

Turn and live

A sermon by Richard Baxter

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?

It hath been the astonishing wonder of many a man, as well as me, to read in the holy Scripture, how few will be saved; and that the greatest part, even of those that are called, will be everlastingly shut out of the kingdom of heaven, and be tormented with the devils in eternal fire. Infidels believe not this when they read it, and therefore they must feel it. Those that do believe it are forced to cry out with Paul, *Rom. xi. 33*, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" but nature itself doth teach us all to lay the blame of evil works upon the doers, and therefore, when we see any heinous thing done, a principle of justice doth provoke us to inquire after him that did it, that the evil of the work may return the evil of shame upon the author. If we saw a man killed and cut in pieces we would presently ask, "Oh! Who did this cruel deed?" If the town was wilfully set on fire, you would ask, "what wicked wretch did this?" So when we read that most will be firebrands of hell for ever, we must needs think with ourselves, how comes this to pass? and who is it long of? who is it that is so cruel as to be the cause of such a thing as this? and we can meet with few that will own the guilt. It is indeed confessed by all that Satan is the cause: but that doth not resolve the doubt, because he is not the principal cause. He doth not force men to sin, but tempt them to it; and leaves it to their own wills whether they will do it or not: he doth not carry men to an alehouse and force open their mouths, and pour in the drink; nor doth he hold them that they cannot go to God's service; nor doth he force their hearts from holy thoughts. It lieth therefore between God himself and the sinner; one of them must needs be the principal cause of all this misery, whichever it is; for there is no other to cast it upon; and God disclaimeth it; he will not take it upon him: and the wicked disclaim it usually, and they will not take it upon them. And this is the controversy that is here managed in my text.

The Lord complaineth of the people; and the people think it is the fault of God. The same controversy is handled, chap. xvii. ver. 25. where they plainly say, "that the way of the Lord is

not equal:" and God saith, "it is their ways that are not equal." So here they say, in verse 9, "If our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how shall we then live?" As if they should say, if we must die, and be miserable, how can we help it? as if it were not long of them, but God. But God in my text doth clear himself of it, and telleth them how they may help it if they will, and persuadeth them to use means, and if they will not be persuaded, he lets them know that it is long of themselves; and, if this will not satisfy them, he will not therefore forbear to punish them. It is he that will be their judge, and he will judge them according to their ways; they are no judges of him or themselves, as wanting authority, and wisdom, and impartiality. Nor is it the cavilling with God, that shall serve their turn, or save them from the execution of justice, at which they murmur.

The words of this verse contain: 1. God's clearing of himself from the blame of their destruction. This he doth not by disowning his judgments and execution according to that law, or by giving them any hope that the law shall not be executed; but by professing that it is not their death that he takes pleasure in, but their returning rather, that they may live: and this he confirmeth to them by his oath. 2. An express exhortation to the wicked to return, wherein God doth not only command, but persuade and condescend also to reason the case with them, why will they die? The direct end of his exhortation is, that they may turn and live. The secondary or reserved ends, upon supposition that this is not attained, are these two: First, to convince them by the means which he used, that it is not the long of God if they be miserable. Secondly, to convince them from their manifest wilfulness in rejecting all his commands and persuasions, that it is the long of themselves; and they die, because they will die.

The substance of the text doth lie in these observations following.

Doct. 1. It is the unchangeable law of God, that wicked men must turn or die.

Doct. 2. It is the promise of God, that the wicked shall live, if they will but turn.

Doct. 3. God taketh pleasure in men's conversion and salvation; but not in their death or damnation: he had rather they would return and live, than go on and die.

Doct. 4. This is a most certain truth, which because God would not have men to question, he hath confirmed it to them solemnly by his oath.

Doct. 5. The Lord doth redouble his commands and persuasions to the wicked to turn.

Doct. 6. The Lord condescendeth to reason the case with them, and asketh the wicked, why they will die?

Doct. 7. If after all this the wicked will not turn, it is not the long of God that they perish, but of themselves; their own wilfulness is the cause of their damnation; they therefore die, because they will die.

Having laid the text open before your eyes in these plain propositions, I shall next speak somewhat of each of them in order, though briefly.

