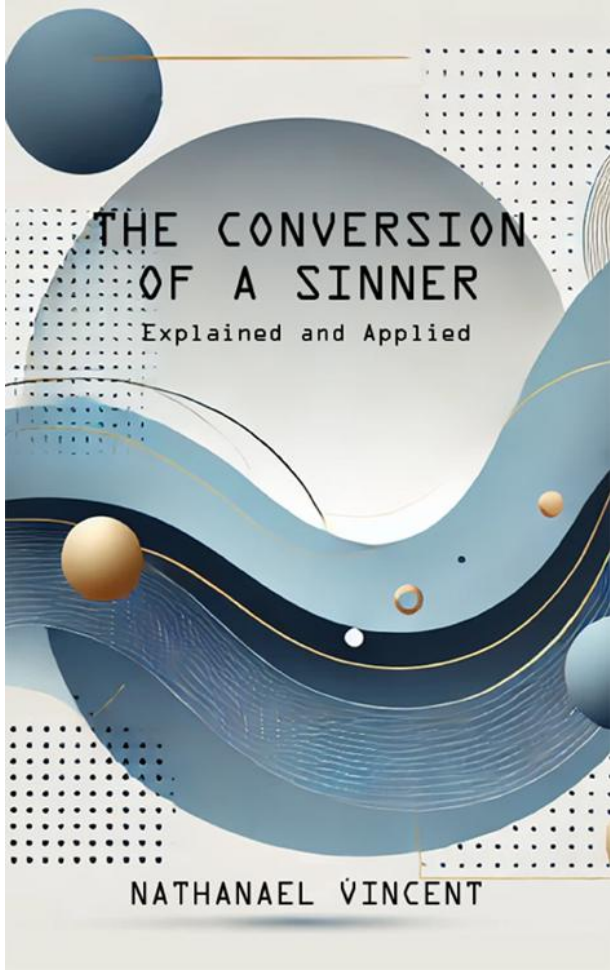




# THE CONVERSION OF A SINNER

Explained and Applied

NATHANAEL VINCENT



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# **THE CONVERSION OF A SINNER**

## **EXPLAINED AND APPLIED**

By Nathanael Vincent, M.A. Minister of the Gospel.

*From Ezekiel 33:11*

*"Turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?"*

A portion of this was preached some time ago at Savior's, Southwark.

### **The Day of Grace Discussed**

*From Luke 19:41-42*

*"If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong to thy peace! But now they are hid from thine eyes."*

By Nathanael Vincent, Minister of the Gospel.

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## **The Dedication**

To His Sacred and Most Glorious Majesty, the God of Heaven and Earth, the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, who is infinitely above the highest potentates and emperors of the world, as much as they are above their meanest slaves!

### **Almighty Lord!**

To Thee I dedicate my book, to whom I have devoted myself. Whatever is good therein is Thine own; and if any good is done by it, to Thee alone must the praise be ascribed. The instrument itself might well be ashamed and discouraged, were it not that Thou canst work as easily by weak means as by strong. Indeed, Thou dost sometimes choose the weak on purpose, that no flesh may glory, but that the excellency of the power may be of Thee alone.

It was Thy free and rich grace (which eternity itself will not be long enough to admire and adore) that had pity on me, who once lay as

polluted in my blood as any other, who had run so far in the broad way, and had sinned myself so near to everlasting destruction! But if I am not only made a convert, but also used as an instrument to convert others, then my obligation is heightened—though it is already infinitely vast—to show forth Thy praise.

It is the desire of my soul, O Lord, that Thy kingdom may be advanced and that the dominion which sin and Satan have usurped may be overthrown. Since Thy yoke is easy and Thy government so sweet and gracious, why should not Thy subjects be most numerous? Gird Thy sword upon Thy thigh, O Most Mighty One, and ride forth conquering and to conquer; and Thy right hand shall teach Thee terrible things. Let Thine arrows be sharp, and let Thy Word pierce like a two-edged sword. Let the whole world, whether by conversion or subversion—but especially by conversion—fall under Thee!

Thou art the God of the spirits of all flesh—is anything too hard for Thee? When the devil sinned against Thee and thereby became a devil, Thou didst easily cast him out of heaven and shackle him in chains of darkness. Canst Thou not as easily cast him out of those sinners' hearts which he has possessed and filled, and pull down all his strongholds? And as for sin, though it is so mighty a thing that Adam in his innocence was overcome by it, and the angels in heaven could not stand before it, yet Thou art able, and hast promised, to subdue it. Oh, show Thy power and grace! Since Thy mercy is so great, why should so few be partakers of it? Since Thy Son is able to save to the uttermost, why should so small a number be saved by Him? Since the New Jerusalem is so spacious, why should hell be filling so exceedingly fast? Oh, let Thy special love be more generally manifested! Let Thy healing and saving grace run in a much broader channel! Let Thy tents be enlarged, and let them stretch forth the curtains of Thy habitation! Let not so many souls be the devil's prey

—souls that are of greater value than the whole world and are capable of loving, admiring, and glorifying Thee forever! Answer, O my God, such desires as these, so far as they are consistent with the secrets of Thy counsel and Thy ways and judgments, which are unsearchable and past finding out!

Let Thy Gospel continue in this land of England! Let the Sun of Righteousness shine forth in greater strength and glory, dispelling the mists of error and chasing away the night of ignorance! Let not the sea be fuller of water than this land is of the knowledge of Thy glory! As long as there is a Church on earth, let there be a Church in England! And let the lamp of Thy Word shine clearly among us, as long as the sun and the moon shine in the firmament!

Thou who hast the hearts of all in Thy hand, incline some to read these following sermons; and let all who read be the better for them. Let them understand, in this their day, the things that concern their peace! Let them obey Thy call to turn before Thou resolvest to call and cry after them no more! Oh, let none grow blinder by the light shining in their eyes! Let none grow harder by the means that were designed to soften them! Let not the Word of Life become to any a deadly savor! Let some souls date their conversion from their reading of this book; and let those who are converted be further strengthened by it.

Encourage Thy servant more and more by making his labors more abundantly successful, who has resigned and given up himself to Thee, and whose greatest honor and truest happiness is to be—

**Thine forever,**  
*Nathanael Vincent*

# THE EPISTLE TO THE READER

## **Reader!**

As soon as you have looked upon these words, immediately look away again—and look up to heaven!

How can you read with any profit unless the Father of lights opens your eyes and grants you an understanding heart? He can show you wonders in the most common truths—things you were previously unacquainted with. Even those doctrines most frequently preached may yet further inform your judgment, but I am certain your affections need to be stirred up to a greater sense of their weight and importance.

It has moved me to sorrow, and almost to indignation, to see how many truths—because they are often (as is necessary) insisted upon—are despised by some professors. And yet, alas, these very truths, though often heard, are not known as they ought to be. As to any heart-affecting and operative knowledge, those who imagine themselves so intelligent are, in reality, grossly ignorant. Their consciences are dull, and they have never been brought under the power of the Word preached to them. Duties, though plainly and frequently pressed upon them, are neglected; and sins, which they commonly hear reproved, are nevertheless continually indulged.

You who cannot bear a discourse unless your fancy is entertained and your itching ears gratified—what just reason have you to question whether your nature has truly been renewed? For those who are born again desire the sincere milk of the Word (though it

contains little of human embellishment) so that they may grow thereby.

**Reader!** Are you grossly ignorant and ungodly? How much, then, does it concern you to use the means appointed for gaining knowledge? Without knowledge, your heart cannot be good, nor can you be in a safe condition. You have gone astray—oh, turn immediately, lest the next step you take leads to the grave and to hell! It is small security to be unaware of your danger; it is a pitiful happiness to be ignorant of your misery, for this very ignorance increases your danger and makes your destruction all the more certain. Sin is such a thing that no one has ever regretted parting with—therefore, be persuaded to deny your former ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present evil world.

If you are a professor but not a practitioner of religion, consider this: it is not a feigned conversion, but a turning of the whole heart, upon which life is promised and assured. If you have a form of godliness without its power, what does this prove but that there is more of the atheist in you? Surely, you think the Lord does not see, or that He will not punish—or at least, that He will be partial toward you. I wonder how you dare so often come into His presence, so near His ark, where His jealousy burns the hottest, and so frequently engage in duties of worship, all the while allowing some sin or vanity to keep your heart away from Him.

But if you are truly converted, then draw nearer to God, and grow more and more like Him. Grace is so excellent a thing that you should be restlessly importunate for a greater measure of it. The more you pursue the knowledge of the Lord, the better you will love

Him, and the more unwilling you will be to depart from Him and return to folly.

Conversion is a nail that the prophets of old hammered upon continually. Our Lord and His apostles sought to drive this nail home. And of late, God has not only sent His ministers to press this matter, but He has taken up the hammer of judgments to drive it in. Now, the greater the resistance we make, the more blows we must expect from that hammer.

We have lately seen days of great calamity and affliction, and yet, in some sense, they have also been days of grace. Temporal judgments have been sent so that spiritual mercies might be prized and eternal judgments prevented. God has had a design of love at the bottom of all His severities. Let us submit to it, for if we still walk contrary to Him, He has threatened in fury to chastise us sevenfold more than He has already done. And I tremble to think of the judgments that would be seven times worse than the plague and fire. But if we learn wisdom and instruction by His correction, and turn to Him who has smitten us, we shall find the expressions of His favor and loving-kindness far greater than any signs of His displeasure.

**N. V.**

## **The Conversion of a Sinner**

**Ezekiel 33:11 (Latter Part)**

*"Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?"*

It is not easy to determine whether mankind displayed greater folly in departing from God at first, or whether his folly is now more inexcusable in refusing to return to Him. At first, man knew by blessed experience how good it was to be near his Maker, to enjoy the light of His countenance in the state of innocence, and yet he dared to turn away. Now he feels the effects of his apostasy, for sin has burdened him with countless miseries, calamities, and vexations—yet how difficult it is to persuade him to come back again!

The children of men are easily induced to yield to Satan, as if it were in their best interest to surrender themselves into the hands of a murderer. But the Lord, besides whom there is no Savior, may call—He may call frequently and earnestly—yet call in vain; for their hearts are dull, their ears are deaf, and they refuse to listen. It can never be sufficiently lamented that sin has made so many madmen in the world. Life and death, blessing and cursing, are set before them—yet they choose death rather than life. The most astonishing and intolerable curses are embraced, while blessings of the highest and most enduring nature are rejected.

*"Proh superi! quantum mortalia pectora caecae noctis habent!"*

(Alas, ye heavens! How much the hearts of mortals are possessed by blind darkness!)

Thus, the Lord expostulates not only regarding sin but also concerning its punishment. He does not merely ask, *Why will you venture to transgress?* but also, *Why are you so eager to die, O house of Israel?*

At the beginning of this chapter, the Lord appoints the prophet as a watchman over the house of Israel. He is commanded to lift up his voice when he sees the revenging sword drawn and coming to cut off the ungodly for their wickedness. If he fails to warn the wicked to turn and live, he becomes complicit in their death, and their blood will be required at his hand. Being thus commissioned, he is also instructed to silence the mouths of evildoers who cavil and contend against their Maker, charging God foolishly.

There was, it seems, a controversy concerning where the blame for sinners' destruction should be laid. The house of Israel, with great boldness and presumption, laid the blame upon God, declaring that *the way of the Lord is not equal*. But the God of mercy and truth vindicates Himself from this unjust accusation, asserting that if sinners were not willfully bent upon their own ruin, they would be spared from destruction. By His own life, He swears that the death of the wicked is not pleasing to Him. Therefore, in the text, His voice is loud and repeated: "*Turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways!*" And the blame is laid where it rightly belongs—upon men's own wills, which are the cause of their own woe. "*Why will ye die, O house of Israel?*"

These words express a deeply passionate and serious call. In them, observe:

1. **The persons called**—*The house of Israel.*
2. **The action to which they are called**—*They are called to turn.*
3. **The urgency of this call**—*It is doubled for emphasis: "Turn ye, turn ye."*
4. **The direction of their turning**—*They must turn from their evil ways.*

5. **The argument used to persuade them**—*A plea full of divine rhetoric: "Why will ye die?"*

## **Without Turning, Death Is Certain**

Satan may say to mankind, as he once said to their first parents, “*Ye shall not surely die*”—but this will prove false. “*The wicked shall be turned into hell*” (Psalm 9:17), all those who refuse to turn to God. Every evil way leads in that direction. There are many paths in the broad way, but they all end in death—the second death. Therefore, the Lord is represented as pitying sinners and pleading with them:

*"Why will ye die?"*

Is it because I am swift in executing vengeance? You know I am slow to anger, and by experience you have found it so—else my wrath would long since have broken forth upon you. Or is it because I am inexorable, unwilling to be entreated when provoked? No, for I have declared myself “*ready to forgive, and plenteous in mercy unto all that call upon*” me (Psalm 86:5). Or is it because you have never heard of the way to recover life and escape the punishment you have deserved? How often have I sent my prophets to bring you to faith, to repentance, and to obedience? Yet still, your neck is like an iron sinew—you are resolved to rush headlong into sin. If you perish, you have only yourselves to blame. If you are destroyed, it is because you have chosen destruction.

