

God blameless in sinners damnation

A Sermon by Richard Baxter

Ezek. xxxiii. 11

Say to them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways, for, why will ye die, O house of Israel?

I have now shown you the reasonableness of God's commands, and the unreasonableness of wicked men's disobedience. If nothing will serve their turn, but men will yet refuse to turn, we are next to consider who it is long of if they be damned. And this brings me to the last doctrine; which is,

Doct. That if, after all, these men will not turn, it is not the fault of God that they are condemned, but themselves, even their own wilfulness. They die, because they will die; that is, because they will not turn.

If you will go to hell, what remedy? God here acquits himself of your blood; it shall not lie on him if you be lost. A negligent minister may draw it upon him; and those that encourage you, or hinder you not in sin, may draw it upon them; but be sure of it, it shall not lie upon God. Saith the Lord, concerning his unprofitable vineyard, *Isaiah* v. 2, 3, 4. "Judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard, what could have been done more to my vineyard: that I have not done in it? When he had planted it in a fruitful soil, and fenced it, and gathered out the stones, and planted it with the choicest vines," what should he have done more to it? He hath made you men, and endowed you with reason; he hath furnished you with all external necessities, he hath given you a righteous perfect law: When you had broken it, and undone yourselves, he had pity on you, and sent His Son by a miracle of condescending mercy to die for you, and be a sacrifice for your sins; and he "was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself." The Lord Jesus hath made you a deed of gift of himself, and eternal life with him, on the condition you will but accept it and return. He hath, on this reasonable condition, offered you the free pardon of all your sins; he hath written this in his word, and sealed it by his Spirit, and sent it by his ministers; they have made the offer to you, (many a time) and called you to accept it, and to turn to God. They have in his name entreated you, and reasoned the case

with you, and answered all your frivolous objections. He hath long waited on you, and staid your leisure, and suffered you to abuse him to his face. He hath mercifully sustained you in the midst of your sins; he hath compassed you about with all sorts of mercies: he hath also intermixed afflictions to mind you of your folly, and call you to your wits; and his spirit hath been often striving with your hearts, and saying there, "Turn, sinner, turn to him that calleth thee: whither art thou going? What art thou doing? Dost thou know what will be the end? How long wilt thou hate thy friends, and love thine enemies? When will thou let go all, and turn, and deliver up thyself to God, and give thy Redeemer the possession of thy soul? When shall it once be?" These pleadings have been used with thee: And when thou hast delayed, thou hast been urged to make haste, and God hath called to thee, "To-day, while it is called to-day, harden not thy heart: Why not now without any more delay?" Life hath been set before you, the joys of heaven have been opened to you in the gospel; the certainty of them have been manifested; the certainty of the everlasting torments of the damned hath been declared to you. Unless you would have had a sight of heaven and hell, what could you desire more? Christ hath been, as it were, set forth crucified before your eyes, *Gal. iii. 1*. You have been a hundred times told that you are but lost men till you come unto him. As oft you have been told of the evil of sin, of the vanity of the world, and all the pleasures and wealth it can afford, or the shortness and uncertainty of your lives, and the endless duration of the joy or torment of the life to come. All this, and more than this, have you been told, and told again, even till you were weary of hearing it, and till you could make the lighter of it, because you had so often heard it, like the smith's dog, that is brought by custom to sleep under the noise of the hammers, and when the sparks do fly about his ears; and, though all this have not converted you, yet you are alive, and might have mercy to this day, if you had but hearts to entertain it. And, now let reason itself be the judge, whether it be long of God or you, if after this you will be unconverted and be damned? If you die now, it is because you will die. What should be said more to you? or what course should be taken that is more likely to prevail? Are you able to say, and make it good, "We would fain have been converted, and become new creatures, but we could not; we would fain have forsaken our sins, but could not; we would have changed our company, and our thoughts, and our discourse, but we could not." — Why could you not, if you would? What hindered you, but the wickedness of your hearts? Who forced you to sin? or who held you back from duty? Had not you the same teaching, and time, and liberty to be godly, as your godly neighbours had? Why then could not you have

been godly as well as they? Were the church-doors shut against you? or did you not keep away yourselves? or sit and sleep, or hear as if you did not hear? Did God put in any exceptions against you in his word, when he invited sinners to return; and when he promised mercy to those that do return? Did he say, "I will pardon all that repent except thee?" Did he shut you out from the liberty of his holy worship? Did he forbid you to pray to him any more than others? You know he did not. God did not drive you away from him, but you forsook him, and ran away yourselves. And when he called you to him, you would not come.—If God had excepted you out of the general promise and offer of mercy, or had said to you, "Standoff; I will have nothing to do with such as you; pray not to me, for I will not hear you; if you repent never so much, and cry for mercy never so much, I will not regard you."—If God had left you nothing to trust to but desperation, then you had had a fair excuse. You might have said, "To what end do I repent and turn, when it will do no good?"—But this was not your case. You might have had Christ to be your Lord and Saviour, as well as others, and you would not; because you felt not yourselves sick enough for the physician, and because you could not spare your disease: In your hearts you said, as those rebels, *Luke* xix. 14. "We will not have this man to reign over us" Christ "would have gathered you under the wings of his salvation, and you would not" *Matt.* xxiii. 37. What desires of your welfare did the Lord express in his holy word! With what compassion did he stand over you, and say, "O that my people had hearkened unto me, and that they had walked in my ways!" *Psalms* lxxxi. 13. "O that there were such a heart in this people, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them and with their children for ever!" *Deut.* v. 20. "O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!" *Deut.* xxxiii. 29. He would have been your God, and done all for you that your souls could well desire; but you loved the world and your flesh above him, and therefore you would not hearken to him; though you complimented with him, and gave him high titles; yet, when it came to the closing, "you would have none of him" *Psalms* lxxxi. 11, 12. "No marvel, then, if he gave you up to your own lusts, and you walked in your own counsels."—He condescends to reason, and pleads the case with you, and asketh you, "What is there in me or my service, that you should be so much against me? What harm have I done thee, sinner? Have I deserved this unkind dealing at thy hand? Many mercies have I shewn thee; for which of them dost thou thus despise me? Is it I, or is it Satan, that is your enemy? Is it I, or is it thy carnal self that would undo thee? Is it a holy life, or a life of sin that thou hast cause to fly from? If thou be undone, thou