Doct. 1. *It is the unchangeable law of God, that wicked men must turn or die.*

If you will believe God, believe this: there is but one of these two ways for every wicked man, either conversion or damnation. I know the wicked will hardly be persuaded either of the truth or equity of this. No wonder if the guilty quarrel with the law. Few men are apt to believe that which they would not have to be true, and fewer would have that to be true, which they apprehend to be against them. But it is not quarrelling with the law, or with the judge, that will save the malefactor. Believing and regarding the law, might have prevented his death; but denying and accusing it will but hasten it. If it were not so, a hundred would bring their reason against the law, for one that would bring his reason to the law. And men would rather give their reasons, why they should not be punished, than to hear the commands and reasons of their governors which require them to obey. The law was not made for you to judge, but that you might be ruled and judged by it.

But, if there be any so blind as to venture to question either the truth or the justice of this law of God, I shall briefly give you that evidence of both, which methinks should satisfy a reasonable man.

And first, if you doubt whether this be the word of God or not, besides a hundred other texts, you may be satisfied by these few.—*Matt.* xviii. 5. “Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted and become as little children, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven.”—*John* iii. 3. “Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”—*2 Cor.* v. 17. “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new.”—*Col.* iii. 9, 10. “Ye have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge, after the image of him that created him.”—*Heb.* xii. 14. “Without holiness no man shall see God.”—*Rom.* viii. 8, 9.

“So, then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.” — “Now if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his.” — *Gal.* vi. 45. “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.” — *1 Pet.* i. 3. “According to his abundant grace he hath begotten us to a lively hope.” — *Verse* 23. “Being born again not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.” — *1 Pet.* ii. 1, 2. “Wherefore laying aside malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and evil speaking: as new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.” — *Psal.* ix. 17. “The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.” — *Psal.* xi. 5. “And the Lord loveth the righteous, but the wicked his soul hateth.”

As I need not stay to open these texts, which are so plain, so I think I need not add any more of that multitude which speak the like. If thou be a man that dost believe the word of God, here is already enough to satisfy thee, that the wicked must be converted or condemned. You are already brought so far, that you must either confess that this is true, or say plainly you will not believe the word of God. And, if once you come to that pass, there are but small hopes of you: look to yourselves as well as you can, for, it is likely you will not be long out of hell. You would be ready to fly in the face of him that should give you the lie; and yet dare you give the lie to God? But if you tell God plainly you will not believe him, blame him not if he never warn you more, or if he forsake you, and give you up as hopeless. For to what purpose should he warn you, if you will not believe him? Should he send an angel from heaven to you, it seems you would not believe. For an angel can speak but the word of God; and, if an angel should bring you any other gospel, you are not to receive it, but to hold him accursed (*Gal.* i. 8). And surely there is no angel to be believed before the Son of God, who came from the Father to bring us this doctrine. If he be not to be believed, then all the angels in heaven are not to be believed. And if you stand on these terms with God, I shall leave you till he deal with you in a more convincing way. God hath a voice that will make you hear. Though he entreat you to hear the voice of his gospel, he will make you hear the voice of his condemning sentence, without entreaty. We cannot make you believe against your will; but God will make you feel against your will.

But let us hear what reason you have, why you will not believe this word of God, which us that the wicked must be converted or condemned. I know your reason; it is because that you judge it unlikely that God should be so unmerciful: you think it cruelty to damn men

everlastingly for so small a thing as a sinful life. And this leads us to the second thing, which is, to justify the equity of God in his laws and judgments.

And first, I think you will not deny but that it is most suitable to an immortal soul to be ruled by laws that promise an eternal reward and threaten an endless punishment. Otherwise the law should not be suited to the nature of the subject, who will not be fully ruled by any lower means than the hopes or fears of everlasting things: As it is in case of temporal punishment; if a law were now made, that the most heinous crimes shall be punished with a hundred years captivity, this might be of some efficacy, as being equal to our lives. But, if there had been no other penalties before the flood, when men lived eight or nine hundred years, it would not have been sufficient, because men would know that they might have so many hundred years impunity afterwards. So it is in the present case.

2. I suppose that you will confess, that the promise of an endless and inconceivable glory is not so unsuitable to the wisdom of God, or the case of man. And why then should you not think so of the threatening of an endless and unspeakable misery?