## **Three Doctrines from the Text**

1. Evil ways are the ways of death.

2. The great reason why men die, and die forever, is because they will.
3. The Lord calls again and again upon sinners to turn from their evil ways and live.

## **Doctrine 1: Evil Ways Are the Ways of Death**

As they are morally evil, so they are also destructive to those who walk in them. These ways may seem right, but that does not make them any less—rather, it makes them more—pernicious. *“There is a way that seemeth right unto a man; but the end thereof are the ways of death”* (Proverbs 14:12).

### **1. Evil Ways Often Accelerate Temporal Death**

This was the sentence pronounced upon man at the fall: *“Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return”* (Genesis 3:19). And how often does sin hasten the execution of that sentence? Some are not allowed to live out half their days—*“Bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days”* (Psalm 55:23)—because they live so wickedly. Those whose carcasses fell in the wilderness might have lived to possess the promised land, but at times they murmured, at times they committed idolatry, at times they engaged in fornication—until at last, the oath was sworn that they would not enter Canaan (Numbers 14:22-23).

How do the intemperate and unclean waste their strength? How many diseases do they bring upon themselves? And though utterly unprepared for judgment, they rush forward to their departure from this world, to stand before Him who judges righteously.

## **2. Evil Ways Separate from God, Who Is Our Life**

Spiritually, we are dead even while we live if we walk in them. The Ephesians are said to have been “*dead in trespasses and sins*” while they followed “*the course of this world*” and lived according to “*the lusts of their flesh*” (Ephesians 2:2-3). If the life of the soul consists in being united to God, in being animated and directed by His Spirit, then iniquity—“*which separates between God and us*” (Isaiah 59:2)—must surely be a deadly thing.

## **3. Evil Ways Lead to Eternal Death in Hell**

These are the beaten paths to damnation, the way that leads to the second death, which is everlasting. No one ever entered hell except through these ways, and there is not one who continues in them without conversion who will not ultimately arrive there. The enemy on the pale horse brings destruction enough—but when hell follows immediately after him, *alas*, what hand can be strong? What heart can endure?

This *second death* is called by one of the Fathers “*the death that is immortal*” because the sinner is never freed from his pain. He is always tortured but never entirely consumed. The fire burns continually but never fully devours those upon whom it preys; the worm gnaws without ceasing, yet is never satisfied (Mark 9:44).

## **A Plea to the Sinner**

Whither away, besotted and blinded soul? Where is it that you are hastening with such reckless speed? Do you imagine that you are pursuing gain, delight, and happiness—that you are flying rather

than running toward them? Alas, no! It is in the broad way that you are so furiously driving. You are not gaining, but losing; not finding pleasure, but misery; not securing happiness, but suffering—yes, the very extremity of suffering!

Oh, stop your course and go no further! Leave this lower path! “*The way of life is above to the wise, that he may depart from hell beneath*” (Proverbs 15:24).

You see in what respects evil ways are the ways of death. Now, the righteousness of God in punishing with death those who persist in these ways will be evident if the following considerations are taken into account.

1. These ways are expressly forbidden by Him who is the supreme Lawgiver, who has power both to save and to destroy. For so lowly a creature as man to affront and despise that Majesty and Authority, which is infinitely above him, justly deserves an infinite punishment. Moreover, the Lord offers Himself to the sinner if he will forsake his evil ways and thoughts. Now, if the sinner rejects that offer and prefers not only the empty world but the vilest lusts before the blessed God, let reason judge whether it is not just that he should be eternally separated from Him. And this *poena damni*—the loss of God—is most properly the death spoken of; indeed, it is the very hell of hell.
2. Sinners are threatened with death. If, therefore, they willfully venture upon that which brings them under the sentence of this threatening, it is only just that they should suffer for their presumption. They have been forewarned to flee from the wrath to come; but if they take no warning, that wrath will rightly overtake them. They cannot plead ignorance, either of their Master’s will or of the penalty that follows their rebellion against

it. How often have those who enjoy the light of the Gospel been informed that it is the will of God that they should sorrow for sin and rend their hearts! That it is the will of God that they should believe in His Son! That it is the will of God, even their sanctification (1 Thessalonians 4:3)! How often have they been forewarned of the many stripes that must be endured by those who continue in willful disobedience? It is not unjust, then, that since they made the Lord a liar by their unbelief, He should vindicate His truth and cause them to feel those plagues and torments of which they were warned thousands of times—warnings they had neither faith to believe nor fear to regard.

3. As sinners are threatened because of their evil ways, so they are shown the way of life and peace and are earnestly pressed to walk in it. Assisting and strengthening grace is offered to them. But if they neither regard the glory and immortality that lies at the end of the way nor the help and grace available to them along the way, and instead prefer *the paths of destruction and misery* (as they are called in Romans 3:16), they do indeed wrong their own souls; yet God is righteous in destroying them.

The only use I shall make of this doctrine is to caution you against these evil ways that are the ways of death. You who, by grace, have left them—take heed lest you decline toward them again. It has cost the saints dearly when they have stepped aside; their falls have defiled them and broken their bones. And you who still resolve to walk in these ways—at last, open your eyes and see where you are going! Upon reading these lines, stop without delay, lest sudden death, sudden destruction, and sudden damnation come upon you, and there be no possibility of escape (1 Thessalonians 5:3).

1. Let not the profit of these ways blind you. Riches are deceitful; they appear to be what they are not, and while we eagerly pursue them, we are deceived and cheated of far greater riches. We miss that *treasure in heaven that will never fail* (Luke 12:33). Be not deluded by unrighteous Mammon. Satisfaction, ease, and contentment may be promised, but you will be repaid with trouble and vexation. Riches are likened by our Lord to thorns—partly because they choke the good seed of the Word, and partly because they pierce those who rest upon them with many sorrows. Take the balances of the sanctuary and weigh the gain you obtain by walking in your evil ways against the loss you both now suffer and will sustain. Then it will be evident that the pleas of Satan and the heart for profit are utterly unreasonable. You gain the earth, but you lose grace; you gain gold, but you lose God; you gain a little of the world, which you can keep only for a very little while, but you lose your soul and an eternity of glory.
2. Let not the pleasure of these evil ways ensnare you. The pleasures of sin usually delight only the more brutish part of man. How much, then, does one who has a rational soul degrade himself by pursuing pleasures common even to beasts? Solomon had an abundance of them. *“Whatever my eyes desired, I kept not from them; I withheld not my heart from any joy”* (Ecclesiastes 2:10). Yet he found them so base, so low, so unsuitable, that in the midst of them he cried out, *“All is vanity and vexation of spirit”* (Ecclesiastes 2:11). Pleasures are but delightful dreams—but how short they are! How soon do affliction, death, and, if not repented of, hell itself, awaken us! Those who are *“lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God”* (2 Timothy 3:4) are most inconsiderate in their choices, caring not what they embrace or what they refuse. Pleasures are the bait that conceals sin, causing men to swallow it with eagerness; they

are the fatal potion that stupefies the soul, rendering it senseless and helpless in the face of extreme danger. They are the subtle yet strong cords by which Satan draws men down to the chambers of death. Indeed, they are the very fuel that feeds the burning lake. *“By how much she hath glorified herself and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her”* (Revelation 18:7). Oh, how will the voluptuous one day suffer for all their pleasures!

3. Let not the multitude of those who walk in these evil ways embolden and harden you. Lot walked alone in the way of righteousness, though *Sodom was generally defiled by an ungodly conversation* (2 Peter 2:7). He would not *follow a multitude to do evil* (Exodus 23:2). He who said, *“Strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it”* (Matthew 7:14), surely never intended that His disciples should follow the broad and beaten path of the world.

Sinner, do not deceive yourself with this thought: *“I do what others do, and I shall fare as well as they.”* Indeed, you and they shall fare alike—but that means being turned into hell for your wickedness. It will be no comfort to have companions in your misery; rather, among the damned, there will be a tormenting grief and indignation at the sight of one another, remembering how you were, in effect, *incarnate devils* to one another’s souls, spurring one another on to destruction. Perhaps it was for this reason that the rich man in *Luke 16* was so unwilling that his brothers should come to the place of torment. If they were damned for the very sins in which he had played a part, their company in hell would have added to his woe.

Here on earth, men say, *“The more, the merrier,”* but in hell, it will be, *“The more, the sadder.”* When God has gathered all His enemies in one place, with none of His people mingled among them, then His wrath will be fully stirred, and all the vials of His fury will be poured upon them.

I have now finished with the first doctrine: that evil ways are the ways of death.

## **Doctrine 2**

The second doctrine is this: The great reason why men die and die forever is because they will. They choose to be the servants of sin, though death is the only wage they will certainly receive for all their toilsome and laborious service. Sinners will not be purged. *“Woe unto thee, O Jerusalem! Wilt thou not be made clean? When shall it once be?”* (Jeremiah 13:27). They will not be gathered under the wing of Christ, though that alone is the place of refuge from both the rage of Satan and the wrath of God. *“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen gathereth her brood under her wings, and ye would not!”* (Matthew 23:37).

Indeed, the wills of many who have long despised the admonitions and calls of Moses and the prophets are so desperately inclined toward sin that, even if they themselves witnessed the flames and torments that others suffer, they still would not be persuaded to forsake it. *“Nay, father Abraham, but if one went to them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead”* (Luke 16:30-31).

My purpose in opening this doctrine will be, first, to demonstrate its truth—that men die because they will. Secondly, to show that the inability of men to do good, as so often spoken of in Scripture, does not contradict this doctrine.

## **Arguments Demonstrating That Men's Own Wills Are the Cause of Their Death and Perdition**

### **1. The Natural Corruption and Depravity of the Human Will**

Where does this corruption lie but in the will's departure from God, the fountain of life and peace, and its inclination toward evil? The sinner—woe unto him—calls that which is evil *good* and imagines to be *sweet* what will prove as bitter and poisonous as the gall of asps. The Pelagians may liken the will of man to a pure virgin, claiming that it remained uncorrupted after the first apostasy, but Scripture and experience both prove otherwise. It is in the will that original sin most visibly manifests itself. He who does not understand that his heart is "*deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked*" (Jeremiah 17:9) is utterly deceived and wholly unacquainted with himself.

What unbelief, what pride, what alienation from the life of God, what enmity against the commandment—which is *holy, just, and good* (Romans 7:12)—resides in the will of the natural man! The will, being so deeply corrupted and exercising such dominion over man's actions, must inevitably resist conversion to God and holiness, which it so greatly abhors. Consequently, the will has a significant role in the perdition of the children of men.

## **2. The Justice of God's Reproofs and Wrath**

Certainly, God would not so sharply rebuke them, nor would His anger so burn against them, if they truly had a sincere will to do good but merely lacked the power to perform it. When the Lord inflicted judgments upon His ancient people, He spoke of their obstinacy, their refusal to hearken, and their unwillingness to be reclaimed. This He did to vindicate the equity of His severe dealings with them.

*“Yet the Lord testified against Israel, and against Judah, by all the prophets, and by all the seers, saying, Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statutes... Notwithstanding they would not hear, but hardened their necks, like the neck of their fathers, that did not believe in the Lord their God” (2 Kings 17:13-14).*

Because of their willful disobedience, God's anger was justly poured out upon them:

*“Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of His sight” (2 Kings 17:18).*

## **Proving That Man's Inability to Do Good Does Not Contradict This Doctrine**

I must now prove that the inability of men to do good, as often mentioned in Scripture, does not negate the fact that their sin and misery are to be laid at the door of their own will. The Holy Ghost, in order to humble the children of men, to overthrow their confidence in their own power and righteousness, and to bring them to that confession, *“Surely, in the Lord have I righteousness and strength”*

(Isaiah 45:24), repeatedly declares that man, in his sinful and degenerate state, is unable to do that which is spiritually good.

Thus, we are said to be:

- *“Without strength”* (Romans 5:6).
- *“Not sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God”* (2 Corinthians 3:5).
- *“Faint and without might”* (Isaiah 40:29).
- *“Without me ye can do nothing”* (John 15:5).