procurest this to thyself, by forsaking me, the Lord, that would have saved thee," *Jer.* ii. 7. "Doeth not thy own wickedness correct thee, and thy sin reprove thee, that thou mayest see that it is an evil and bitter thing that thou hast forsaken me?" *Jer.* ii. 19. "What iniquity have you found in me, that you have followed after vanity, and forsaken me?" *Jer.* ii. 5, 6. He calleth out as it were to the brutes, to hear the controversy he hath against you. *Micah* vi. 3, 4, 5. "Hear, O ye mountains, the Lord's controversy, and ye strong foundations of the earth, for the Lord God hath a controversy with his people, and he will plead with Israel. O my people, what have I done unto thee, and wherein have I wearied thee? Testify against me, for I brought you up out of Egypt, and redeemed thee, &c." "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth, for the Lord hath spoken it. I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider! Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil doers, &c." *Isaiah* i. 2, 3, 4. "Do you thus requite the Lord, O foolish people and unwise? Is not he thy Father that bought thee? Hath he not made thee, and established thee?" *Deut.* xxii. 6. When he saw that you forsook him, even for nothing, and turned away from your Lord and life, to hunt after the chaff and feathers of the world, he told you of your folly, and called you to a more profitable employment, *Isaiah* lv. 1, 2, 3. "Wherefore do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Harken 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.—Seek ye the Lord while he may be found: Call ye upon him while he is near. 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," *ver.* 6, 7. and so *Isaiah* i. 16, 17, 18. And, when you would not hear, what complaints have you put him to, charging it on you as your wilfulness and stubbornness!—*Jer.* ii. 13. "Be astonished: O heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid!—For, my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water."—Many a time hath Christ proclaimed that free invitation to you, *Rev.* xxii. 17, "Let him that is athirst come; and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." But you put him to complain after all his offers: "They will not come to me, that they may have life" *John* v. 40. He hath invited you to feast with him in the kingdom of his grace, and you have had excuses from your grounds, and

your cattle, and your worldly business; and, when you would not come, you have said you could not; and provoked him to resolve that you should never taste of his supper, *Luke xiv. 15, 24*. And who is it long of now but yourselves? and what can we say is the chief cause of your damnation, but your own wills? You will be damned. The whole case is laid open by Christ himself, *Prov. i.* from the 20th to the end, “Wisdom crieth without, she uttereth her voice in the streets, she crieth in the chief place of concourse: How long, ye simple ones, will you love simplicity, and the scorers delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn ye at my reproof; behold I will pour out my spirit unto you, and I will make known my words unto you. Because I have called and ye refused, I have stretched out my hands, and no man regarded, but ye have set at nought all my counsel, would none of my reproofs; I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh, when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind. When distress and anguish come upon you, then shall they call on me, but I will not answer: They shall seek me early, but they shall not find me. For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord. They would none of my counsel; they despised all my reproof: Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. For, the away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them. But whose hearkeneth to me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from the fear of evil.”—I thought best to recite the whole text at large to you, because it doth so fully show the cause of the destruction of the wicked. It is not because God would not teach them, but because they would not learn. It is not because God would not call them, but because they would not turn at His reproof. Their wilfulness is their undoing.

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From what has been said, you may farther learn these following things:

1. From hence you may see, not only what blasphemy and impiety it is to lay the blame of men's destruction upon God, but also, how unfit these wicked wretches are to bring in such a charge against their Maker. They cry out upon God, and say, he gives them not grace, and his threatening is severe, and God forbid that all should be damned that be not converted and sanctified: and they think it a hard measure that a short sin should have an endless suffering; and if they be damned they say they cannot help it; when in the mean time they are busy about their own destruction, even cutting the throat of their own souls, and will not be persuaded to hold their hands. They think God were cruel if he should damn them; and yet they are so cruel to themselves, that they will run into the fire of hell; when God hath told them it is a little before them, and neither entreaties, nor threatening, nor any thing that can be said, will stop them. We see them almost undone; their careless, worldly, fleshly lives do tell us, that they are in the power of the devil; we know, if they die before they are converted, all the world cannot save them; and, knowing the uncertainty of their lives, we are afraid every day lest they drop into the fire. And, therefore, we entreat them to pity their own souls, and not to undo themselves when mercy is at hand, and they will not hear us. We entreat them to cast away their sin, and come to Christ without delay, and to have some mercy on themselves, but they will have none. And yet they think that God must be cruel if he condemn them. O wilful miserable sinners! It is not God that is cruel to you; it is you that are cruel to yourselves. You are told that you must turn or burn, and yet you turn not. You are told, that if you will needs keep your sins, you shall keep the curse of God with them, and yet you will keep them. You are told that there is no way to happiness but by holiness; and yet you will not be holy. What would you have God say more to you? What would you have him do with