3. When you find it in the word of God that so it is, and so it will be, do you think yourselves fit to contradict this word?—Will you call your Maker to the bar, and examine his word upon the accusation or falsehood? Will you set upon him, and judge him by the law of your conceits? Are you wiser, and better, and more righteous than he? Must the God of heaven come to you to learn wisdom? Must infinite wisdom learn of folly? and infinite Holiness be corrected by a selfish sinner that cannot keep himself an hour clean? Must the Almighty stand at the bar of a worm? O! horrid arrogance of senseless dust! Shall every mole, or clod, or dunghill, accuse the sun of darkness, and undertake to illuminate the world? Where were you when the Almighty made these laws, that he did not call you to his counsel? Surely he made them before you were born, without desiring your advice! and you came into the world too late to reverse them. If you could have done so great a work, you should have stepped out of your nothingness, and have contradicted Christ when he was on earth, or Moses before him, or have saved Adam and his sinful progeny from the threatened death, that so there might have been no need of Christ! And what if God withdraw his patience and sustentation, and let you drop into hell while you are quarrelling with his word?—Will you then believe that there is no hell?

4. If sin be such an evil that it requires the death of Christ for its expiation, no wonder

if it deserve our everlasting misery.

5. And if the sin of the devils deserved an endless torment, why not also the sin of man?

6. And methinks you should perceive, that it is not possible for the best of men, much less for the wicked, to be competent judges of the desert of sin. Alas! We are both blind and partial. You can never know fully the desert of sin till you fully know, the evil of sin: and you can never fully know the evil of sin till you fully know, 1 The excellency of the soul, which it deformeth: 2. And the excellency of holiness, which it doth obliterate: 3. And the reason and excellency of the glory, which it violateth: And 4. the excellency of the glory which it doth despise: And, 5. the excellency and office of reason, which it treadeth down:

6. No, nor till you know the infinite excellency, almightiness and holiness, of that God, against whom it is committed. When you fully know all these, you shall fully know the desert of sin. Besides, you know that the offender is too partial to judge the law or the proceedings of the judge. We judge by feeling, which blinds our reason. We see, in common worldly things, that most men think the cause is right which is their own; and that all is wrong that is done against them; and let the most wise, or just impartial friends persuade them to the contrary, and it is all in vain. There are few children but think the father is unmerciful, or dealeth hardly with them, if he whip them. There is scarce the vilest wretch, but thinketh the church doth wrong him, if they excommunicate him; or scarce a thief or murderer that is hanged, but would accuse the law and judge of cruelty, if that would serve his turn.

7. Can you think that an unholy soul is fit for heaven? Alas! they cannot love God there, nor do him any service which he can accept. They are contrary to God; they loathe that which he most loveth; and love that which he abhorreth: they are incapable of that imperfect communion with him; which his saints do here partake of. How then can they live in that perfect love of him, and full delight and communion with him, which is the blessedness of heaven? You do not accuse yourselves of unmercifulness, if you make not your enemy your bosom counsellor; and yet you will blame the absolute Lord, the most wise and gracious Sovereign of the world, if he condemn the unconverted to perpetual misery.

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I beseech you now, all that love your souls, that instead of quarrelling with God, and with his word, you will presently stoop to it, and use it for good. All you that are unconverted in this assembly, take this as the undoubted truth of God; you must ere long be converted or condemned; there is no other way, but to turn or die. When God that cannot lie hath told you this; when you hear it from the Maker and Judge of the world, it is time for him that hath ears to hear. By this time you may see what you have to trust to. You are but dead and damned men, except you will be converted. Should I tell you otherwise, I should deceive you with a lie.—Should I hide this from you, I should undo you, and be guilty of your blood, as the verses before my text assure me: ver. 8. “When I say to the wicked, O wicked man, you shalt surely die, if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thy hand.”—You see then, though this be a rough and unwelcome doctrine, it is such as we must preach, and you must hear. It is easier to hear of hell than feel it. If your necessities did not require it, we would not gall your tender ears with truths that seem so harsh and grievous. Hell would not be so full, if people were but willing to know their case, and to hear and think of it. The reason why so few escape it is, because they strive not to enter in at the strait gate of conversion, and go the narrow way of holiness while they have time; and they strive not, because they are not awakened to a lively feeling of the danger they are in; and they are not awakened, because they are loathe to hear or think of it, and that is partly through foolish tenderness and carnal self-love, and partly because they do not well believe the word that threateneth it.—If you will not thoroughly believe this truth, methinks the weight of it should force you to remember it; and it should follow you, and give you no rest, till you are converted. If you had but once heard this word, by the voice of an angel, “Thou must be converted, or condemned; turn, or die” would it not stick in your mind, and haunt you night and day, so that in your sinning you would remember it, as if the voice were still in your ears, “turn, or die!” O happy were your souls if it might thus work with you, and never be forgotten or let you alone till it have driven home your heart to God. But if you will cast it out by forgetfulness or unbelief, how can it work to your conversion and salvation? But take this with you to your sorrow, though you