However, though we lack the power to do good, our wills remain to be blamed for the evil we commit. It must not be supposed that the Scripture speaks of man's inability to do good in order to provide sinners with an excuse for their evil. Rather, this truth is pressed upon them to drive them to Christ, who alone can strengthen them to do all things. *“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me”* (Philippians 4:13).

It is true that man is unable—but at the same time, he is also unwilling—to do what God requires for his own welfare. The reason he continues in sin and perishes by it is not merely because he cannot convert himself, but also, and chiefly, because he is unwilling to be converted. This will be further demonstrated in the following particulars.

- Sinful man imagines himself able to turn from his evil ways; he defers his repentance as if he could turn to God at a moment's warning. Now, since he does not do what he thinks he can, his own will must be the impediment, and it is this that he must blame if he perishes.

- Sinful man will not do what he is actually able to perform. He has one talent, but he will not trade with it. Many sins that expose him to wrath and vengeance he might abstain from if he chose, but alas! he is voluntarily a slave to them and delights in this servitude. The adulterer willfully goes to the harlot's house; the unrighteous worldling willfully seeks dishonest gain. Therefore, it follows that such men willfully destroy themselves. A natural man can do that which is good as to the matter, though he fails in the manner of doing it. He can pray, hear, and read the Word; yet he willfully omits these duties and thus willfully subjects himself to the curse threatened upon his neglect. He will not do what he truly can; and surely, if his power were enlarged, it would not be used. He who can well spare it and yet refuses to give a penny to the poor—can we not conclude that, even if he could spare it, he would still be unwilling to give a pound? In like manner, a natural man who will not do what little he can to be saved would not do more were his power greater.
- Sinful man is even grieved that he is able to do so much; he wishes that he were totally impotent so that it might serve as an excuse for him. This reveals the wickedness of his will. Furthermore, he will not use the means by which grace and strength from heaven are conveyed. He will not wait upon God, nor call upon Him, nor seek Him for the fulfillment of the promises made in the gracious covenant. Nay, he willfully resists the Spirit when He comes to work upon him—he would rather be left alone in his sin. This is the language of the ungodly: *“They say unto God, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways”* (Job 21:14). Though the wicked may cavil, claiming that they lack power, it is their want of will to be turned and live that is their great ruin. And all those high

thoughts and reasonings against God—as though He were a hard Master, as though His ways were not equal—oh, how ashamed will they be of them on the great day! When conscience shall rise up against them and, in bitter earnest, rebuke them: *He was often warned and called upon, but would not turn that he might have life.*

The Application follows.

Use 1. Of Information in these particulars.

1. Do men die forever because they will? Then who art thou, O man, that chargest God with thy destruction? Surely, herein thou chargest God foolishly; as He delights not in thy sin, so neither in thy death. The malefactor must not be angry with the Judge for passing a sentence of condemnation upon him, but he ought to blame himself for doing that for which he deserves to be condemned. How often has the Lord called, but thou hast refused; how often has He stretched forth His hand, all the day long, but all the day long thou hast been disobedient and gainsaying? (Rom. 10. ult.) How speechless will this make thee when He comes to judge the world in righteousness?
2. Do men die forever because they will? Then the death of the wicked is most just and righteous. It is only fitting that the willing slaves of sin, who would not become the Lord's freemen, should be fettered in chains of darkness. The offender who refuses a pardon offered justly—and indeed doubly deserves to have judgment executed, both because of his offense and because he slights mercy—resembles the patient who thrusts away the physician who would heal him of a sore distemper; and the sinner who will not turn to God, who rejects the Lord Jesus,

who is able both to pardon and to heal him, though he perish and be condemned, is not in the least wronged.

3. Do men die forever because they will? What a torture it will be to them in Hell to think that it was their own willfulness which brought them thither. Such reflections will be as poisoned daggers piercing the very soul of a damned reprobate. What ailed me to prove a devil to myself! What ailed me to side with Satan, thereby bringing about my own destruction! What frenzy was this, to make the whips myself with which I am to be lashed—to kindle the flames with my own hands—in which I must dwell and burn forever!

Use 2. Shall be of Caution: Take heed of willful sinning, which is the high road leading to death. Take heed also lest you content yourselves with a seeming willingness to escape destruction.

1. Let me caution you against willful sinning. The more the will is in transgression, the more it provokes; therefore David is so earnest to be kept from presumptuous sins which he knew, because they were too great to be presumed (Psal. 19. 13). In a land and time of light, take heed of being willfully ignorant. In the midst of help and encouragement toward duty, take heed of sloth, which is a fault of the will; but be a follower of those who, through faith and patience, inherit the promises (Heb. 6. 12). Let no sin be loved, pleaded for, or lived in; let not its pleasing taste cause thee to venture upon any forbidden fruit; let not the fine-coloured skin make thee embrace any serpent in thy bosom, which will sting thee to death.
2. Let me caution you against that which is only a seeming willingness to turn from sin and escape destruction.

1. An idle, unindustrious will is only a seeming will. A lazy wish to be saved, where there is no earnest use of the means of salvation, signifies nothing but that you are grossly ignorant and stupid—ignorant of the worth of salvation and foolishly insensitive to your own danger.
  
2. A will for the future is only a seeming will. Most who persist in their evil ways claim a will to abandon them hereafter; but this only shows their present unwillingness. And if you are backward to turn now, you are likely hereafter to be even more averse. When God is further departed from you, when Satan has built stronger holds in you, when conscience grows more dull, when custom in sin has doubled the strength and vehemence of your natural inclination toward it—alas! how many have died and been taken away in their iniquities, who were as fully resolved upon repenting hereafter as any that are now alive! Take heed of this rock upon which so many have split and been cast away forever. God's will is for the present; He says, "Today, if you will hear My voice, harden not your hearts" (Heb. 3. 7, 8). But if now, when God is willing to give you life, you are unwilling, then He may be hereafter unwilling when you would fain have it: when death and destruction come upon you as a whirlwind, He has threatened that you shall call upon Him for life and salvation, but it shall be far from you; you shall seek Him early, but you shall not find Him, if now you hate knowledge and do not choose the fear of the Lord (Prov. 1. 28, 29).
  
3. A will based on a mistake is only a seeming will. Those whom our Lord likens to the stony ground heard the word with joy and were willing to embrace it, yet they did not

consider the cross and persecution; that caused them to fall away. Many seem willing to be converts, but they do not sit down and count the cost of conversion. And when once they are informed that they must deny themselves, let go all their affections immediately and also relinquish all their possessions when standing in competition with the Lord Jesus—when they are told that they must even give a bill of divorce to their Herodias, that they must defy every lust, however delightful or profitable it may seem—and that they must watch, pray, and walk with the greatest care, fervency, and circumspection, that they may take the Kingdom of Heaven with a holy violence, as it were by storm, else they will fall short and lose the crown. Oh, then they cry out, "These are hard sayings; who can hear them?"

### **Use 3. Of Exhortation**

Since men die because they will, let me persuade you to consent that your wills may be renewed. Man has no worse enemy than his own will until a change is wrought in it. And that this change may be effected, observe these directions:

- 1. Judge yourselves because of your natural perverseness;** until you are sensible of this, you cannot be rightly humbled. That you have sinned so much and for so long should deeply affect and afflict you before God; but that you have a will to sin ten thousand times more—were it not for the restraints of grace—nay, to sin unto eternity, oh, what confusion and sorrow should this cause!
- 2. Study the deceitfulness of the Tempter and the world;** then your hearts will not be so easily taken by their baits or

drawn away from God. The world is vain and vexing, and Satan is both a liar and a murderer. You have little reason to yield to either.

3. **Set before your eyes the blessedness of life eternal and the misery of everlasting death**, that you may choose life and the way that leads to it.
4. **Be fervent in prayer**, that the Lord, according to His promise, would give you a new heart and work in you to will according to His good pleasure (Ezekiel 36:26; Philippians 2:13). And if He causes your hearts to desire grace and glory, He will satisfy those desires He has raised in you. If He works in you to will and to do, then, despite all opposition, you shall work out your own salvation, and an abundant entrance shall be granted to you into the everlasting kingdom.

Thus concludes the second doctrine: The reason why men die, and die forever, is because they will.

## **Doctrine 3**

The third doctrine follows: The Lord calls and calls again upon sinners to turn from their evil ways and live. *“Turn ye, turn ye,”* saith God in the text.

The matter of conversion is not something that man first thinks of; indeed, he would never think of it, nor be persuaded to it, if the Lord did not call after him and make that call effectual. We read in Scripture of sensible and awakened penitents crying and begging to be turned, but these cries are nothing more than echoes of God's voice and call, which went before them.

In handling this doctrine, I shall:

- 1. Show how God calls upon sinners to turn to Him.**
- 2. Explain why He does so.**
- 3. Expound the nature of this conversion or turning.**
- 4. Conclude with application.**

In the first place, I am to show how God calls upon sinners to turn to Him. This He does in several ways.

- 1. He calls upon them from Mount Ebal.**

This was the mount from which the curses were pronounced. In His Word, He declares the cursedness and wretchedness of the unconverted state. He sends the Law as a schoolmaster to teach them a solemn lesson—that because of their frequent transgressions, they stand on the very brink of eternal misery. His purpose is to awaken them and stop them in their destructive course, that they may not flatter themselves with false hopes of peace while continuing to walk after the imagination of their evil hearts.

This voice of the Lord through the Law is loud and terrible, spoken expressly to rouse and startle those who are dead in sleep. When the Law was delivered, *“there was a burning with fire, blackness, darkness, and tempest, the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard entreated that the word should not be spoken to them anymore. And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake”* (Hebrews 12:18-19, 21).

And if the manner in which the Law was delivered was so dreadful, how much more dreadful will be the manner in which the Law will be executed upon those who have violated it? The fire and darkness at Mount Sinai were nothing in comparison with the fire of Hell and the

blackness of darkness there. Upon the impenitent wicked, the Lord has threatened to “*rain snares, fire and brimstone, and a horrible tempest; this shall be the portion of their cup*” (Psalm 11:6).

Truly, this lesson from the Law is necessary, that we may attain a true knowledge and understanding of sin. When we have stood at the foot of Mount Ebal and Sinai, and have heard that sin is the great hindrance to all blessings, loading us instead with curses of every kind—temporal, spiritual, and everlasting—this is the way to cure our unreasonable love for it and to make us fear and tremble, because we have given it such place in our lives.

## **2. God calls upon sinners from Mount Gerizim to turn to Him.**

From this mount, of old, the blessings were proclaimed. He not only reveals the wrath that is near at hand for those who continue in iniquity, but He also sets before them a view of mercy, though yet afar off—mercy that shall be brought near upon their forsaking of wickedness.

To the unrighteous man who turns from his sinful ways and thoughts, mercy and abundant pardon are promised: “*Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon*” (Isaiah 55:7).

This call of the Gospel from Mount Gerizim is like the still voice that follows after the strong wind, the fire, and the earthquake. How full of encouragement are those words: “*Turn unto me, saith the Lord of Hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the Lord of Hosts*” (Zechariah 1:3). “*O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God, for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. Thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thy help*

*found. I will heal thy backslidings, and will love thee freely, though thou deservest nothing but my anger and my hatred” (Hosea 14:1, 4).*

Satan, by tempting us to sin, has taken away our blessing from us. Yet we ought not to despair, for the Lord has more than one blessing. That which the first Adam forfeited, the second Adam was sent to restore: *“Unto you first, God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities” (Acts 3:26).*

The Lord, as it were, takes sinners up into Mount Gerizim; He shows them His Kingdom and its glories. He declares to them His store of blessings and the inestimable benefits which His Son has purchased—justification, adoption, sanctification, and glory. He assures them that *all shall be theirs* if they will but turn indeed. And truly, these are offers far greater than anything Satan has ever made or ever could make.

### **3. God calls upon sinners to turn by the most passionate pleadings and pressing exhortations.**

His design in exhorting with sinners is to make them aware of their unreasonableness in pursuing deceitful vanities, fulfilling their defiling lusts, and refusing to return to Him—who alone can both sanctify them from their defilements and satisfy them with His all-sufficiency.

He reasons with Judah: *“Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labor for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto*

*me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David” (Isaiah 55:2-3).*

The Lord pleads with the ungodly through the ministry of the Word in this manner:

What! Though you are told of sin’s deceitful, defiling, and damnable nature—will you still embrace it and hold it fast, to My dishonor and your own destruction? Though you are forewarned of the heat and heaviness of My anger, will you not flee from it? Though you have been so often informed that Hell will be no place of ease, will you still insist on rushing toward it and burning there forever? Though you are told of a Kingdom that cannot be moved, will you not be moved with desire after it? Will you not be persuaded to strive for it?