his mercy? He offereth it to you, and you will not have it. You are in the ditch of sin and misery, and he would give you his hand to help you out, and you refuse his help: he would cleanse you of your sins, and you had rather keep them. You love your lust, and love your gluttony, and sports, and drunkenness, and will not let them go. Would you have him bring you to heaven whether you will or not? Or would you have him bring you and your sins to heaven together? Why that is an impossibility: you may as well expect he should turn the sun into darkness. What! an unsanctified fleshly heart to be in heaven! it cannot be. "There entereth nothing that is unclean," *Rev.* xxi. 17. "For what communion hath light with darkness, or Christ with Belial?" *2 Cor.* vi. 14, 15. "All the day long hath he stretched out his hands to a disobedient and gainsaying people," *Rom.* x. 25. What will you do now? Will you cry to God for mercy? Why God calleth upon you to have mercy upon yourselves, and you will not. Ministers see the poisoned cup in the drunkard's hand, and tell him, there is poison in it, and desire him to have mercy on his soul, and forbear; and he will not hear us: drink it he must and will; he loves it; and therefore, though hell come next, he saith he cannot help it. What should one say to such men as these? We tell the ungodly careless worldling, it is not such a life that will serve the turn, or ever bring you to heaven. If a bear were at your back, you would mend your pace, and, when the curse of God is at your back, and Satan and hell are at your back, will you not stir, but ask, What needs all this ado? Is an immortal soul of no more worth? Oh! have mercy upon yourselves! But they will have no mercy on themselves, nor once regard us. We tell them the end will be bitter. Who can dwell with the everlasting fire? And yet they will have no mercy on themselves. And yet will these poor wretches say, that God is more merciful than to condemn them, when it is themselves that cruelly and unmercifully run upon condemnation; and if we should go to them, and entreat them, we cannot stop them. If we should fall on our knees to them, we cannot stop them; but to hell they will go, and yet will not believe that they are going thither. If we beg of them for the sake of God that made them, and preserveth them; for the sake of Christ, that died for them; for the sake of their own poor souls, to pity themselves, and go no farther in the way to hell, but come to Christ while his arms are open, and enter into the state of life while the door stands open, and now take mercy while mercy may be had; they will not be persuaded. If we should die for it, we cannot so much as get them so much as now and then to consider with themselves of the matter, and turn. And yet they can say, "I hope God will be merciful." Did you never consider what he saith, *Isaiah* xxvii. 11. "It is a people of no understanding, therefore he that made them will

not have mercy on them; and he that formed them will shew them no favour” If another man will not clothe you when you are naked, and feed you when you are hungry, you will say he is unmerciful. If he should cast you into prison, or beat and torment you, you would say he is unmerciful. And yet you will do a thousand times more against yourselves, even cast away both soul and body for ever, and never complain of your own unmercifulness! Yea, and God, that waited upon you all the while with his mercy, must be taken to be unmerciful, if he punish you after all this. Unless the Holy God of heaven will give these wretches leave to trample upon his Son’s blood, and with the Jews, as it were, again to spit in his face, and do despite to the spirit of grace, and make a jest of sin, and a mock at holiness, and set more light by saving mercy than by the filth of their fleshly pleasures; and unless, after all this, He will save them by the mercy which they cast away, and would none of, God himself must be called unmerciful by them.—But he will be justified when he judgeth, and he will not stand or fall at the bar of a sinful worm.—I know there are many particular cavils that are brought by them against the Lord; but I shall not here stay to answer them particularly, having done it already in my *Treatise of Judgment*, to which I shall refer them. Had the disputing part of the world been as careful to avoid sin and destruction as they have been busy in searching after the cause of them, and forward directly to impute them to God, they might have exercised their wits more profitably, and have less wronged God, and sped better themselves. When so ugly a monster as sin is within us, and so heavy a thing as punishment is on us, and so dreadful a thing as hell is before us, one would think it would be an easy question, who is in the fault, whether God or man be the principal or culpable cause? Some men are such favourable judges of themselves, that they are more prone to accuse the infinite perfection and goodness itself than their own hearts, and imitate their first parents, that said, “The serpent tempted me, and the woman that thou gavest me gave unto me, and I did eat;”—secretly implying that God was the cause. So say they, “the understanding that thou gavest me was unable to discern; the will that thou gavest me was unable to make a better choice; the objects which thou didst set before me did entice me; the temptation which thou didst permit to assault me prevailed against me.” And some are so loathe to think that God can make a self-determinate creature, that they dare not deny him that which they take to be his prerogative to be the determiner of the will in every sin, as the first efficient immediate physical cause.—And many would be content to acquit God from so much causing of evil, if they could but reconcile it with his being the chief cause of good: as if truths would be no longer truths if we are unable

to see them in their perfect order and coherence; because our ravelled wits cannot see them right together, nor assign each truth its proper place, we presume to conclude that some must be cast away. This is the fruit of proud self-conceitedness; when men receive not God's truth as a child his lesson, in a holy submission to the omniscience of our teacher but as censurers that are too wise to learn.

Objecti. But we cannot convert ourselves till God convert us: we can do nothing without his grace: It is not in him that willeth, nor in him that runneth, but in God that showeth mercy.

Answer. God hath two degrees of mercy to show; the mercy of conversion first, and the mercy of salvation last: The latter he will give to none but those that will and run, and hath promised it to them only. The former is to make them willing that are unwilling; and though your own willingness and endeavours deserve not his grace, yet your wilful refusal reserveth that it should be denied to you. Your disability is your very unwillingness itself which excuseth not your sin, but maketh it the greater. You could turn if you were but truly willing; and, if your wills themselves are so corrupted, that nothing but effectual grace will move them, you have the more cause to seek for that grace, and yield to it, and do what you can in the use of means, and not neglect it, or set yourself against it. Do what you are able first, and then complain of God for denying you grace, if you have cause.

Object. But you seem to intimate all this while that man hath free will.

Ans. The dispute about free will is beyond your capacity; I shall therefore now trouble you with no more but this about it. Your will is naturally a free, that is, a self-determining faculty, but it is viciously inclined, and backward to do good; and therefore we see, by sad experience, that it hath not a virtuous moral freedom. But that it is the wickedness of it which deserveth the punishment. And I pray you let us not befool ourselves with opinions. Let the case be your own. If you had an enemy so malicious that he falls upon you, and beats you every time he meets you, and takes away the lives of your children, will you excuse him, because he saith, "I have not free-will, it is my nature; I cannot choose, unless God gives me grace." If you have a servant that robbeth you, will you take such an answer from him? Might not every thief and murderer, that is hanged at the assize, give such an answer? "I have not free will; I cannot change my own heart! What can I do without God's grace?" And shall they therefore be acquitted? If not, why then should you think to be acquitted for a course of sin against the Lord?