may put this out of your minds, you cannot put it out of the Bible; but there it will stand as a settled truth, which you shall experimentally know forever, that there is no other way but, *turn, or die.*

O what is the matter then, that the hearts of sinners be not pierced with such a weighty truth! A man would think now, that every unconverted soul that hears these words should be pricked to the heart, and think with themselves, this is my own case, and never be quiet till they found themselves converted.—Believe it, Sirs, this drowsy careless temper will not last long. Conversion and condemnation are both of them awakening things. I can foretell it as truly as if I saw it with my eyes, that either grace or hell will shortly bring these matters to the quick, and make you say, “What have I done? what a foolish wicked course have I taken?” The scornful and the stupid state of sinners, will last but a little while, As soon as they either turn or die, the presumptuous dream will be at an end, and then their wits and feeling will return.

But I foresee there are two things that are likely to harden the unconverted, and make me lose all my labour, except they can be taken out of the way: and that is, the misunderstanding on those two words: [the wicked] and [turn.] Some will think to themselves, it is true, the wicked must turn or die; but what is that to me? I am not wicked, though I am a sinner, as all men are. Others will think, “it is true that we must turn from our evil ways; but I am turned long ago: I hope this is not now to do.” And thus, while wicked men think they are not wicked, but are already converted, we lose all our labour in persuading them to turn. I shall therefore, before I go any farther, tell you here who are meant by the wicked, and who they are that must turn or die; and also what is meant by turning, and who they are that are truly converted. And this I have purposely reserved for this place, preferring the method that fits my end.

And here you may observe, that, in the sense of the text, a wicked man and a converted man are contraries. No man is a wicked man that is converted, and no man is a converted man that is wicked; so that to be a wicked man, and to be an unconverted man, is all one.

And therefore in opening one, we shall open both.

Before I can tell you what either wickedness or conversion is, I must go to the bottom, and fetch up the matter from the beginning.

It pleased the great Creator of the world to make three sorts of living creatures.—Angels he made pure spirits, without flesh, and therefore he made them only for heaven, and not to

dwell on earth. Beasts were made flesh, without immortal souls, and therefore they were made only for the earth, and not for heaven: Man is of a middle nature between both, as partaking of both flesh and spirit, so is he made for earth, but as his passage or way to heaven, and not that this should be his home or happiness. The blessed state that man was made for was to behold the glorious majesty of the Lord, and to praise him among his holy angels; and to love him, and to be filled with his love forever. And as this was the end that man was made for, so God did give him means that were fitted to the attaining of it. These means were principally two: First, the right disposition of the mind of man; Secondly, the right ordering of his life. For the first, God suited the disposition of man unto the end; giving him such knowledge of God as was fit for his present state, and a heart inclined to God in holy love. But yet he did not fix or confirm him in this condition; but, having made him a free agent, he left him in the hands of his own free will. For the second, God did that which belongeth to him: that is, he gave man a perfect law, requiring him to continue in the love of God, and perfectly to obey him. By the wilful breach of this law, man did not only forfeit his hopes of everlasting life, but also turned his heart from God, and fixed it on these lower fleshly things, and hereby did blot out our spiritual image of God, from the soul: So that man did both fall short of the glory of God, which was his end, and put himself out of the way by which he should have attained it; and this both as to the frame of his heart, and of his life. The holy inclination and love of his soul to God, he lost, and instead of it, he contracted an inclination and love to the pleasing of his flesh, or carnal self, by earthly things; growing strange to God, and acquainted with the creature: and the course of this life was suited to the inclination of his heart; he lived to his carnal self, and not to God, he sought the creature, for the pleasing of his flesh, instead of seeking to please the Lord. With this nature, or corrupt inclination, we are all now born into the world; for, "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" *Job* xiv. 4. As a lion hath a fierce and cruel nature before it doth devour; and an adder hath a venomous nature before she sting; so in our infancy we have those sinful natures, or inclinations, before we think, or speak, or do amiss: and hence springeth all the sin of our lives. And not only so, but when God hath of his mercy provided us a remedy, even the Lord Jesus Christ to be the Saviour of our souls, and bring us back to God again, we naturally love our present state, and are loathe to be brought out of it, and therefore are set against the means of our recovery. And, though custom have taught us to thank Christ for his good will, yet carnal self persuadeth us to refuse