Are grace and glory of no worth at all? Is not a Savior to be prized by those who, through sin, have enslaved and lost themselves and stand in danger of being lost for eternity?

Consider these things and show yourselves men, O ye transgressors.

Thus, the Lord pleads that He may prevail with sinners—for their own good.

#### **4. God calls upon sinners to turn by the examples of others and by the voice of the rod upon themselves.**

The ungodly are very prone to observe bad examples in order to imitate them; but it is their duty to take notice when exemplary punishments are inflicted upon others, that they may be warned and afraid to follow them any longer in wickedness. When we behold others plagued for the very sins of which we ourselves are guilty, the Lord calls us to recognize the heinousness of our own iniquities in

the judgments that others have suffered before our eyes. And we may justly expect that like sins will have like ends if we continue in provocation. These examples are set before us *on purpose* that we might not lust after evil things, as it is written, "*Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted*" (1 Corinthians 10:6), and that we might be admonished to turn out of those paths which have led others to ruin.

But especially when the rod falls upon our own backs, God calls upon us in a more direct and sensible way to turn to Him. The design of the rod is to embitter sin—both to the flesh and to the conscience—so that it may no longer be imagined as delightful, seeing it is the procuring cause of every stripe we endure. The rod has a voice, as well as the Word, and it is wisdom to hear it. When affliction is laid upon the sinner's loins, the Lord speaks in such a manner as this:

*"Hast thou not procured this unto thyself, in that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God?"* (Jeremiah 2:17).

To turn from iniquity is to seek thine own peace. Let the pain of the rod (which is yet nothing compared to the pains of Hell) convince thee that sin is not to be admired for its pleasure. At present, thou art chastised with whips; but if thou art incorrigible and dost continue in sin yet more and more, assuredly, at last, thou shalt be lashed with scorpions.

#### **5. God calls upon sinners to turn to Him by the internal voice and motions of His Spirit.**

The Spirit often suggests concerning the sinful and deceitful way: "*This is not the way; turn out of it.*" But concerning the way of holiness, which leads to God, He says: "*This is the way; walk ye in it, and turn neither to the right hand nor to the left*" (Isaiah 30:21).

All other calls will be of little purpose unless the Spirit accompanies them. Without His conviction, the denunciation of curses will not awaken. Without His illumination, the blessings offered will be undervalued. Without His power setting an edge upon them, even the most passionate expostulations will have no efficacy to persuade. The loudest word will be no more regarded than if it were but a whisper. Unless the Spirit joins in teaching and instruction, the rod will be mute and ineffective; neither personal afflictions nor national judgments will teach anything.

It is, therefore, dangerous to be heedless of and to resist the Holy Ghost, since the efficacy of all means depends upon Him.

There is a twofold call of the Spirit: the more common and the more special.

1. **The more common call;** in this sense, many are called who are never truly converted. It was this common work of the Spirit that made Felix tremble, that brought Agrippa within a step of Christianity, and that caused Herod to do many things. Multitudes of unregenerate ones have felt the waters stirred, the Holy Ghost moving them to conversion and readily offering His aid and assistance. Perhaps for a while, they were even led by Him. But then, there was some lust or vanity they refused to forsake when He commanded them to abandon it. They would not turn their spiritual sloth into serious diligence concerning the state of their immortal souls. Thus, by disregarding His motions and slighting His help, they have grieved the Spirit, who came in love to work upon them, and caused Him to depart.
2. **The more special and efficacious call of the Spirit;** when He thus moves them to turn to God, sinners are not only almost, but altogether persuaded. The method of the Spirit in working

upon those who are indeed made converts is much to be observed.

- 3. Those whom the Spirit calls effectually, He convinces of sin** (John 16:8). He sets the Law before them and interprets it Himself, and by His commentary upon it, they are made to see that the Law forbids not only the outward breakings forth of sin at the lips and in the life but also the inward lustings and stirrings of sin in the heart. And when the Law thus comes, oh, how does the offense abound! The Spirit sets their iniquities in order before their eyes and holds their eyes waking to behold them. The book of conscience is opened, and how many transgressions are immediately beheld there, recorded against them! And if, upon dipping into this book, so many abominations appear, what an innumerable multitude must be written down in the book of God's remembrance! Though sinners may not consider it, "*yet God remembers all their wickedness*" (Hosea 7:2).

This the soul lays to heart: "*Innumerable evils have compassed me about; mine iniquities have taken hold upon me*" (Psalm 40:12). When he lies down, they lie down with him; when he rises, they rise with him; wherever he goes or stands, they continually dog and haunt him.

If the sinner has been notorious, how hideous and horrid will sin appear to him when all pleas and excuses are silenced—when the painted mask is torn away and he sees sin in its true and native form! Drunkenness, uncleanness, oaths, profane jesting, greediness after the world—these will no longer be made light of. Before, such things seemed to him to hold no danger, but much delight and pleasure. But

after conviction, their deceitful and damnable nature will be as evident as the sun at noonday.

And though the sinner may have been free from the more gross pollutions of the world, enough shall yet be shown to him to cause him to conclude himself a wretch, in a lost estate. *What!* Are all his omissions of duty, or his mockery of the jealous God by heartless performances, nothing? Is his misspending of time and his disregard for eternity nothing? Is his delight in creatures and vanity, his love for the things of the world more than for God, Christ, and glory, a small matter? These are heinous sins, which yet even the more civilized among men are guilty of.

This conviction of the Spirit is strong and lasting; it does not wear off until the sinner is brought completely home. Actual transgressions, with their aggravations, lie heavy upon him; and original sin, the fountain from which all others flow, is revealed. And in this fountain, there is enough to feed ten thousand times more streams of sin than have ever issued forth from it.

David was not only convinced of the murder and adultery he had committed, but he was made to trace these sins to the wellhead—the original corruption of his nature: “*Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me*” (Psalm 51:5). And the sight of this, how greatly it humbled him!

Finally, this conviction is not only of certain acts of sin but of the wretchedness of the sinner’s state; he is made to see that, being a child of disobedience, he is therefore also a child of wrath. Without caviling, all is yielded to and acknowledged, for such is the evidence of the Spirit’s conviction.

## **2. Those whom the Spirit effectually calls, He works fear in them.**

The spirit of bondage to fear precedes the spirit of adoption. There are indeed degrees of these fears and terrors, yet such a measure is wrought in all upon whom the Lord has set His love, as to make them restless in their natural state. Carnal security is one of the first things the Spirit strikes at; He bids the soul awake and makes it know that, while it sleeps in sin, it is in far greater danger than if it were asleep upon the top of a mast.

Well may the sinner be afraid, for he has engaged against himself the wrath of God, armed with almighty and irresistible power. *"Who can stand before His indignation? And who can abide in the fierceness of His anger?"* (Nahum 1:6). The curses of the Law now sound dreadful in the sinner's ears, and because threatened, damnation will not long slumber. The nearness and imminence of such great evils raise his fears exceedingly. His conviction is strong, and in his mind, he already foresees the Lord Jesus revealed with His mighty angels in flaming fire, ready to take vengeance on those who know not God and who disobey the Gospel, punishing them with everlasting destruction (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9). *And, he thinks to himself, how terrible will it be to be among those who shall call to the rocks and mountains to fall upon them, that they might be hidden from the face of Him who sits upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb!*

This causes him to halt in his wicked course; he dares no longer rush headlong into sin, as the horse rushes into battle.

## **3. Those whom the Spirit effectually calls, He causes to grieve and sorrow over their sin and misery.**

They now see what they have done against God and against themselves, and this troubles their spirit. This is the being *“weary and heavy laden”* that the Scripture speaks of in those whom Christ calls to Himself, that they may find rest for their souls (Matthew 11:28-29). *“A voice was heard upon the high places, weeping and supplication of the children of Israel; because they have perverted their way, and have forgotten the Lord their God.”* And this was followed by His invitation: *“Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings”* (Jeremiah 3:21-22).

The sinner, by the Spirit’s work, is made to behold the misery of his case, the evil of his sin, and how grievously he has been deceived by his own lusts and by Satan. Now he sees his folly in yielding to them. How does he now accuse and condemn himself! His heart is grieved, he is pricked in his soul, because he has been so foolish and ignorant, so much like a beast before God (Psalm 73:22). He wishes a thousand times that he had resisted temptations and never committed those sins. I shall represent the workings of the sinner’s heart in this prosopopoeia:

*“O wretched man that I am! What have I been doing all my days! Was this the end for which I was made—to destroy myself? Was there no better employment for me than to add sin to sin, and to treasure up wrath against the day of wrath? How much time have I wasted, and what labor have I spent to make myself miserable! Ah, foolish, self-destroying wretch! Do you not see how far you have gone in the broad way, how long sin has enslaved you, and how bitterly you have provoked the Lord to anger? Oh, that my head were waters, and my eyes fountains of tears, that I might weep day and night! The damned will weep and wail forever—shall not I mourn and weep, who have so greatly deserved to be damned? Well*

*may I be troubled, and bowed down greatly, and go mourning all the day long."*

Thus, the sinner grieves and bemoans himself, and no carnal company, no sensual pleasures, no worldly diversions can drive away this sorrow. None but He who broke the heart is able to bind up its wounds.

#### **4. Those whom the Spirit effectually calls, He causes to despair in themselves.**

They are made to perceive that they have no power to raise themselves out of the depths of sin and misery into which they have plunged themselves. And as they are unable to help themselves, so they see that they are utterly unworthy to be helped. God may justly leave them where they have fallen, and should He deal thus with them, they would fall lower and lower, until they fall past all recovery.

The sinner may attempt to seek relief in his duties, hoping by these to make amends to God for his past offenses. But he is now made to see that his best duties have so much sin mingled with them, that apart from Christ's righteousness and intercession, they would be a mere abomination. Now he is beaten off from all self-confidence and comes to have "*no confidence in the flesh*" (Philippians 3:3). He realizes that he can do nothing of himself and that he can claim nothing as his due to be done for him. Instead, he sees that he must be entirely beholden to grace for all.

Upon this, he cries out from the depths unto the Lord: "*Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord*" (Psalm 130:1). He perceives himself sinking and cries, "*Lord, save me, or I perish! I am at the brink of the bottomless pit, and in I shall fall unless the hand of*

*mercy catches hold of me.*” He begs with Ephraim, “*Turn thou me, and I shall be turned*” (Jeremiah 31:18). And as the evil of sin is set before his eyes, so also the goodness of God is, in some measure, revealed to him by the Spirit. Therefore, he desires to be converted, not only out of necessity—because otherwise, he would be extremely and eternally miserable—but also out of choice, because this is the way to true and lasting happiness. These desires to be turned are, as it were, the first breathings of the new creature.

Thus, I have shown the manner of the Spirit’s operation in those whom He effectually calls to turn to God, as well as the various other ways in which the Lord calls upon sinners to conversion—most of which prove ineffectual, because those who are called are deaf, disobedient, and gainsaying.

My task now, in the second place, is to lay down the reasons why God calls the children of men to turn from their evil ways and live.

## **Reasons Why God Calls Sinners to Turn**

- 1. Hereby, He displays His gracious nature, in that He delights not in the death and destruction of His creatures.**

Indeed, death will be inflicted upon them should they obstinately continue in their evil ways. Yet the showing of mercy and the giving of life is that which pleases God; therefore, He calls even the most hardened sinners to conversion.

- 2. The Lord calls us to turn so that we may know our duty.**

From this, we may understand that it is our duty to go astray no longer but to return with all haste to our Father's house. And by the frequency and urgency of these calls, our obligation to this duty is greatly heightened. The disregarding of this duty—our refusal to turn—will do us more harm than all our other sins. If we would but turn, all our other sins would be abundantly pardoned. But as long as we remain unconverted, not one of them is forgiven, the guilt of all remains upon us, and we assuredly remain under the wrath of God.

**3. The Lord calls upon us to turn, to show that our turning to Him will not be in vain.**

Though sin has greatly abounded, yet upon our return there is not only a possibility, but a certainty, that we shall be graciously received and embraced. This is a great encouragement to a soul that lies under the weight of sin and the dread of wrath. Hear what language the Lord speaks to Judah:

*"Behold, thou hast spoken and done evil things as thou couldst; thou hast played the harlot with many lovers; yet return again to me, saith the Lord" (Jeremiah 3:1, 5).*

This call clearly shows that, though their transgressions were exceedingly multiplied, yet if they would now turn sincerely, their sins should not bar them from mercy's door.