2. From hence also you may observe these three things together: 1. What a subtle tempter Satan is. 2. What a deceitful thing sin is. 3. What a foolish creature corrupted man is. A subtle tempter indeed, that can persuade the greatest part of the world to go wilfully into everlasting fire, when they have so many warnings and dissuasive as they have. A deceitful thing is sin indeed, that can bewitch so many thousands to part with everlasting life, for a thing so base and utterly unworthy! A foolish creature is man indeed, that will be cheated of his salvation for nothing, yea, for a known nothing; and that by an enemy, and a known enemy. You would think it impossible that any man in his wits should be persuaded, for a trifle, to cast himself into the fire, or water, or into a coal-pit, to the destruction of his life. And yet men will be enticed to cast themselves into hell. If your natural lives were in your own hands, that you should not die till you should kill yourselves, how long would most of you live? And yet, when your everlasting life is so far in your own hands, under God, that you cannot be undone till you undo yourselves, how few of you will forbear your own undoing? Ah! what a silly thing is man! And what a bewitching and befooling thing is sin!

3. From hence also you may learn, that it is no great wonder if wicked men be hinderers of others in the way to heaven, and would have as many unconverted as they can, and would draw them into sin and keep them in it! Can you expect that they should have mercy on others, that have none upon themselves? and that they should so much stick to the destruction of others, that stick not to destroy themselves? They do no worse by others than they do by themselves.

4. Lastly, You may hence learn, that the greatest enemy to man is himself; and the greatest judgment in this life, that can befall him, is to be left to himself; that the great work that grace hath to do, is to save us from ourselves; that the greatest accusations and complaints of men should be against themselves; that the greatest work that we have to do ourselves, is to resist ourselves; and the greatest enemy that we should daily pray, and watch, and strive against, is our own carnal hearts and wills; and the greatest part of your work, if you will do good to others, and help them to heaven, is to save them from themselves, even from their blind understandings, and corrupted wills, and perverse affections, and violent passions, and unruly senses. I only name all these for brevity sake; and leave them to your farther consideration.

Well, Sirs, now we have found out the great delinquent and murderer of souls, (even men's selves, their own wills) what remains but that you judge according to the evidence, and

confess this great iniquity before the Lord, and be humbled for it, and do so no more? To these three ends distinctly, I shall add a few words more.—1. Farther to convince you. 2. To humble you. And 3. To reform you, if there yet be any hope.

1. We know so much of the exceeding gracious nature of God, who is so willing to do good, and delighteth to show mercy, that we have no reason to suspect him of being the culpable cause of our death, or to call him cruel: he hath made all good, and he preserveth and maintaineth all; the eyes of all things do wait upon him, and he giveth them their meat in due season; he openeth his hand, and satisfieth the desires of all the living, *Psal.* cxlv. 15, 16. He is not only “righteous in all his ways (and therefore will deal justly) and holy in all his works, (and therefore not the author of sin) but he is also good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.” *Psal.* cxlv. 17, 19. But as for man, we know his mind is dark, his will perverse, his affections carry him so headlong, that he is fitted by his folly and corruption to such a work as the destroying of himself. If you saw a lamb lie killed in the way, would you sooner suspect the sheep, or the wolf to be the author of it, if they both stand by? Or, if you see a house broken, and the people murdered, would you sooner suspect the prince, or judge, that is wise and just, and had no need; or a known thief or murderer? I say therefore as *James* i. 13, 14, 15. “Let no man say, when he is tempted, that he is tempted of God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man, (to draw him to sin) but every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then, when lust hath conceived, it brings forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, brings forth death. You see here that sin is the offspring of your own concupiscence, and not to be fathered on God; and that death is the offspring of your own sin, and the fruit which it will yield you as soon as ripe. You have a treasure of evil in yourselves, as a spider hath of poison, from whence you are bringing forth hurt to yourselves, and spinning such webs as entangle your own souls. Your nature shows it is you that are the cause.

2. It is evident that you are your own destroyers, in that you are so ready to entertain any temptation almost that is offered you. Satan is scarce readier to move you to any evil than you are ready to hear and to do as he would have you. If he would tempt your understanding to error and prejudice, you yield. If he would hinder you from good resolutions, it is soon done. If he would cool any good desires or affections, it is soon done. If he would kindle any lust, or vile affections and desires in you, it is soon done. If he will put you on to evil thoughts,

or deeds, you are so free, that he needs not rod or spur. If he would keep you from holy thoughts, and words, and ways, a little doth it, you need no curb. You examine not his suggestions, nor resist them with any resolution; nor cast them out as he casts them in, nor quench the sparks which he endeavoureth to kindle; but you set in with him, and meet him half-way, and embrace his notions, and tempt him to tempt you. And it is easy for him to catch such greedy fish that are ranging for a bait, and will take the bare hook.

3. Your destruction is evidently of yourselves, in that you resist all that would help to save you, and would do you good, or hinder you from undoing yourselves. God would help and save you by his word, and you resist it; it is too strict for you. He would sanctify you by his Spirit, and you resist and quench it. If any man reprove you for your sin, you fly in his face with evil words; and if he would draw you to a holy life, and tell you of your present danger, you give him little thanks, but either bid him look to himself, he shall not answer for you; or else, at best, you put him off with heartless thank, and will not turn when you are persuaded. If ministers would privately instruct and help you, you will not come to them; your unhumbled souls do feel but little need of their help; if they would catechise you, you are too old to be catechised, though you are not too old to be ignorant and unholy. Whatever they can say to you for your good, you are so self-conceited and wise in your own eyes, (even in the depth of ignorance) that you will regard nothing that agreeth not with your present conceits; but contradict your teachers, as if you were wiser than they; you resist all that they can say to you, by your ignorance, unwillfulness, and foolish cavils, and shifting evasions, and unthankful rejections; so that no good that is offered can find any welcome acceptance and entertainment with you.

4. Moreover, it is apparent that you are self-destroyers, in that you draw the matter of your sin and destruction even from the blessed God himself. You like not the contrivance of his wisdom; you like not his justice, but take it for cruelty; you like not his holiness, but are ready to think he is such a one as yourselves, *Psalm* i. 21. and make as light of sin as you do; you like not his truth, but would have his threatening, even his peremptory threatening prove false. And his goodness, which you seem most highly to approve, you partly resist, as it would lead you to repentance; and partly abuse, to the strengthening of your sin, as if you might freely sin because God is merciful, and because his grace doth so much abound.