his remedies, and to desire to be excused when we are commanded to take the medicines which he offereth, and are called to forsake all and follow him to God and glory.

I pray you read over this leaf again, and mark it: for in these few words you have a true description of our natural state, and consequently of a wicked man. For every man that is in this state of corrupted nature is a wicked man, and in a state of death.

By this also you are prepared to understand what it is to be converted; to which end you must farther know, that the mercy of God, not willing that man should perish in his sin, provided a remedy, by causing his Son to take our nature, and being in one person God and man, to become a mediator between God and man; and, by dying for our sins on the cross, to ransom us from the curse of God and the power of the devil: and, having thus redeemed us, the Father has delivered us into his hands as his own. Hereupon the Father and the Mediator do make a new law and covenant for man: not like the first, which gave life to none but the perfectly obedient, and condemned man for every sin; but Christ hath made a law of grace, or a promise of pardon and everlasting life to all, that, by true repentance and by faith in Christ, are converted unto God. Like an act of oblivion which is made by a prince to a company of rebels, on condition they lay down their arms and come in, and be loyal subjects for the time to come.

But, because the Lord knoweth that the heart of man is grown so wicked, that for all this men will not accept of the remedy, if they be left to themselves; therefore that Holy Ghost hath undertaken it as his office, to inspire the apostles, and seal up the scriptures by miracles and wonders, and to illuminate and convert the sons of the elect.

So that by this much you see, that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, have each their several works, which are eminently ascribed to them.

The Father's works were to create us, to rule us as his rational creatures, by the law of nature, and judge us thereby, and in mercy to provide us a Redeemer, when we were lost, and to send his Son, and accept his ransom.

The works of the Son for us were these; to ransom and redeem us by his sufferings and righteousness, to give out the promise or law of grace, and rule and judge the world as their Redeemer, on terms of grace, and to make intercession for us, that the benefit of his death may be communicated; and to send the Holy Ghost, which the Father also doth by the Son. The works of the Holy Ghost for us are these; to indite the holy scriptures, by inspiring and

guiding the prophets and apostles, and sealing the word by his miraculous gifts and works; and the illuminating and exciting the ordinary ministers of the gospel, and so enabling them and helping them to publish that word; and, by the same word, illuminating and converting the souls of men. So that, as you could not have been reasonable creatures if the Father had not created you; nor have had any access to God if the Son had not redeemed you; so neither can you have a part in Christ, or be saved, except the Holy Ghost do sanctify you. So that by this time you may see the several causes of this work:— The Father sendeth his Son: the Son redeemeth us, and maketh the promise of grace; the Holy Ghost inditeth and sealeth this gospel; the apostles are the secretaries of the Spirit to write it; the preachers of the gospel to proclaim it, and persuade men to obey it; and the Holy Ghost doth make their preaching effectual, by opening the hearts of men to entertain it; and all this to repair the image of God upon the soul, and to set the heart upon God again, and take it off the creature and carnal self to which it is revolted, and so turn the current of the life into a heavenly course, which before was earthly, and all this by the entertainment of Christ by Faith, who is the physician of the soul.

By what I have said, you may see what it is to be wicked, and what it is to be converted; which I think will yet be plainer to you, if I describe them as consisting of their several parts; and, for the first, a wicked man may be known by these three things.