**4. The Lord calls upon us to turn, to make it known that we must receive power and strength to turn from Himself.**

The precepts and exhortations in Scripture to repent, to believe, to stand fast, and the like, are not given so that we might conclude that

we have power in ourselves to do what is commanded. Rather, they are given so that we may turn these precepts into prayers.

For instance:

- When we hear the command to believe, it should make us cry out with the father of the sick child in the Gospel, *“Lord, help my unbelief”* (Mark 9:24).
- When we hear the command to cast away every transgression, it should make us beg with David, *“Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me”* (Psalm 119:133).
- When we hear the command to turn, it should make us pray in the language of the penitent: *“Turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God”* (Jeremiah 31:18).

**5. The Lord calls upon us to turn, so that the obstinate may be left without excuse when they refuse.**

Those who will not turn, who will not come to Christ that they may have life, will be found utterly inexcusable. Concerning Israel, God says:

*“All day long have I stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people”* (Romans 10:21).

But this disobedience leaves them without any defense. When the unconverted fall into God’s revenging hands, they are the less to be pitied, for they will have no plea to make on their own behalf. The invitations of the Gospel were given to them in vain.

These sinners, who have been *“stiff-necked”* and whose hearts were like iron, would neither be terrified by threats nor softened by the

expressions of divine kindness and mercy. When they stand before God's judgment seat, how will they be struck speechless, having not a word to say in their own defense! They were called to grace and glory, but they would not listen. They were told of their danger, but they would not seek to prevent it. They were warned concerning the ways of sin and dehorted from them. They were wooed and entreated with the most passionate earnestness not to be cruel to themselves by persisting in such a cursed course—yet they refused to be freed from sin and become the servants of righteousness.

Surely their mouths must be stopped! Or if they say anything when the sentence is passed upon them, it must be to take the side of divine justice against themselves—to acknowledge the righteousness of God's ways and the wickedness of their own.

**6. The Lord calls upon us to turn, so that those who are ordained to eternal life may be effectually wrought upon and brought to turn indeed.**

We read that the Gospel was preached both to Jews and Gentiles:

*"And as many as were ordained to eternal life believed"* (Acts 13:48).

And truly, it is much for the sake of the elect—who are scattered among the multitude—that the call to turn is made so general. By this means, those whom the Father has given to Christ are brought home. And how welcome are they when they come!

*"All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out"* (John 6:37).

Thus, we have seen the reasons why God calls upon sinners to turn.

In the third place, I promised to explain the nature of this conversion or turning. I find that the Apostle gives a notable and full description of it in *Acts 26:18*, where he calls it “*a turning from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God.*” From this, we gather that conversion consists of four things:

1. **Being turned from darkness.**
2. **Being turned unto light.**
3. **Being turned from the power of Satan.**
4. **Being turned unto God.**

## **1. Conversion implies being turned from darkness.**

Just as “*darkness was upon the face of the deep*” until God said, “*Let there be light*” (Genesis 1:2-3), so too does darkness cover the soul of a natural man until he is enlightened from above. Believers are “*delivered from the power of darkness*” when they are translated into the kingdom of the Son (Colossians 1:13), which shows that once they, like others, were in darkness. This darkness is said to have *power*—a power to hold, a power to blind, and a power to ruin—so that there is a necessity of being delivered from it.

There are several kinds of darkness from which converts are set free:

1. **They are turned from the darkness of ignorance.**

No longer are they content to be ignorant of the way of salvation, but they are made inquisitive, asking, “*What must I do to be saved?*” (Acts 16:30). They become informed about the doctrine of Christ and are made to understand what it means to believe and repent. They now know that sin is to be sorrowed for as the worst of evils, and that

God is the supreme good. They come to understand that “*God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life*” (John 3:16).

They learn that Christ is to be received by faith and that “*there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved*” (Acts 4:12). They come to see that it is in vain to expect salvation from Him as a Savior unless they also consent to obey Him as Lord. These and similar truths are no longer hidden from them.

Now they are sensible of the mischief and danger of ignorance; they, therefore, desire to have it removed in a greater measure and to “*follow on to know the Lord*” (Hosea 6:3).

## **2. Converts are turned from the darkness of unbelief.**

The Spirit works a persuasion in their hearts of the certain truth of all that God has revealed in His Word. They no longer dare to make the Lord a liar by refusing to believe what He has spoken. They now believe, admire, and acknowledge “*the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ*” (Colossians 2:2).

Previously, their unbelief had hidden the Gospel from them and left them in a lost estate. They did not see the majesty of the Word, nor were they captivated by the treasures of wisdom and grace revealed in it. Neither were they awakened by the terrors of judgment, with which the Word abounds against the ungodly. But now, the veil is taken away, and they both assent to and are deeply affected by what the Gospel declares.

They believe that *“God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them”* (2 Corinthians 5:19). They believe that *“being now justified by His blood, they shall be saved from wrath through Him”* (Romans 5:9). They believe that sin is deadly, that the world is deceitful, and that true and eternal happiness is to be found in God. Therefore, they abandon the shadow to embrace that which is substantial.

### **3. Converts are turned from the darkness of prejudice.**

Prejudice casts a strange mist before the eyes, preventing the light of truth from shining into the mind. One of the greatest barriers to the Jews accepting Christ was their prejudice against Him, which was a principal impediment to their embracing the faith. Satan endeavors to fill the ungodly with such prejudices and to maintain them, for they are a great pillar of his kingdom.

At times, sinners harbor prejudice against holiness, as though it were a disgrace. Yet holiness is the very glory of the divine nature and, therefore, the highest honor and perfection that a rational creature can attain. Sometimes holiness is regarded as unnecessary, whereas Scripture affirms that *“without holiness no man shall see the Lord”* (Hebrews 12:14). At other times, the carnal heart rises in opposition to holiness, imagining that nothing delightful or pleasurable can coexist with it. Yet, in truth, when one is converted to God, joy is not lost but only changed.

For *“the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost”* (Romans 14:17). Whereas the joy of the unconverted is poor, low, brutish, and defiling—mixed with

many secret grudgings of conscience and misgivings of heart—after conversion, joy becomes pure, heavenly, satisfying, and a foretaste of those pleasures that will endure forever (Psalm 16:11).

This unreasonable prejudice is not only against the ways of holiness but also against those who preach and publish them. There was prejudice against Elijah, as if he had been *“he that troubleth Israel”* (1 Kings 18:17); against Jeremiah, as if he had been unfaithful to the state and a secret ally of the Chaldeans (Jeremiah 37:13-14); against the Apostles, as if they were intolerable disturbers who had *“turned the world upside down”* (Acts 17:6). Often, the treasure is disregarded because of the earthen vessel in which it is brought (2 Corinthians 4:7).

But when a person is truly converted, the mist of prejudice is immediately scattered. Then the strict doctrines of the Gospel, which before were nauseating, will be accepted; then the servant of Christ, who before was despised, will be esteemed; then he who was accounted as *“the filth of the world, and the offscouring of all things”* (1 Corinthians 4:13) will be recognized as a faithful ambassador of the Lord.

#### **4. Converts are turned from the works of darkness.**

*“The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness”* (Romans 13:12). No known, presumptuous sin is allowed to remain. The convert perceives the fruitlessness of his former ways and is now ashamed of them: *“What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death”* (Romans 6:21).

Formerly, he went on securely in sin because he did not realize where he was headed; but now he perceives that these works of darkness lead to *“the blackness of darkness forever”* (Jude 13). He is, therefore, *“made free from sin”*—not from all sin’s presence, but from its servitude—and becomes *“the servant of righteousness”* (Romans 6:18).

Sin may plead hard to be retained, but its arguments are all invalid.

The gainful sin pleads thus for itself:

*“I have raised thee from a low to a high estate; I have filled thy bag and furnished thy table. By me, thou hast gained a fair estate—without me, thou wouldst have been little better than a beggar. And shall I now be cast off, having been so beneficial and brought such advantage?”*

But the convert has a sufficient answer to such reasoning:

Whatever he has gained unjustly, he must restore. If he had trusted in God and done good, he would have fared better, for *“a little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked”* (Psalm 37:16). The *mammon of unrighteousness* (Luke 16:9) is attended with a curse.

All the while he prospered in a wicked way, he remained destitute of the true riches. It is a wonder that by such dishonest gain he had not already lost his soul forever. Now, therefore, he is resolved against sinful gain, lest, before he is aware, he lose God, Christ, and his soul beyond all hope of recovery.

The pleasing sin also has its arguments for being cherished:

*"I have pleased thy flesh and rejoiced thy heart. I have made days and nights pass away insensibly. I have gratified thy senses and made thy tongue to sing for joy. I have soothed thee and silenced that fury called conscience when it began to stir and torment thee. I have chased away thy cares and made thee forget thy sorrows. There was a time when the very thought of me was delightful, and I was embraced as a darling—why, then, should I now be banished and slain, as if I were an enemy? Is affliction of soul and brokenness of heart to be preferred over the sweetness I once afforded thee?"*

But the convert's ear is deaf to such siren melodies. One word is enough to silence and answer all: *"The pleasures of sin are but for a season"* (Hebrews 11:25), whereas the pains of hell—sure to follow if there is no conversion—will never cease nor be in the least mitigated. The rich man, who had lived in luxury and fared sumptuously every day, when cast into the flames, begged for just a drop of water—and it was denied him. Therefore, the works of darkness are cast off by the convert; for the pleasure they once afforded is nothing in comparison to the pain, nor is the gain of them worth the loss that will swiftly follow.

## **2. As conversion implies being turned from darkness, so also it implies being turned unto light.**

*"For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light" (Ephesians 5:8). And again: "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6).*

This light has a threefold property: it **discovers**, **directs**, and **operates**.

### 1. **This light discovers.**

The Apostle tells us, “*whatsoever doth make manifest is light*” (Ephesians 5:13). The convert now sees what he never saw before. There may be many toads, serpents, and other loathsome creatures in a dark dungeon, but until the light shines in, they are neither perceived nor an annoyance. When light enters, these creatures are discovered. So too, within the heart of man, many impure and noisome lusts have their dwelling; yet, they are neither acknowledged nor disturbing until light exposes them.

The convert now sees his sin and shame. He is deeply aware of the plagues of his own heart and his absolute need of a cure. His true interest is also revealed to him—that his highest good lies in *seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness* (Matthew 6:33), in securing his soul, which is of far greater value than the whole world, and in pursuing “*that good part, which shall not be taken away*” (Luke 10:42).

### 2. **This light directs.**

It guides those who have been turned into the way of peace and truth. The lamp of the Word—when the Spirit teaches by it—reveals the crooked and perverse paths so that they may be shunned. It also directs the believer into the ways that are pleasing to God, which are pleasant in themselves and so exceedingly safe that none who walk in them ever miss heaven.

We are directed to *believe* and *obey*, and when faith and obedience are linked together, the offspring of that union will most certainly be

*“glory, honor, and immortality”* (Romans 2:7).

### **3. This light operates powerfully.**

It is not only light but also heat. Converts may have been previously informed of the evil and folly of sin, but now they see it by another light and their hearts burn with indignation against it. They not only see sin but are deeply affected by it—they mourn for it and abhor it.

Before, they had heard of God’s mercy, all-sufficiency, and other perfections; but now they behold His glory in the face of Christ, and their hearts are set ablaze with love for Him. This love compels them to labor diligently in His service.

When Caleb had seen the good land of promise, he was eager to go up at once and possess it (Numbers 13:30). In the same way, when the light of God reveals the celestial Canaan to the convert and directs him on how to reach it—oh, what watching, praying, resisting, striving, and storming heaven will follow!

### **3. Conversion implies being turned from the power of Satan.**

Satan is *“the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience”* (Ephesians 2:2) and has possession of them until they are converted. But when conversion comes, he is cast out and his strongholds are torn down. Considering the devil’s hatred, power, and subtlety, what a mercy it is to have the cords by which he led us captive broken!

Being turned from the power of Satan includes three things:

#### **1. The converted are freed from Satan’s dominion.**

They now have wisdom and grace to resist his usurped authority. The promise to those under grace, not the law, is this: “*Sin shall not have dominion over you*” (Romans 6:14). This necessarily implies that Satan’s dominion is destroyed, for he holds it by the power of sin.

Now, the net is broken, and the soul escapes as a bird from the fowler’s snare (Psalm 124:7). The unconverted sinner is a slave to Satan—if the devil says, *Go*, he goes; nay, he runs, even to his own ruin. The devil need only ask, and he shall have the sinner’s time, his body, and even his soul. But the convert now draws near to God and, being strengthened by grace, instead of being commanded by Satan, compels Satan to flee from him (James 4:7).