5. Yea, you fetch destruction from the blessed Redeemer, and death from the Lord of life himself! And nothing more emboldeneth you in sin, than that Christ hath died for you; as if now the danger of death were over, and you might boldly venture: As if Christ were become a servant to Satan and your sins, and must wait upon you while you are abusing him; and because he is become the physician of souls, and is able to save to the utmost all that come to God by him, you think he must suffer you to refuse his help, and throw away medicines, and must save you whether you will come to God by him or not; so that a great part of your sins are occasioned by your bold presumption upon the death of Christ; not considering that he came to redeem his people from their sins, and to sanctify them a peculiar people to himself, and to confirm them in holiness to the image of their heavenly Father, and to their head. *Matt.* i. 21. *Tit.* ii. 14. *1 Pet.* i. 15, 16.—*Col.* iii. 10, 11. *Phil.* iii. 9, 10.

6. You also fetch your own destruction from all the providences and works of God. When you think of his eternal fore-knowledge and decrees, it is to harden you in your sin, or possess your minds with quarrelling thoughts, as if his decrees might spare you the labour of repentance and a holy life, or else were the cause of sin and death. If he afflict you, you repine; if he prosper you, you the more forget him, and are the more backwards to the thoughts of the life to come. If the wicked prosper, you forget the end that will set all reckonings strait; and are ready to think it is as good to be wicked as godly; and thus you draw your death from all.

7. And the like you do from all the creatures and mercies of God to you. He giveth them to you as the tokens of his love, and furniture for his service, and you turn them against him, to the pleasing of your flesh. You eat and drink to please your appetite, and not for the glory of God, and to enable you to perform his work. Your clothes you abuse to pride. Your riches draw your hearts from heaven, *Phil.* iii. 18. Your honours and applause do puff you up. If you have wealth and strength, it makes you more secure, and forget your end. Yea, other men's mercies are abused by you to your hurt. If you see their honours and dignity, you are provoked to envy them. If you see their riches, you are ready to covet them. If you look upon beauty, you are stirred up to lust. And it is well if godliness itself be not an eye sore to you.

8. The very gifts that God bestoweth on you, and the ordinances of grace which he hath instituted for his church, you turn to sin. If you have better parts than others, you grow proud and self-conceited. If you have but common gifts, you take them for special grace. You take

the bare hearing of your duty for so good a work, as if it would excuse you for not obeying it. Your prayers are turned into sin, because you regard iniquity in your hearts, *Psa. lxvi. 18.* "And depart not from iniquity when you call on the name of the Lord," *2 Tim. ii. 19.* "Your prayers are abominable, because you turn away your ear from hearing the law," *Prov. xxviii. 9.* and are more ready to offer the sacrifice of fools (thinking you do God some special service) than to hear his word and obey it," *Eccles. v. 1.*

9. Yea, the persons that you converse with, and all their actions, you make the occasions of your sin and destruction. If they live in the fear of God, you hate them.—If they live ungodly, you imitate them. If the wicked are many, you think you may the more boldly follow them. If the godly be few, you are the more emboldened to despise them. If they walk exactly, you think they are too precise: if one of them fall in a particular temptation, you stumble upon them, and turn away from holiness, because that others are imperfectly holy; as if you were warranted to break your necks, because some others have by heedlessness sprained a sinew or put out a bone. If a hypocrite discover himself, you say, *they are all alike*, and think yourselves as honest. A professor can scarce slip into any miscarriage, but, because he cuts his finger, you think you may boldly cut your throats. If ministers deal plainly with you, you say they rail. If they speak gently or coldly, you either sleep under them, or are little more affected than the seats you sit upon. If any errors creep into the church, some greedily entertain them, and others reproach the Christian doctrine for them, which is most against them. And if we would draw you from any ancient rooted error, which can but plead two, or three, or six, or seven hundred years custom, you are as much offended with a motion for reformation as if you were to lose your life by it, and hold fast old errors, while you cry out against *new* ones. Scarce a difference can arise among the ministers of the gospel, but you will fetch your own death from it. And you will not hear, or at least not obey, the unquestionable doctrine of any of those that jump not with your conceits. *One* will not hear a minister because he saith the Lord's prayer; and another will not hear him because he doth not use it. One will not hear them that are for Episcopacy; and another will not hear them that are against it. And, thus I might show it you in many other cases, how you turn all that come near you to your own destruction; so clear is it that the ungodly are self-destroyers, and that their perdition is of themselves.

Methinks now, upon the consideration of what is said, and the review of your own ways, you should bethink you what you have done, and be ashamed and deeply humbled to remember it. If you be not, I pray you consider these following truths:

1. To be your own destroyers is to sin against the deepest principle in your natures, even the principle of self-preservation. Everything naturally desireth or inclineth to its own felicity, welfare, or perfection. And will you set yourselves to your own destruction? When you are commanded to love your neighbours as yourselves, it is supposed that you naturally love yourselves. But if you love your neighbours no better than yourselves, it seems you would have all the world be damned.

2. How extremely do you cross your own intentions! I know you intend not your own damnation, even when you are procuring it. You think you are but doing good to yourselves, by gratifying the desires of your flesh: but, alas! it is but as a draught of cold water in a burning fever, or as the scratching of an itching wild-fire, which increaseth the disease and pain. If indeed you would have pleasure, or profit, or honour, seek them where they are to be found, and do not hunt after them in the way to hell.

3. What pity is it, that you should do that against yourselves which none else on earth or in hell can do! If all the world were combined against you, or all the devils in hell were combined against you, they could not destroy you without yourselves, nor make you sin but by your own consent. And will you do that against yourselves which no one else can do? You have hateful thoughts of the devil, because he is your enemy, and endeavoureth your destruction. And will you be worse than devils to yourselves? Why thus it is with you, if you had hearts to understand it, when you run into sin, and run from godliness, and refuse to turn at the call of God, you do more against your own souls than men or devils could do besides. And, if you should set yourselves and bend your wits to do yourselves the greatest mischief, you could not devise to do a greater.