First, he is one who places his chief content on earth, and loveth the creature more than God, and his fleshly prosperity above the heavenly felicity: He favoureth the things of the flesh, but neither discerneth nor savoureth the things of the spirit:—Though he will say, that heaven is better than earth, yet doth not really so esteem it to himself; if he might be sure of earth, he would let go heaven, and had rather stay here than be removed thither. A life of perfect holiness, in the sight of God, and in his love and praise for ever in heaven, doth not find such liking, with his heart, as a life of health, and wealth, and honour, here upon earth. And though he falsely profess that he loveth God above all, yet indeed he never felt the power of divine love within him, but his mind is more set on the world, or fleshly pleasures than on God. In a word, whoever loveth earth above heaven, and fleshly prosperity more than God, is a wicked unconverted man.

On the other hand, a converted man is illuminated to discern the loveliness of God; and so far believeth the glory that is to be had with God, that his heart is taken up to it, and set more

upon it, than anything in this world. He had rather see the face of God, and live in his everlasting love and praises, than have all the wealth or pleasures of the world; he seeth that all things else are vanity, and nothing but God can fill the soul, and therefore, let the world go which way it will, he layeth up his treasures and hopes in heaven, and for that he resolves to let go all. As the fire doth mount upwards, and the needle that is touched with the loadstone still turneth to the north, so the converted soul is inclined to God. Nothing else can satisfy him, nor can he find any content and rest but in his love. In a word, all that are converted do esteem and love God better than all the world; and the heavenly felicity is dearer to them than their fleshly prosperity. The proof of what I have said you may find in these places of scripture: *Phil.* iii. 18, 21. *Matt.* vi. 19, 20, 21. *Col.* iii. 1, 2, 4, 5. *Rom.* viii. 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 18, 23. *Psal.* lxxiii. 25, 26.

Secondly, a wicked man is one that maketh it the principal business of his life to prosper in the world, and attain his fleshly ends. And though he may read and hear, and do much in the outward duties of religion, and forbear disgraceful sins, yet this is all but the by, and he never makes it the principal business of his life to please God, and attain everlasting glory, and puts off God with the leavings of the world, and gives him no more service than the flesh can spare; for he will not part with all for heaven.

On the contrary, a converted man is one that makes it the principal care and business of his life to please God, and to be saved, and takes all the blessings of this life but as accommodations in his journey towards another life, and useth the creature in subordination to God: he loveth a holy life, and longeth to be more holy: he hath no sin but what he hateth, and longeth, and prayeth, and striveth to be rid of. The drift and bent of his life is for God; and, if he sin, it is contrary to the very bent of his heart and life, and therefore he rises again and lamenteth it, and dares not wilfully live in any known sin. There is nothing in this world so dear to him but he can give it up to God, and forsake it for him, and the hopes of glory. — All this you may see in *Col.* iii. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. *Matt.* vi. 20, 33. *Luke* xviii. 22, 23, 29. *Luke* xiv. 18, 24, 26, 27. *Rom.* viii. 13. *Gal.* v. 24. *Luke* xii. 21, &c.

Thirdly, the soul of a wicked man did never truly discern and relish the mystery of redemption, nor thankfully entertain an offered Saviour; nor is he taken up with the love of the Redeemer, nor willing to be ruled by him as the physician of his soul, that he may be saved from the guilt and power of his sins, and recovered unto God; but his heart is insensible of

this unspeakable benefit, and is quite against the healing means by which he should be recovered. Though he may be willing to be carnally religious, yet he never resigneth up his soul to Christ, and to the motion and conduct of his word and spirit.

On the contrary, the converted soul having felt himself undone by sin, and perceiving that he hath lost his peace with God, and hopes of heaven, and is in danger of everlasting misery, doth thankfully entertain the tidings of redemption, and, believing in the Lord Jesus as his only Saviour, resigneth up himself to him for wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption; he taketh Christ as the life of his soul, and liveth by him, and useth him as a salve for every sore, admiring the wisdom and love of God in this wonderful work of man's redemption. In a word, Christ doth even dwell in his heart by faith, and the life that he now liveth is by the faith of the Son of God, that he hath loved him, and gave himself for him; yea, it is not so much he that liveth, as Christ in him. For these, see *Job* i. 11, 12, and iii. 20. *John* xv. 2, 3, 4. *1 Cor.* i. 20, and ii. 2.