## **2. The converted lay aside the works of Satan.**

They now see how base and injurious his employments are, both to God and their own souls. Instead of serving the devil, they labor in the work of the Lord, of which they can never do too much.

## **3. The converted regard Satan’s baits with contempt.**

Satan’s power lies in his temptations. “*The god of this world*” (2 Corinthians 4:4) uses the things of this world to bewitch and ensnare men. He magnifies sensual pleasures, sumptuous fare, costly apparel, worldly honor, and recreations, persuading sinners that these will make them happy. He tempts them with the worth of silver and gold and, through the lens of their own eyes, kindles sinful desires for beauty and possessions.

But the convert, by faith, looks beyond these things. He sees the vanity of the creature. He has experienced God’s displeasure, and at such times, the world has appeared as an empty bubble. He has

known a wounded conscience and realized that no wealth, pleasure, or honor in this world could heal that wound.

Now, the convert's gaze is lifted upward, where he beholds *more durable riches and lasting pleasures* (Proverbs 8:18). He is no longer taken with the things that are seen but with "*the things which are not seen*" (2 Corinthians 4:18). Though still in the world, he looks beyond it.

Moses, "*having respect unto the recompense of the reward,*" refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter and esteemed "*the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt*" (Hebrews 11:24-26). In like manner, the convert, seeing the eternal glory prepared for him, renounces all that Satan once used to charm his soul.

#### **4. As conversion implies being turned from the power of Satan, so it also implies being turned unto God.**

*"Turn ye unto me, saith the Lord of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the Lord of hosts"* (Zechariah 1:3).

As it is in the courts of kings, where many who enter become preoccupied with admiring the splendid tapestries and portraits, while the wise statesman is concerned only with his business before the king himself—so it is with men in the world. While most of creation is consumed with beholding, admiring, and pursuing various vanities, the convert, who shows himself truly wise, turns directly to God. He does not fixate on the fleeting things of this world

but seeks Him who created all things and who alone can make him truly happy.

When the sinner turns to God, he perceives Him under a threefold aspect:

1. **As a Lord, to whom he submits.**
2. **As a Father, from whom he seeks grace.**
3. **As his ultimate end, for whom he now lives.**

## **1. The Convert Acknowledges God as His Lord.**

He submits to His sovereignty and bows under His scepter. *“Other lords besides thee have had dominion over us”* (Isaiah 26:13), but now his resolution is fixed—he will own no other Lord but God alone. His will aligns with God’s will. Even when his natural inclinations toward something are strong, if he is informed that pursuing it would displease God, that alone is enough to halt his desires.

He takes the testimonies of the Lord as the rule by which he orders his life. When he hears that God has commanded him to keep His precepts diligently, his heart immediately echoes back, *“Oh that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!”* (Psalm 119:4-5).

He dares not any longer presumptuously commit the evil that the Word forbids, nor neglect the good that the Word commands. Failings and infirmities remain, for *“in many things we offend all”* (James 3:2). But unlike the hypocrite, the convert does not wish the law were less holy or that it would allow greater liberty to sin. Rather, he wishes his own heart and life were more holy and increasingly conformed to it.

## 2. The Convert Acknowledges God as His Father.

He now sees God as willing to become his Father in Christ Jesus. One of the ancients rightly said: *Tam Pater nemo, tam pius nemo*—none is so much a Father, none so full of fatherly affection as God. He has an abundant store of grace to supply the needs of all returning prodigals, and He is far more willing to impart it to those who see their need and ask than earthly parents are to give bread to their hungry children (Matthew 7:11).

This is great encouragement to the returning sinner. The parables of the lost sheep, the lost silver, and the lost son were spoken for this very purpose—to encourage sinners to come home to God (Luke 15). The shepherd rejoiced when he found his sheep, the woman rejoiced when she recovered her lost coin. And the kind father—though his son returned only because necessity drove him home, though he came in rags, having wasted his substance in riotous living—as soon as he saw him, ran to him, had compassion on him, embraced him, kissed him, clothed him, adorned him, and prepared a feast for him, rejoicing that his lost son was found, that he who was dead was alive again.

Surely, we may conclude that God is willing to receive those who, being made aware of their sin, confess: *“I have sinned and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not”* (Job 33:27). If they return to Him with their whole hearts, He will not reject them.

It is true that the convert’s sins and unbelieving heart often fill him with doubts and fears. He remembers God and is troubled, for he knows how bitterly he has provoked Him. He hesitates to call Him Father and greatly doubts whether he will be received. But then, faith

and hope are strengthened by the gracious promises of God, such as this:

*"Touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (2 Corinthians 6:17-18).*

### **3. The Convert Acknowledges God as His Ultimate End.**

His great aim in turning to God is that God may be glorified and enjoyed.

The sinner is now aware that while he was unconverted, his life was spent dishonoring the One who gave him life and whose hand holds his breath. Now, therefore, he is zealous to *"walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work"* (Colossians 1:10). Before, he sought only himself—his own desires, his own interests. He had no higher aim than to gratify his worldly and fleshly inclinations with whatever seemed most suitable to his corrupt mind. So long as he prospered and was pleased, he cared not how much he provoked and dishonored God.

But now he is of another mind. He pursues the same design that the angels do, that Christ did—namely, to honor and please the God of glory. This is not confined only to spiritual actions but extends even to his daily affairs and lawful recreations, which are now sanctified to God's glory. He seriously regards the Apostle's command:

*"Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31).*

Now he truly lives as a creature should—acknowledging his dependence upon God. Now he lives as a son should—seeking to please his Father. Before, he lived as neither. Before, he lived only for himself.

And in thus glorifying God, the convert takes the surest course to enjoy Him. He sees God as his chief portion and, therefore, fixes his heart upon Him. Let the men of the world seek the world, if they will—let them pursue their bubbles, toil, and vex themselves for that which, once gained, will only bring further vexation. But his soul now speaks a different language:

*"Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee"* (Psalm 73:25).

Nothing short of God will satisfy the convert. Wealth cannot do it, nor can honor or sensual delights. Even ordinances themselves are but empty breasts and broken cisterns unless communion with God is enjoyed in them. He prays for God, he hears for God, he fasts for God, he comes to the table for God. Earth is as a place of desolation when God is absent, and he esteems that even Heaven itself would not be Heaven were God not always present.

Thus, I have shown wherein conversion lies—in being turned from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God.

I shall now add a few words to manifest through whom sinners must turn to God if they would be received. The truth is, it is through Christ alone. The Apostle plainly affirms: *"Through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father"* (Ephesians 2:18). And our Lord himself declares: *"I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me"* (John 14:6).

It is impossible that such guilty and polluted creatures as we have made ourselves by sin should ever be accepted before a just and holy God without a Mediator. Hence, there is an absolute necessity that we *look unto Jesus* (as the Apostle expresses it), “*in whom God was reconciling the world unto himself*” (2 Corinthians 5:19), lest we should not dare to approach Him, but instead flee away, fearing to be consumed as we deserve.

Now, in looking unto Jesus the Mediator, we must behold Him in a threefold office:

1. **As our Righteousness.**
2. **As our Advocate.**
3. **As our Helper.**

## **1. We Must Look Upon Christ as Our Righteousness.**

This is the very name by which that Branch from David is called: “*The Lord our Righteousness*” (Jeremiah 23:6). There is no coming unto God without some righteousness or other. Our own righteousness is *as filthy rags* (Isaiah 64:6); and because it is rags, it cannot cover us; because it is *filthy* rags, it cannot adorn or commend us before Him. Therefore, we must look unto Jesus, that He may be made righteousness unto us (1 Corinthians 1:30), that for the sake of His obedience and sufferings in our stead, our sins may be forgiven, and our persons accepted in the sight of God.

The righteousness of Christ, imputed to believers, is so perfect and complete that even the pure and piercing eye of God sees not the least stain or defect in it. If, therefore, we are clothed with this, none of our sins will appear against us or be laid to our charge. “*Who shall*

*lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died"* (Romans 8:33-34). Since God justifies on the ground of Christ's atoning death, who can accuse or condemn those who believe?

## **2. When We Turn to God, We Must Look Upon Christ as Our Advocate.**

*"If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous"* (1 John 2:1). This Advocate, having suffered to purchase pardon and grace, now intercedes that these may be bestowed upon returning sinners. And the Father always hears Him (John 11:42).

We ought to consider, and to be encouraged in considering, what a High Priest we have at the right hand of God. When the sinner beholds himself undone in himself—when he comes, pleading for the remission of sins, the healing of his spiritual wounds, and the saving of his soul, which seems to lie just upon the borders of damnation—this Advocate takes the sinner's petition and presents it before His Father. And all that the sinner asks, and infinitely more than he could ever desire or conceive, shall be granted.

Christ's advocacy is our great encouragement to draw near to God. We are not left to plead our cause alone. He who shed His blood for us now pleads for us before the throne.

## **3. When We Turn to God, We Must Look Upon Christ as Our Helper.**

He strengthens the feeble knees; without Him, we would be unable to take even a single step in the way of life. He is called “*the Author and Finisher of our faith*” (Hebrews 12:2), and it is “*by Him we have access into this grace wherein we stand*” (Romans 5:2).

The sinner must be made deeply aware of his own insufficiency to turn himself, to set himself at liberty. And seeing this, he must look unto the Son of God to bring his soul out of prison, to make him free indeed—from the curse of the Law, from the bondage of corruption, and from the tyranny of sin. Only Christ can enable him to come to God and cleave to Him.

## **Application**

### **Use I. Of Examination**

Since God calls upon sinners again and again to turn, it highly concerns all to examine whether this call has been obeyed. It is wisdom to bring our grace to the touchstone, since there is so much counterfeit grace in the world. As it is both easy and common to mistake in this matter, so there is no mistake more dangerous. Before long, the opportunity to correct errors about conversion will be impossible. The damned now see wherein they deceived themselves, but alas! it is too late to think of turning again. The door of mercy is shut and barred, and it will be barred forever.

I remember Theodoret, commenting on this text, observing that the repetition of the words “*Turn ye, turn ye*” (ἐπιστρέψατε, ἐπιστρέψατε) conveys the sincerity required in true conversion. A mere outward appearance of turning to God only serves to place one at a greater distance from Him.

Here I shall speak of some changes that bear a resemblance to conversion, yet are found in those who fall short of both grace and glory.

## **1. A Mere Change of Party or Opinion Is Not True Conversion.**

Those who only turn to a particular religious party or embrace certain opinions on lesser matters of religion cannot be said to be truly converted. Suppose your opinion is orthodox and correct—what does that avail if your heart is not right in the sight of God?

There are those who take pride in the name of *Non-conformists*, yet of what significance is this unless they refuse to conform to the sinful fashions and corrupt courses of the world? On the other hand, those who boast of being *sons of the Church*—what advantage is that to them if by their swearing, lying, and hatred of holiness they prove themselves to be the sons of Belial?

## **2. Partial Turning Is Not True Conversion.**

Those who turn to God only in part are not truly converted. Saul obeyed the Lord's command against Amalek *in part*—that which was vile and refuse he utterly destroyed, but delicate Agag and the best of the spoil he spared (1 Samuel 15:9). Yet this partial obedience was counted as high rebellion (v. 23).

Many will yield to God's call in some respects. The sins they can more easily part with, they are willing to mortify. But the chief, the

darling, the delicate sin that they live upon, or which makes their lives so sweet—*that* must not be touched!

Herod was a partial convert. He obeyed John the Baptist's preaching in many things, yet when John reproved him for his incest with Herodias, he could not bear it. Instead of obeying the message, he persecuted and ultimately put the messenger to death.

### **3. Temporary Turning in Times of Extremity Is Not True Conversion.**

Those who turn to God only in times of distress, yet later fall away, are not truly converted. When Israel saw Sinai all aflame before their eyes, they turned to God out of fear of being consumed. Then they cried out, saying they would hearken and do all that the Lord spoke to them (Deuteronomy 5:27). But before many days had passed, they quickly turned aside from the way the Lord had commanded them and fell into gross idolatry.

Again, we read: "*When He slew them, then they sought Him; and they returned and inquired early after God.*" Yet, "*their heart was not right with Him, neither were they steadfast in His covenant*" (Psalm 78:34, 37).

How many sickbed resolutions have *seemed* like true conversion, only to vanish upon the return of health? True conversion is a lasting change. Though there may be seasons of stumbling and spiritual drowsiness—the wise virgins themselves *slumbered and slept* (Matthew 25:5), though it was not their wisdom to do so—yet true converts never go so far as to change their Lord. They never cease to choose God as their chief happiness.