4. You are false to the trust that God hath reposed in you. He hath much entrusted you with your own salvation; and will you betray your trust? He hath set you with all diligence to keep your hearts; and is this the keeping of them? *Prov. iv. 23.*

5. You do even forbid all others to pity you when you will have no pity on yourselves.—If you cry to God in the day of your calamity, for *mercy, mercy*; what can you expect, but that

he should thrust you away, and say, "Nay, thou wouldst not have mercy on thyself: Who brought this upon thee but thy own wilfulness?" And if your brethren see you everlastingly in misery, how shall they pity you, that were your own destroyers, and would not be dissuaded?

6. It will everlastingly make you your own tormentors in hell to think on it, that you brought yourselves wilfully to that misery. O what a torturing thought it will be for ever to think with yourselves that this was your own doing!—That you were warned of this day, and warned again, but it would not do! That you wilfully sinned, and wilfully turned away from God! That you had time as well as others, but you abused it! That you had teachers as well as others, but you refused their instructions! You had holy examples, but you did not imitate them. You were offered Christ, and grace, and glory, as well as others; but you had more mind of your fleshly pleasure. You had a price in your hands, but you had not a heart to lay it out, *Prov. xvii. 16.*—Can it choose but torment you to think of this your present folly? O that your eyes were open to see what you have done in the wilful wronging of your own souls! and that you better understood these words of God, *Prov. viii. 33, 34, 35, 36.* "Hear instruction and be wise, and refuse it not: Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors: For whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain the favour of the Lord: But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: All they that hate me love death."

And now I am come to the conclusion of this work, my heart is troubled to think how I shall leave, lest after this the flesh should still deceive you, and the world and the devil should keep you asleep, and I should leave you as I found you, till you awake in hell: Though in care of your poor souls, I am afraid of this, as knowing the obstinacy of a carnal heart: yet I can say with the prophet *Jeremiah, xvii. 16.* "I have not desired the woeful day, the Lord knoweth:" I have not, with *James* and *John*, desired that "fire might come from heaven" to consume them that refused Jesus Christ, (*Luke ix. 54*). but it is the preventing of the eternal fire that I have been all this while endeavouring! And O that it had been a needless work! That God and conscience might have been as willing to spare me this labour as some of you could have been!—Dear friends! I am so loathe that you should die in everlasting fire, and be shut out of heaven, if it be possible to prevent it, that I shall once more ask you, what do you now resolve? Will you turn, or die? I look upon you as a physician on his patient, in a dangerous disease, that says to him, "Though you are far gone, take but this medicine, and forbear but these few things that are hurtful to you, and I dare warrant your life: but if you

will not do this, you are but a dead man.”—What would you think of such a man, if the physician, and all the friends he hath, cannot persuade him to take one medicine to save his life, or to forbear one or two poisonous things that would kill him?—This is your case. As far as you are gone in sin, do but now turn and come to Christ, and take his remedies, and your souls shall live: Cast up your deadly sins by repentance, and turn not to the poisonous vomit any more, and you shall do well. But yet, if it were your bodies that we had to deal with, we might partly know what to do for you: Though you would not consent, yet you might be held or bound, while the medicine were poured down your throats, and hurtful things might be kept from you: But about your souls it cannot be so; we cannot convert you against your wills: There is no carrying madmen to heaven in fetters; you may be condemned against your wills, because you sinned with your wills; but you cannot be saved against your wills. The wisdom of God hath thought meet to lay men’s salvation or destruction exceedingly much upon the choice of their own wills; that no man shall come to heaven, that chose not the way to heaven, and no man shall come to hell, but shall be forced to say, “I have the thing I chose, my own will did bring me hither.”—Now, if I could but get you to be willing, to be thoroughly, and resolvedly, and habitually willing, the work were more than half done.—And alas! must we lose our friends, and must they lose their God, their happiness, their souls, for want of this? Oh! God forbid! It is a strange thing to me, that men are so inhuman and stupid in the greatest matters, that in less things are very civil and courteous, and good neighbours. For ought I know, I have the love of all, or almost all my neighbours, so far, that if I should send to any man in the town, or parish, or country, and request a reasonable courtesy of them, they would grant it me; and when I come to request of them the greatest matter in the world, for themselves, and not for me, I can have nothing of many of them but a patient hearing. I know not whether people think a man in the pulpit is in good sadness or not, and means as he speaks; for I think I have few neighbours, but, if I were sitting familiarly with them, and telling them what I have seen, or done, or known in the world, they would believe me, and regard what I say: But when I tell them, from the infallible word of God, what they themselves shall see and know in the world to come, they show by their lives that they do either not believe it, or not much regard it. If I met ever a one of them on the way, and told them, yonder is a coal-pit, or there is a quicksand, or there are thieves lie in wait for you, I could persuade them to turn by: But when I tell them that Satan lieth in wait for them, and that sin is poison to them, and that hell is not a matter to be jested with, they go on as if they did not hear me.—

Truly, neighbours, I am in as good earnest with you in the pulpit as I am in any familiar discourse, and, if ever you will regard me, I beseech you let it be here. I think there is never a man of you all, but, if my own soul lay at your wills, you would be willing to save it, (though I cannot promise that you would leave your sins for it.) If I come hungry or naked to one of your doors, would you not part with more than a cup of drink to relieve me? I am confident you would; if it were to save my life, I know you would (some of you) hazard your own. And yet, will you not be entreated to part with your sensual pleasures for your own salvation? I profess to you, Sirs, I am as hearty a beggar with you this day, for the saving of your own souls, as I would be for my own supply, if I were forced to come begging to your own doors. And, therefore, if you would hear me then, hear me now: if you would pity me then, be entreated now to pity yourselves. I do again beseech you, as if it were on my bended knees, that you would hearken to your Redeemer, and *turn, that you may live*.—All you that have lived in ignorance, carelessness, and presumption, to this day; all you that have been drowned in the cares of the world, and have no mind of God and eternal glory; all you that are enslaved to your fleshly desires of meats and drink, sports and lusts; and all you that know not the necessity of holiness, and never were acquainted with the sanctifying work of the Holy Ghost upon your souls; that never embraced your blessed Redeemer by a lively faith, and with admiring and thankful apprehensions of his love; and that never felt a higher estimation of God and heaven, and heartier love to them, than your fleshly prosperity, and the things below: I earnestly beseech you, not only for my sake, but for the Lord's sake, and for your souls' sake, that you go not one day longer in your former condition, but look about you, and cry to God for converting grace, that you may be made new creatures, and may escape the plagues that are a little before you. And if ever you will do anything for me, grant me this request, to turn from your evil ways and live. Deny me anything that ever I shall ask you for myself, if you will but grant me this. And if you deny me this, I care not for anything else that you would grant me. Nay, as ever you will do anything at the request of the Lord that made you and redeemed you, deny him not this; for if you deny him this, he cares for nothing that you shall grant him. As ever you would have him hear your prayers, and grant your requests, and do for you at the hour of death and day of judgment, or in any of your extremities, deny not his request now in the day of your prosperity. O believe it, death and judgment, and heaven and hell, are other matters when you come near them, than they seem to carnal eyes afar off.—Well tho' I cannot hope so well of all, I will hope that some of you are by this time

