His grace, to reveal His Son in me." It is a Divine revelation. It pleased God to reveal His Son. Some speak as if it were possible for the sinner to reveal Christ to himself, or possible for Sunday-school teachers and ministers of the Gospel to reveal Jesus Christ to the hearts of the people. My dear friends, a divine

revelation is a marvelous mystery and mercy; and just as you cannot command the sun to shine, so neither can you reveal Jesus Christ to your fellow creature, whatever powers you may possess. The natural sun must reveal himself, and God must reveal Himself to the heart, ere any true knowledge of Him can be possessed; therefore Paul ascribes all to His God, It pleased God to reveal His Son in me. Peculiar expression—"to reveal His Son in me;" not to me, God has revealed His Son to all, so far as the Bible is concerned; He has revealed Him unto the world in writing ; but He has not revealed Him in the hearts of all the world. All that read the Bible, read about Christ; and all that hear Gospel sermons hear about Him. This is an external revelation of Christ. But whilst the ear catches the sound, and the understanding is, perhaps, somewhat enlightened, the heart remains untouched, unfilled, unsanctified, and unsatisfied, without a special revelation by God. He that made the heart can reach it, and He that is the God of salvation can save it; and when He brought a light into your heart you could not put it out, and no power could quench it. You first saw you were a sinner, and then God came with the revelation of His Son; and this made Paul leap for joy, saying, "He loved me, and gave Himself for me." Thus the revelation is divine. It is internal. This revelation embraces new objects; but let me not be misunderstood here. Revelation is the uncovering of something that was concealed, and was riot known. Revelation is not creation. Objects revealed were in existence before a revelation of them takes place. Why, therefore, do you my that the objects revealed are new. In this way : if a person born blind should receive his sight, the sun which has been shining 6000 years would be a new object to him, but not new in itself. If one that was born deaf, and had never heard a sound, should have his ears opened, a clap of thunder, which is very common, would be new to him. And God's dear Son is in existence before He is seen and known. God regenerates the heart and makes it capable of seeing and appreciating Christ, and then He reveals His Son in that heart, and thus the objects seen are new. "Ah me!" "one is ready to say," I read the Bible before, but now it is a new book to me. I heard of Christ before I knew Him, but now be is a new Saviour. I used to hear about His salvation, hut now I see all in a new light; God has revealed His Son in me." This revelation becomes impressed upon the heart which is favored with it. All revelation is not impressed upon the mind; but if God reveals His Son, and mark this, in one's soul, it becomes impressed with the object revealed. Thus Christ is formed in you the hope of glory. A revelation impressed upon the heart, is a deep, an abiding, a living one. Not dead strokes drawn upon a dead heart, but living lines upon a living heart, drawn by the hand of the living God. All is life. "I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish." The heart is a living one, the lines written upon

it are living lines, the Son of God is a living Person. He is life itself. "This is the true God and eternal life." When a revelation of Him takes place, His image becomes stamped upon the heart, and He is thus formed within, the hope of glory, and the subject becomes a living Christian. What constitutes real Christianity? An approval of Christianity? No, but a revelation of God's Son in the heart; and if we have not been favored with this internal revelation, we are not true Christians. If Christ has been formed within, we are Christians indeed, and our sympathies are with our Lord. "Whom have I in heaven but Thee I and there is none upon the earth that I desire beside Thee."

Fourthly, the Apostle's confidence and assurance. I dare say the wish on my part is a carnal one, in fact, I think it is so. I will, however, give expression to it; I wish I were able to lead every child of God in

this house this morning into the position occupied by Paul when he penned these words. He was satisfied that he had been born naturally; God separated me from my mother's womb; no doubt existed as to his natural birth, and he was equally confident about his spiritual birth. Read on: "He called me by His grace." Paul was as satisfied concerning the second birth as he was concerning the first. I say, I wish I could lead all my hearers into that position. No one doubts his first or natural birth. Oh that every saint of God might be led to realize for himself very confidently, that he has been born again. I know there are many of God's people who are tried on that point. Because they cannot describe any particular circumstances connected with their regeneration; therefore they conclude they have not been born again. Because they cannot give dates and places in connection with their new birth, therefore they fear they have not spiritual life. Well, my dear friends, whatever your experience of doubts and fears may be, the time is coming when, having been called by grace, the revelation of Jesus Christ will be made by the Holy Spirit in your hearts, and all your darkness, suspense, and uncertainty will depart, If you have been called by grace, you are as truly a child of God as Abraham who is now before God's, throne.

What may we learn from the subject? Who knows the destiny of an infant 4 When Saul was born into this world, who in heaven or on earth thought that that little helpless infant, which was perhaps embraced by the father and rejoiced in by the mother, would become what he through grace divine did become I That he would sit at the feet of Gamaliel, become a stiff and strong Pharisee, go through the blood of the saints, and rejoice in it, and then become a praying penitent, trusting in the name of his Saviour, and a

preacher of the faith he once destroyed, and at last enter Rome, as a prisoner, and die there for Christ's sake, saying, " The time of my departure is at hand ; I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." Who could have thought that that little infant born in Tarsus was destined to become all that! You take your darling children in your arms, and press them to your lips and breast, but you know not what God may be pleased to do with them. Pray for your children, and I will pray with you for them, as I have prayed for my own and would again if I had others. Pray that God, having brought them into natural existence, would call them by His grace, and reveal His Son in them. To make them rich, healthy, and high in social position, may be very well as far as it goes; but an internal revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ is eternal salvation and life. The Lord command His blessing, for Christ's sake. Amen.