**Reader, beware of being only almost a convert, lest you be only almost saved and yet quite damned.**

The question now arises: *How may true conversion be distinguished from those outward appearances by which so many are deceived?* To this, I answer in the following particulars:

**1. In true conversion, the heart is turned from the love of every known iniquity.**

The strength of sin lies in the love of it, and to continue loving sin proves that it still holds possession of the heart. This is the convert's language: *"I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right, and I hate every false way"* (Psalm 119:128). The chief thing God requires from you is your love; if sin or the world runs away with that, how can you claim to have turned to God?

It is not enough to abstain from the outward act of sin, for even a hypocritical Pharisee may go that far. The very soul must abhor it. The sin that was once most desired and delighted in will be most detested when conversion is sincere. The covetous man, when turned, will most abhor covetousness; the unclean, their filthiness; the proud, their pride. The reason is clear—these are the sins by which they most displeased and dishonored God and most defiled themselves.

**2. In true conversion, the whole man is renewed.**

*"All things are become new"* (2 Corinthians 5:17) in those who are new creatures, and *"old things are passed away."* Every part is changed, though the change is not yet perfect. The understanding is enlightened, the conscience is made tender and commands great authority, the heart chooses God, and the desires are after His favor and fellowship. The members are

yielded as instruments of righteousness unto holiness. The convert willingly resigns his whole self—both body and spirit—to the Lord.

**3. In true conversion, there is a continual desire to be turned more and more.**

There is a hungering after a greater degree of righteousness. The remaining corruption of the flesh is a burden, and the spirit lusts against it (Galatians 5:17). The convert prays to God to perfect that which concerns him and to strengthen what He has already begun.

*“Lord! Thou hast done much for me, but there is much more still to do. Many enemies remain to be slain, many sinful affections still to be healed, many spots yet to be washed out, many wrinkles still to be smoothed. O Thou who hast laid the foundation, rear up the building, and at last bring forth the topstone, that I may cry, ‘Grace, grace forever!’”*

**4. In true conversion, there is a pure and fervent love for other converts.**

*“We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren”* (1 John 3:14). Let them be poor and of weak abilities, let them be vilified and despised by the world—yet if they are saints, they will be esteemed and embraced by those who are truly changed.

Our love is genuine when the holier any person is, the more we love them; and the more they seek our holiness, the more we value them. If they deal plainly with us about our sin, we love them all the more for their faithfulness. Indeed, we can rejoice in their grace, even if their spiritual luster makes us seem obscure in comparison.

**5. In true conversion, there is deep pity for the unconverted.**

Those who are turned to God have escaped danger, and they cannot help but be moved by the peril of others. How can they do otherwise than mourn over their unconverted friends and relations who remain without Christ and without God in the world?

Oh, what hazards do such souls run! When they go to sleep, they know not whether they may wake in the midst of unquenchable flames. When they leave their houses, they may be in hell before they return. They hang over the bottomless pit by the slender thread of life, and a thousand things may happen daily to snap that thread, plunging them into destruction beyond redemption.

*Oh, the dreadful state of the ungodly!* If you, being a godly wife, were to wake in the night and find your husband suddenly dead beside you, would it not amaze and grieve you? If you, as a master of a household, were to find all your children and servants dead before your eyes, would it not deeply affect you? And yet, if your husband, your wife, your children, or your servants are *dead in sin*, in danger of eternal damnation, have you not much greater cause to be concerned for them? Should you not strive by counsel, prayers, and tears to see them turned and reconciled to God?

## **Reader, Examine Yourself!**

Try yourself by these marks of true conversion. If you find them in yourself, rejoice, for they plainly show that your name is written in the Book of Life.

But if any sin is still loved—if your mind, conscience, heart, and life remain defiled—and if, being unrenewed, you have no desire after renewing grace... if you delight in the carnal and have hatred for the saints... this is a sure sign that you are still a stranger to conversion and, to this hour, remain in the gall of bitterness.

### **Use III. Of Consolation.**

You who have obeyed the call of God to turn, I am commanded to speak peace and comfort to you. *Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God* (Isa. 40:1). The unconverted are not more accursed than you are blessed. I have several things to tell you, which are enough to make your hearts leap for joy.

- 1. God has had thoughts of love toward you before the foundation of the world was laid.** He predestined and chose you unto the adoption of children (*Eph. 1*), long before you were. From everlasting, he designed to make you his heirs, and joint-heirs with Christ, unto that kingdom and glory, with which the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared. And since the love of God toward you is from everlasting, and co-eternal with himself, surely it can never in time be changed.
- 2. God has justified you freely by his grace, through the redemption of Jesus Christ** (*Rom. 3:24*). *As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed your transgressions from you* (*Ps. 103:12*), and surely that is as far as you can desire. They are cast into the depths of the sea, which signifies that when they come to be sought for, they shall not be found—just as those things which are cast into the depths of the sea are never recovered. Christ has been wounded for your

transgressions; he has been bruised for your iniquities (*Isa. 53:5*). And as the imputation of your sins to Christ caused him to undergo real sufferings, so the imputation of his righteousness to you will cause a real exemption from that wrath and punishment which, by sin, you have justly merited. Be of good cheer, Converts: your sins are forgiven, and consequently, the curse of afflictions, and also the sting of death, is taken away.

3. **You who are Converts, it will not be long before you are all glorified** (*Rom. 8:30*). *Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified.* The Lord has promised that those who overcome shall sit with him on his throne. You shall not only overcome but be more than conquerors through him that has loved you. Mansions are already prepared for you, and when you are prepared for those mansions, you shall be received into them. Then, neither the fury nor the favor of the world will be a temptation. Satan's fiery darts will not be able to reach you when once you are brought into the third heaven. When you are just entering into the New Jerusalem, you will shake hands both with sin and misery at the door, and neither will be able to follow. Tears will be wiped away, and all cause of sorrow will be gone. There will be a clear view of God without the least cloud; the Sun of Righteousness will shine forever without eclipse; there will be entire joy without grief, perfect peace without trouble, complete holiness without the least remainder of corruption, and full blessedness without end.

## **Use IV. Of Exhortation**

And who would not now become a convert? Have you anything to say against a pardon, or against that glory which has been revealed? Shall it be made a question whether pleasures forevermore or eternal torments are to be preferred? Oh, that you would come to yourselves! Then I am sure you would come to God immediately.

The arguments to persuade you to conversion are many.

**1. If you do not turn, you cannot fulfill the purpose of your creation.** Do not think that God gave you life and sent you into the world merely to please yourselves, to satisfy your inordinate and corrupt desires, and to live carelessly and rebelliously against him. Yet this you will do until you are converted. Did the Lord give you understanding only for you to remain ignorant of him? Did he give you a memory and not intend that he should be remembered? Did he give you a heart to love and to desire, and not design himself to be the chief object of both? Did he give you affections, only for you to squander them on sin and vanity? Do not continue to frustrate the very purpose for which you were made, lest you provoke the Lord to repent that he made you and grieve at heart (*Gen. 6:6*), resolving to destroy the workmanship of his own hands. If you remain obstinate and without understanding, *He that made you will not save you, nor have mercy on you; He that formed you will show you no favor (Isa. 27:11).*

**2. Unless you turn, you cannot fulfill the purpose of Christ's death and the redemption he has wrought.** Our Lord died not only to atone for offenses, but also *to purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works* and that, *in the body of his flesh through death, he might present them holy and unblameable (Col. 1:22).* Through the eternal Spirit, he

*offered up himself without spot to God, that by his blood he might purge our consciences from dead works, to serve the living God (Heb. 9:14).* From these and similar scriptures, it is evident that Christ designed not only our pardon but our purity. But how can we be pure unless we turn to God from sin, which defiles us? Christ knew what a sickness and debasement of our nature sin is; therefore, he himself was slain that sin might be put to death. And will you dare to continue in sin? Hark to the Apostle: *Who his own self bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness; by whose stripes ye were healed (1 Pet. 2:24).* As Christ's death is an argument to persuade us to turn from sin, so from this death virtue and power may be derived, whereby sin may be subdued.

3. **You are further obliged to turn because of God's condescension in giving you leave to do it.** If the gulf had been fixed upon the very first transgression—if the turning of fallen man had been as impossible as the turning of the fallen angels—the Lord could not have been charged with the least injustice. But though you have departed, he calls after you. Without any detriment to his justice, he has found a way to show you mercy. The devils were never called to conversion; as soon as ever they had sinned, they were fettered in chains of darkness that shall never be loosed. But hear what wisdom says: *Unto you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of man (Prov. 8:4).* You have often stopped your ears—oh, that at last you would hear, that your souls may live! If you persist in deafening your ears, you may provoke the Lord to shut his mouth; and then you will never be converted, never healed.
4. **Consider who it is that calls you to turn, and what his design is in doing so.** You are undone wretches who have

neither skill, nor will, nor power to save yourselves. And he who calls after you is a God to whom power and mercy belong. His purpose is to make his power and mercy known in you. His aim is to bring you near, that he might manifest himself to you as he does not manifest himself unto the world—to shield you from danger, to supply your needs according to the riches of his glory, to deliver you from every evil work, and to preserve you unto his heavenly kingdom. And is there any harm in all this?

5. **It is unreasonable that the world or sin should hinder you and keep you from God any longer.** You have every reason to turn from sin, for it deserves your hatred; and your hearts should turn from idolizing the world and the things of it, for these deserve your scorn. All things besides God are either hurtful or helpless. Nothing is more hurtful than sin; and they that have expected help from the creatures have found themselves destitute and forlorn in their extremity.
6. **If you turn to God, he will not fail to turn to you.** His ear shall be inclined and open to your cry; his hand shall be upon you for good; and in the hollow of his hand, you shall be secure. *He is greater than all, and none shall be able to pluck you out of his hand (John 10:29).* He will not hide his face, but will turn it towards you; he will give peace as well as mercy, and will make you know that pardon is multiplied, that your love may be increased. *The debtor loved much, to whom much was forgiven (Luke 7:47).* Finally, the stream of his benefits shall be turned towards you. The Lord will do you good and will delight in doing so. You shall lack no temporal provision, and spiritual blessings shall be showered down abundantly. At last, you shall ascend and be admitted into his immediate presence, where God will turn to you, never to withdraw again. Be not afraid or dismayed

if any turn against you for the sake of your conversion. The Lord himself is with you and for you, and he will turn to good whatever adversaries mean for evil.

**7. Not only his Word, his ministers, and his Spirit, but also his providences call upon you to turn to God.** Both his mercies and his judgments urge this exhortation to conversion. The streams of goodness that continually run towards you—and which sometimes swell and overflow abundantly—declare that it is wisdom to forsake the broken cisterns and come to the fountain of living waters. His mercies speak this language: it is good to return and obtain an interest in the Father of mercies. Then these mercies will indeed be given in mercy. Cords of love are cast about you on purpose to draw you unto the God of love and peace. Oh, that you would run to him! The riches of his goodness are unlocked and revealed, that they might lead you to repentance (*Rom. 2:4*).

His judgments likewise are inflicted with the same purpose. That is the voice they proclaim: *Go, return unto the Lord, for he hath torn, and he will heal you; he hath smitten, and he will bind you up (Hos. 6:1)*. The fire of London calls upon the inhabitants of that city, and indeed the whole land, to repent—since they have not only heard of God by the hearing of the ear but have seen him marching forth so dreadfully against them. Let them now abhor themselves and repent in dust and ashes. Those many thousands who perished by the plague, though they are dead, yet still speak; and what they say is this: *O you that are alive, return, return unto the Lord your God, for after death it will be too late to do so.*

**8. Consider that, as yet, it is not too late to turn to God.**  
Though you have been hitherto senseless and unawakened, if

now you will arise; though you have been stubborn and rebellious, if now you will yield yourselves to the Lord; though you have bolted the door to keep in sin and keep out Christ, if now at last you will open at the knock of the Gospel and consent that your lusts should be expelled and the Lord Jesus enter, he is ready to receive you into grace and favor. All your former denials, affronts, and repulses shall be forgotten and forgiven. The scepter is still held forth, the Lord has not removed himself from the mercy seat; mercy and grace are now offered, if you will come for them. But if you will not know the day of your visitation, and are resolved to continue in your stubborn way, then an oath may soon be sworn in wrath that you shall never enter into his rest. God may say: *He that is filthy, let him be filthy still; he that is unjust, let him be unjust still (Rev. 22:11). He that is joined to his idols, let him alone (Hos. 4:17).* He that despises the offer of grace shall not have another offer. He that now refuses to be converted shall never be a convert.