purposing to turn and live, and that you are ready to say, "God forbid that we should choose destruction by refusing conversion, as hitherto we have done."

If these be the thoughts and purposes of your hearts, I shall gladly give you direction what to do, and that but briefly, that you may the easier remember it for your practice.

DIRECTION I

If you will be converted and saved, labour to understand the necessity and true nature of conversion; for what, and from what, and to what, and by what, it is that you must turn. Consider in what a lamentable condition you are till the hour of your conversion, that you may feel it is not a state to be rested in. You are under the guilt of all the sins that ever you committed; and under the wrath of God, and the curse of his law; you are bond-slaves to the devil, and daily employed in his work against the Lord, yourselves, and others; you are spiritually dead and deformed, as being void of the holy life, and nature, and image of the Lord. You are unfit for any holy work, and do nothing that is truly pleasing unto God. You are without any promise or assurance of his protection, and live in continual danger of his justice, not knowing what hour you may be snatched away to hell, and most certain to be damned if you die in that condition. And nothing short of conversion can prevent it. Whatever civilities, or amendments, or virtues, are short of true conversion, will never procure the saving of your souls. Keep the true sense of this natural misery, and so of the necessity of conversion on your hearts.

And then you must understand what it is to be converted: it is to have a new heart or disposition, and a new conversation.

Quest. 1. For what must we turn?

Ans. For these ends following, which you may attain: 1. You shall immediately be made living members of Christ, and have an interest in him, and be renewed after the image of God, and be adorned with all his graces, and quickened with a new and heavenly life, and saved from the tyranny of Satan and the dominion of sin, and be justified from the curse of the law, and have the pardon of all the sins of your whole lives, and be accepted of God, and made his sons, and have liberty to call Him Father, and go to him by prayer, in all your needs, with a promise of acceptance; you shall have the Holy Ghost to dwell in you, to sanctify and guide you; you shall have part in the brotherhood, communion, and prayers of the saints; you shall be fitted for God's service, and be freed from the dominion of sin, and be useful and a blessing to the place where you live, and shall have the promise of this life, and that which is to come. You shall want nothing that is truly good for you, and your necessary afflictions you will be enabled to bear; you may have some taste of communion with God in the spirit, especially in all holy ordinances, where God prepareth a feast for your souls; you shall be heirs of heaven while you live on earth, and may foresee by faith the everlasting glory, and so may live and die in peace; and you shall never be so low, but your happiness will be incomparably greater than your misery.—How precious is every one of these blessings, which I do but briefly name, and which in this life you may receive. And then, 2. At death your souls shall go to Christ, and at the day of judgment both soul and body shall be justified and glorified, and enter into your Master's joy; where your happiness will consist in these particulars:

1. You shall be perfected yourselves:—Your mortal bodies shall be made immortal, and the corruptible shall put on incorruption: You shall no more be hungry, or thirsty, or weary, or sick; nor shall you need to fear either shame, or sorrow, or death, or hell. Your souls shall be perfectly freed from sin, and perfectly fitted for the knowledge, and love, and praises of the Lord.

2. Your employments shall be to behold your glorious Redeemer, with all your holy fellow-citizens of heaven; and to see the glory of the most blessed God, and to love him perfectly, and be beloved by him, and to praise him everlastingly.

3. Your glory will contribute to the glory of the New Jerusalem, the city of the living God; which is more than to have a private felicity to yourselves.

4. Your glory will contribute to the glorifying of your Redeemer, who will everlastingly be magnified and pleased in you that are the travail of his soul; and this is more than the glorifying of yourselves.

5. And the eternal Majesty, the living God, will be glorified in your glory; both as he is magnified by your praises, and as he communicateth of his glory and goodness to you, and as he is pleased in you, and in the accomplishment of his glorious work, in the glory of the New Jerusalem, and of His Son. All this, the poorest beggar of you, that is converted, shall certainly and endlessly enjoy.

2. You see *for* what you must turn: next you must understand *from* what you must turn: And that is, in a word, from your carnal self, which is the end of all the unconverted. From the flesh that would be pleased before God, and would still be enticing you; from the world, that is the bait; and from the devil, that is the angler for souls, and the deceiver. And so from all known and wilful sins.

3. Next you must know to *what* end you must turn: and that is, to God as your end, to Christ as the way to the Father; to holiness, as the way appointed you by Christ; and to the use of all the helps and means of grace afforded you by the Lord.

4. Lastly; you must know by *what* you must turn: And that is, by Christ, as the only Redeemer and Intercessor; and by the Holy Ghost, as the sanctifier; and by the Word, as his instrument or means; and by faith and repentance, as the means and duties on your part to be performed. All this is of necessity.

Direct. II. If you will be converted and saved, be much in secret serious consideration. Inconsiderateness undoes the world. Withdraw yourselves often into retired secrecy, and there bethink you of the end why you were made; of the life you have lived; the time you have lost; the sin you have committed; of the love and sufferings, and fullness of Christ; of the danger you are in; of the nearness of death and judgment; of the certainty and excellency of the joys of heaven; and of the certainty and terror of the torments of hell; and eternity of both; and of the necessity of conversion and a holy life. Steep your hearts in such considerations as these.