You see now in plain terms, from the word of God, who are the wicked and who are the converted. Ignorant people think that if a man be no swearer, nor curser, nor railer, nor drunkard, nor fornicator, nor extortioner, nor wrong anybody in their dealings, and if they come to church, and say their prayers, receive the sacrament, and sometimes extend their hands to the relief of the poor, these cannot be unconverted men. Or if a man, that hath been guilty of drunkenness, or swearing, or gaming, or the like vices, do but forbear them for the time to come, they think that this is a converted man.—Others think, if a man, that hath been an enemy and scorner at godliness, do but approve it, and join himself with those that are godly, and be hated for it by the wicked, as the godly are, that this must needs be a converted man. And some are so foolish as to think that they are converted by taking up some new opinion. And some think, if they have but been affrighted by the fears of hell, and had conviction and tortures of conscience, and thereupon have purposed and promised amendment, and take up a life of civil behaviour and outward religion, that this must needs be true conversion. And these are the poor deluded souls that are like to lose the benefit of all our persuasions; and, when they hear that the wicked must turn or die, they think that this is not spoken to them; for they are not wicked, but are turned already. And therefore it is that Christ told some of the rulers of the Jews who were graver and civiler than the common people, that “publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of Christ before them,” *Matt.* xxi. 31.

Not that a harlot or gross sinner can be saved without conversion, but because it was easier to make these gross sinners perceive their sin and misery, and the necessity of a change, than the civiler sort delude themselves by thinking that they are converted already, when they are not.

O sirs, conversion is another kind of work than most are aware of; it is not a small matter to bring an earthly mind to heaven, and to show man the amiable Excellency of God, till he be taken up in such love to him, that can never be quenched; to break the heart for sin, and make him fly for refuge to Christ, and thankfully embrace him as the life of his soul; to have the very drift and bent of the heart and life changed; so that a man renounceth that which he took for felicity, and placeth his felicity where he never did before, and liveth not to the same end, and driveth not on the same design in the world, as he formerly did: in a word, he that is in Christ is a new creature: "old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new." (2 *Cor.* v. 17). He hath a new understanding, a new will and resolution, new sorrows, and desires, and love, and delight: new thoughts, new speeches, new company, (if possible) and new conversation. Sin, that was before a jesting matter with him, is now so odious and terrible to him, that he flies from it as from death. The world, that was so lovely in his eyes, doth now appear but as vanity and vexation: God, that was before neglected, is now the only happiness of his soul; before he was forgotten, and every lust preferred before him: but now he is set next the heart, and all things must give place to him, and the heart is taken up in the attendance and observance of him, and is grieved when he hides his face, and never thinks itself well without him. Christ himself, that was wont to be slightly thought of, is now his only hope and refuge, and he liveth upon him as on his daily bread; he cannot pray without him, nor rejoice without him, nor think, nor speak, nor live without him.—Heaven itself, that before was looked upon but as a tolerable reserve which he hoped might serve his turn better than hell, when he could not stay any longer in the world, is now taken for his home, the place of his only hope and rest, where he shall see, and love, and praise that God that hath his heart already. Hell, that before did seem but as a bug bear to frighten men from sin, doth now appear to be a real misery, that is not to be ventured on, nor jested with.—The works of holiness, which before he was weary of, and seemed to be more ado than needs, are now both his recreation, and his business, and the trade that he lives upon. The Bible, which was before to him but almost as a common book, is now as the law of God, as a letter written to