Oh, that I could prevail with you by all these arguments! But lest they should leave no impression, lest they should slip from your minds and have no influence upon your hearts, I shall second them—

**With a voice from Hell.**

**With a voice from Heaven.**

**With a voice from Christ himself.**

## **1. A Voice from Hell**

Imagine, then, a damned sinner who has lain many years in the burning lake should have leave to come and appear before this assembly. And after a river of tears has gushed from his eyes, stopping his speech for a while, at length he thus speaks:

*Cursed be the day wherein I was born, and that night wherein it was said, "A man-child is conceived!" Let that day be darkness; let not God regard it from on high, neither let the light shine upon it. Alas! it were better never to have been at all than to be forever miserable! How intolerable are the gnawings of the never-dying worm! How hot and unquenchable are these flames, which the breath of the Lord, as a stream of brimstone, has kindled!*

*The world is grievously mistaken about sin. They think it light and pleasant—and so once thought I. But now I find how woefully I was deceived! I feel its weight, I taste—yea, I am drunk with—the gall and wormwood of it. I find that true which I was told but would not believe: that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. His mighty hands have taken hold of me, bound me hand and foot, and thrown me into outer darkness.*

*And here I must lie, tortured for all eternity! Oh, that word—eternity!—it rends my very heart, kills all hope, and sinks me into utter despair. If, after millions upon millions of ages, my torments were to end, I should strengthen myself under my sorrows. But since, after so long a space of time, I shall be as far from release as the first moment I was imprisoned, this is what makes my grief boundless—because my misery is endless! Oh, what frenzy possessed me, that for the sake of a little gain and fleeting pleasure, which sin yielded me for a short season, I should venture to dwell with devouring fire and inhabit everlasting burnings!*

*But I have only myself to blame. God is severe, but not in the least unrighteous. He called, but I refused; he stretched forth his hand, but I disregarded him. I set at naught all his counsel and would have none of his reproofs. I remember very well—he spoke to me often, calling me to turn from the paths that lead to destruction and*

*misery; but I was determined to go on. I was warned to flee from the wrath to come, but I would take no warning. I was entreated to be reconciled, but I resolved to continue a rebel. I would not be made clean, though the Lord waited to be gracious and frequently said, "When will it once be?"*

*And what! Will any of you continue in the same desperate mind I was in? Will you still cherish the very sins that were my undoing? Behold the flames about my ears—and oh, that you could conceive the anguish of my heart! Be wise, be wise, and accept mercy and salvation while they are tendered to you. For if once you come to this place of torment, the Lord will forget to be gracious, and his mercy will be quite and clean gone forever!*

## **2. A Voice from Heaven**

Suppose now that one of the glorified saints, who has been an inhabitant of the heavenly Jerusalem, who has conversed with an innumerable company of angels, and who has seen God face to face, should for a while leave his blissful mansion. And with abundance of joy and glory in his countenance, he should utter such words as these before you:

*Oh, the height, and length, and depth, and breadth of the love of Christ, which passes knowledge! How unsearchable is his goodness, and his mercy past finding out! Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing! For by his blood, he has redeemed me—and millions more—out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation!*

*I was called to turn and live, and through rich grace, I was enabled to obey the call. And now I find what a glorious life it is, unto which sincere and persevering converts shall at last be brought. This is a life that is free from sin and suffering, that will never see death or be in danger of the grave.*

*It is best of all to be near to God! Christ is, without controversy, the best Master; to be subject to him is to reign—and to reign forever! What ails the blind and stupid world, that they see no form nor comeliness in this fairest among ten thousand, the light of whose countenance makes heaven not to need the light of the sun, moon, or stars! His beauty is all-surpassing; his grace is much more precious than gold that perishes. But his glory—it is not lawful, or even possible, for me to utter!*

*And now—will any of you any longer slight him? Open your eyes and see clearly that you are the children of perdition, the sons of death, without him. But through him, you may be turned; through him, you may be saved with a great and everlasting salvation. Surely, then, you have reason to value him above all things—though the whole world, nay, though ten thousand worlds, should stand in competition with him!*

### **3. A Voice from Christ Himself**

Imagine the Lord Jesus appearing with a light far exceeding the brightness of the sun. Suppose some of his angels as his harbingers and forerunners, coming before him and crying, *Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts!* And at last, he himself visibly fills this place with his majesty and glory. Suppose he strikes an awe into you and works in you an admiration of his excellency and greatness. Then imagine him speaking and pleading with you in these words:

*"Look unto me, and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth. I am your Redeemer, and there is none else. You have destroyed yourselves, but in me, and in me alone, you may find help. Unless I make you free, sin will still reign in you; and if it reigns, it will also ruin. Unless I bind the strong man armed, he will keep you bound and lead you captive at his pleasure. Unless I turn and bring you near to God, you will run farther and farther away from him, till at last, there is no possibility of returning. How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity, and fools hate knowledge? Turn ye at my reproof; behold, I will pour out my Spirit upon you, I will make known my words unto you."*

*"Former contempts I will pass by, if now at last you will receive me. I will free you from the guilt and from the power of sin. I will pacify my Father's anger, though by breaking his laws and despising me, his Son, you have never so much incensed him. Though by nature captives, I will make you kings and priests; though by sin traitors and enemies, I will make you sons, heirs of God, and co-heirs with myself, who am the heir of all things. You shall in no case be miserable, if all that fullness which dwells in me can satisfy and make you happy."*

And after all this, my brethren, will you still be fond of sin and ruin? Oh, hear the voice of the Son of God, who is not willing that you should perish.

How shall I prevail upon you? Methinks I could be willing that these words should be my last, upon condition that they might be powerful and effectual to the converting, healing, and saving of all within the sound of them. Methinks I could be willing to expire here and be carried dead out of the pulpit, upon condition that all of you might hear, so as to turn from your evil ways and live. Most of those

thousands before me are unknown to me; but this I know—that you all have souls, and that every soul is worth a world. Oh, that you all would consult your soul’s interest and safety!

But lest it should be in vain if I speak to you only, I shall direct my words unto him who is Lord over all.

Oh, that he who works, and none can hinder, would work a thorough and saving change in you! Oh, that he would pity those among you who are cruel to themselves! Oh, that he would awaken the souls that are not only asleep but dead! And break the hearts that have made themselves as an adamant stone! Oh, that he would convince you of your sin and misery, and effectually turn you from the one, that you may be forever freed from the other!

To these petitions let every heart say, **Amen!**

## **Directions for Turning to God**

### **1. Think upon and seriously consider your ways.**

This consideration had great influence upon the Psalmist, “*I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies. I made haste and delayed not*” (Ps. 119:59–60). The Lord himself twice commands it: “*Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, Consider your ways*” (Hag. 1:5, 7). The prophet Ezekiel also points to its importance: “*Now, lo, if he beget a son that seeth all his father’s sins which he hath done, and considereth, and doth not such like*” (Ezek. 18:14). If sinners would but consider what they do when they do evil, it would be a means to make them cease from it and learn to do well.

Consider the misery and danger of being at a distance from God. The ways in which you naturally walk lead you away from him, and the Scripture declares, *“Those that are far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee”* (Ps. 73:27). Think on these things until your heart is affected, so as to conclude that it is the height of madness to lie secure in an unconverted state. Let this thought take deep impression: *All the while thou persistest in thy evil ways, thou forsakest the Lord, thou forsakest thine own mercies, and thou art traveling apace to the regions of eternal woe and darkness.*

## **2. Study the vanity of former excuses.**

I know the natural man’s mouth is very full of them, but they are easily answered.

- *Sin, thou sayest, is riveted in thy very nature.*

Therefore, thou hast all the more reason to cry to heaven that thy nature may be changed and to seek to be made a new creature.

- *But sin is the common practice.*

Therefore, thy danger is all the greater, and thou shouldst be the more careful lest thou be overwhelmed in that ruin which will be so general.

- *But my lusts are both profitable and pleasant; why then should I abandon them?*

Consider, O soul, whether the damned, who have lost their souls and eternal blessedness, and suffer the vengeance of eternal fire, have any reason to boast of gain or pleasure?

- *But men will deride and scorn me if I become a convert.*

They that do so are beside themselves, and sober people do not

concern themselves with the laughter of those who are out of their wits. Oh, contemn their contempt! Despise the shame they cast upon you! Shortly, they themselves will wish that instead of scorning you, they had been imitators of you.

- *But to turn unto and follow God is very hard, and the difficulty is a great discouragement.*

The work is hard indeed, but the strength and assistance are great which shall be afforded. “*The Lord will work all your works in you and for you*” (Isa. 26:12). He commands nothing but what he is ready to help you perform himself.

- *But if I am a convert, I shall never live a pleasant hour; my tears will be my meat and drink, and my sorrows my perpetual companions.*

Oh, what a gross mistake! What an unreasonable prejudice against the ways of holiness! If godliness is such a melancholy business, why does the Scripture tell us of “*peace which passeth all understanding*” and “*joy unspeakable and full of glory*” (Phil. 4:7; 1 Pet. 1:8)? Why is David so often singing, so often harping, if mirth and religion were altogether inconsistent?

- *Oh, but if I turn, I shall be exposed to suffering.*

Well, suppose thou art—“*the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed*” (Rom. 8:18). Even now, grace and consolation shall attend thy trials, and soon they will be exchanged for eternal joy.

Study the vanity of all such excuses.

### **3. Save yourselves from the untoward generation among whom you live.**

This was the advice the Apostle gave to those who had been

awakened and pricked in their hearts: *“Save yourselves from this untoward generation”* (Acts 2:40). You must shake hands with your former brethren in iniquity, else they will prove a great temptation and snare to you. Carnal company are incarnate devils, who endeavor to draw as many as they can to hell along with them. Therefore, the wisest of men gives many words of caution: *“Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away”* (Prov. 4:14–15).

Though you are not bound to be morose and uncivil toward the ungodly, take heed of being delightfully familiar with them. Many a conviction and good resolution has cooled and vanished by association with the wicked. Suck not in any prejudices from them against true piety; and when they presume to prate against prayer, hearing, fasting, or professing Christ—when they quarrel against the Lord’s day and censure the Lord’s people—regard all this as no more than the ravings of those who, in a spiritual sense, are distracted.

#### **4. Despise not prophesyings.**

The ministry of the Word is ordained for the very purpose of working faith and turning sinners unto God. Therefore, let not drowsiness, distraction, worldly cares, pleasures, lusts, or the deceitfulness of riches choke this Word, preventing it from prospering in the work whereunto it is appointed.

When Ezekiel prophesied over the dead and dry bones, they immediately revived, and a valley of dead bones became a living army. Who knows but that, while thou art prophesied over by the ministry of the Gospel, thou mayest suddenly be made alive, though now dead in trespasses and sins? Let powerful preaching be prized and frequented. Certainly, the Word has a converting power when it

is set home: *“The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple”* (Ps. 19:7).

#### **5. Quench not the Spirit.**

*“Quench not the Spirit”* (1 Thess. 5:19). His convictions must not be stifled but improved. The Spirit of the Lord sometimes comes very near to a drunkard, a swearer, a covetous worldling, or an unclean person, telling them that their way is perverse before him, that there is but a step between them and death, between them and damnation; and therefore, he moves them toward humiliation and reformation. He informs them that they had better leave their sins than be undone for their sake.

Such convictions might be heightened into conversion if they were but closed with and improved. But thousands resist the Holy Ghost. They would rather be permitted to sin without disturbance than have the waters troubled, though upon stepping in they might be healed, no matter what their spiritual malady or plague may be. Dost thou find the Spirit near thee? Oh, heed his checks! Comply with all his motions, and beg that thou mayest not be put off with common operations but that a saving work may be wrought in thee.

#### **6. Lay hold upon and plead the Lord’s own Covenant.**

In his Covenant, he has engaged to give you a new heart, to cleanse you from your filthiness and your idols, to put his Spirit within you, and to cause you to walk in his statutes—that is, in one word, to convert you: *“Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean... A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you... And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them”* (Ezek. 36:25–27).

Be earnest that these promises may be accomplished. Resolve to take no denial; the Lord will be pleased with your importunity in a matter so much for his own honor to grant. You cannot turn yourselves, but he can as easily do this work as leave it undone. One word of life and power will raise you. Since he says, *“Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?”* (Ezek. 33:11), immediately make this text into a prayer:

**“Turn us, turn us from our evil ways, for why should we die, O thou God of Israel?”**

**FINIS.**

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