Direct. III If you will be converted and saved, attend upon the word of God, which is the ordinary means. Read the scripture, or hear it read, and other holy writings that do apply it:

Constantly attend on the public preaching of the word. As God will lighten the world by the sun, and not by himself alone without it, so will he convert and save men by his ministers, who are the lights of the world, *Acts* xxvi. 17, 18. *Matt.* v. 14. When he had miraculously humbled *Paul*, he sendeth him to *Ananias*, *Acts* ix. 10. And when he hath sent an angel to *Cornelius*, it was but to bid him send for *Peter*, who is to tell him what he is to believe and do.

Direct. IV. "Betake yourselves to God in a course of earnest constant prayer. Confess and lament your former lives, and beg his grace to illuminate and convert you. Beseech him to pardon what is past, and to give you his Spirit, and change your hearts and lives, and lead you in his ways, and save you from temptations." And ply this work daily, and be not weary of it.

Direct. V. "Presently give over your known and wilful sins. Make a stand, and go that way no farther."—Be drunk no more, but avoid the place and occasion of it. Cast away your lusts and sinful pleasures with detestation, and rail no more; and, if you have wronged any, restore as *Zaccheus* did. If you will commit again your old sins, what blessings can you expect on the means for conversion?

Direct. VI. "Presently, if possible, change your company, if it have hitherto been bad." Not by forsaking your necessary relations, but your unnecessary sinful companions, and join yourselves with those that fear the Lord, and inquire of them the way to heaven. *Acts* ix. 19, 26. *Psalms* xv. 4.

Direct. VII. "Deliver up yourselves to the Lord Jesus as the physician of your souls," that he may pardon you by his blood, and sanctify you by his Spirit, by his word and ministers, the instruments of the Spirit. He is the way, the truth, and the life; there is no coming to the Father but by him, *John* xiv. 6. "Nor is there any other name under heaven by which you can be saved," *Acts* iv. 12. Study therefore His person and nature, and what he hath done and suffered for you, and what he is to you, and what he will be, and how he is fitted to the full supply of all your necessities.

Direct. VIII. If you mean indeed to turn and live, "Do it speedily, without delay". If you be not willing to turn to-day, you are not willing to do it at all.—Remember you are all this while in your blood, under the guilt of many thousand sins, and under God's wrath, and you stand at the very brink of hell; there is but a step between you and death. And this is not a case for a man that is well in his wits to be quiet in. Up therefore presently, and fly as for your lives; as

you would be gone out of your house, if it were all on fire over your heads.—O if you did but know in what continual danger you live in, and what daily unspeakable loss you do sustain, and what a safer and sweeter life you might live, you would not stand trifling, but presently turn. Multitudes miscarry that wilfully delay, when they are convinced that it must be done. Your lives are short and uncertain; and, what a case are ye in, if you die before you thoroughly turn! You have staid too long already, and wronged God too long; sin getteth strength and rooting while you delay. Your conversion will grow more hard and doubtful. You have much to do, and therefore put not all off to the last, lest God forsake you, and give you up to yourselves, and then you are undone for ever.

Direct. IX. If you will turn and live, do it “unreservedly, absolutely, and universally.” Think not to capitulate with Christ, and divide your heart betwixt him and the world, and to part with some sins, and keep the rest; and to let that go that which your flesh can spare. This is but self-deluding; you must in heart and resolution forsake all that you have, or else you cannot be his disciples, *Luke* xiv. 26, 33. If you will not take God and heaven for your portion, and lay all below at the feet of Christ, but you must needs also have your good things here, and have an earthly portion, and God and glory are not enough for you, it is in vain to dream of salvation on these terms, for it will not be. If you seem never so religious, if yet it is but a carnal righteousness, and the flesh’s prosperity, or pleasure, or safety, be still excepted in your devotedness to God, this is as certain a way to death as open profaneness, tho’ it may be more plausible.

Direct. X. If you will turn and live, do it “resolvedly,” and stand not still deliberating, as if it were a doubtful case. Stand not wavering, as if you were yet uncertain whether God or the flesh be the better master; or whether heaven or hell be the better end; or whether sin or holiness is the better way. But away with your former lusts, and presently, habitually, fixedly resolve. Be not one day of one mind, and the next day of another; but be at a point with all the world, and resolvedly give up yourselves, and all you have to God. Now while you are reading, or hearing this, resolve. Before you sleep another night, resolve. Before you stir from the place, resolve. Before Satan have time to take you off, resolve. You never turn indeed till you do resolve, and that with a firm unchangeable resolution.—*So much for the Directions.*

And now I have done my part in this work, that you may turn to the call of God, and live; what will become of it, I cannot tell: I have cast the seed at God’s command, but it is not in my

power to give the increase. I can go no farther with my message: I cannot bring it to your hearts, nor make it work; I cannot do your parts for you to entertain it and consider it; I cannot do God's part, by opening your heart to cause you to entertain it; nor can I show heaven or hell to your eye-sight, nor give you new and tender hearts. If I knew what more to do for your conversion, I hope I should do it.

But O thou, that art the gracious Father of spirits, thou hast sworn thou delightest not in the death of the wicked, but rather that they may turn and live; deny not thy blessing to those persuasions and directions, and suffer not thine enemies to triumph in thy sight; and the great deceiver of souls to prevail against thy Son, thy Spirit, and thy Word! O pity poor unconverted sinners, that have no hearts to pity themselves: Command the blind to see, and the deaf to hear, and the dead to live, and let not sin and death be able to resist thee.—Awaken the secure, resolve the unresolved, confirm the wavering, and let the eyes of sinners, that read these lines, be next employed in weeping over their sins; and bring them to themselves and to thy Son, before their sins have brought them to perdition. If thou sayst but the word, these poor endeavours shall prosper to the winning of many a soul, to their everlasting joy, and everlasting glory. *Amen.*