him from heaven, and subscribed with the name or the eternal Majesty; it is the rule of his thoughts, and words, and deeds; the commands are binding, the threats are dreadful, and the promises of it speak life to his soul. The godly, that seemed to him but like other men, are now the excellentest and happiest on earth. And the wicked that were his play-fellows, are now his grief; and he, that could laugh at their sins, is readier now to weep for their sin and misery, *Psalms* xvi. 3. and xv. 4. *Phil.* iii. 18. In short, he hath a new end in his thoughts, and a new way in his endeavours, and therefore his heart and life are new. Before, his carnal self was his end; and his pleasure and worldly profits, and credit were his way; and now God and everlasting glory are his end; and Christ, and the spirit, and word, and ordinances, holiness to God, and righteousness, and mercy to men, these are his way. Before, self was the chiefest ruler; to which the matters of God and conscience must stoop and give place. And now God in Christ, by the spirit, word and ministry, is that chief ruler, to whom both self and all the matters of self must give place. So that this is not a change in one, or two, or twenty points, but in the whole soul, and in the very end and bent of the conversation. A man may step out of one path into another, and yet have his face the same way, and be still going towards the same place: But it is another matter to turn quite back again, and take his journey the contrary way, to a contrary place. So it is here: a man may turn from drunkenness to thriftiness, and forsake his good fellowship, and other gross disgraceful sins, and set upon some duties of religion, and yet be still going to the same end as before, intending his carnal self above all, and giving it still the government of his soul. But, when he is converted, this self is denied and taken down, and God is set up, and his face is turned the contrary way; and he, that before was addicted to himself, and lived to himself, is now by sanctification devoted to God, and liveth unto God. Before, he asked himself what he should do with his time, his parts, and his estate, and for himself he used them; but now he asketh God what he shall do with them, and useth them for him. Before, he would please God so far as might stand with the pleasure of his flesh and carnal self, but not to any great displeasure of them. But now he will please God, let flesh and self be ever so much displeased. This is the great change that God will make upon all that shall be saved.

You can say, that the Holy Ghost is our sanctifier; but do you know what sanctification is? Why, this is that I have now opened to you; and every man and woman in the world must have this, or be condemned to everlasting misery. They must turn or die. Do you believe all this, or do you not? Surely you dare not say, you do not; for it is past a doubt or denial. These

are not controversies, where one learned pious man is of one mind, and another of another; where one party saith this, and another saith that; every denomination among us that deserve to be called Christians are all agreed in this that I have said; and, if you will not believe the God of truth, and that in a case where every party do believe him, you are utterly inexcusable.

But, if you do believe this, how comes it to pass that you live so quietly in an unconverted state? Do you know that you are converted? and can you find this wonderful change upon your souls? Have you been thus born again, and made anew?—Are not these strange matters to many of you? and such as you never felt upon yourselves? If you cannot tell the day or week of your change, or the very sermon, that converted you, yet, do you find that the work is done; that such a change indeed there is, and that you have such hearts as before described? Alas! The most do follow their worldly business, and little trouble their minds with such thoughts: and, if they be but restrained from scandalous sins, and can say, “I am no whoremonger, nor thief, nor curser, nor swearer, nor tippler, nor extortioner; I go to church, and say my prayers;” they think that this is true conversion, and they shall be saved as well as any. Alas, this is foolish cheating of yourselves; this is too much contempt of an endless glory, and too gross neglect of your immortal souls.—Can you make so light of heaven and hell? Your corpse will shortly lie in the dust, and angels or devils will presently seize upon your souls, and every man and woman of you all will shortly be among other company, and in another case than now you are; you will dwell in those houses but a little longer, you will work in your shops but a little longer; you will sit in these seats, and dwell on this earth, but a little longer; you will see with those eyes, and hear with those ears, and speak with those tongues, but a little longer; till the resurrection day: and can you make shift to forget this? O what a place will you be shortly in of joy or torment! O what a sight will you shortly see in heaven or hell! O what thoughts will shortly fill your hearts with unspeakable delight or horror! What work will you be employed in; to praise the Lord with saints and angels, or to cry out in fire unquenchable with devils! And should all this be forgotten? And all this will be endless, and sealed up by an unchangeable decree; ETERNITY, ETERNITY will be the measure of your joys or sorrows: And can this be forgotten? And all this is true, most certainly true.—When you have gone up and down a little longer, and slept and awaked a few times more, you will be dead and gone, and find all true that now I tell you. And yet can you now so much forget it? You shall then remember that you heard this sermon, and that this day, from this place, you

were reminded of these things; and perceive them matters a thousand times greater than either you or I could have conceived; and yet shall they now be so much forgotten?

Beloved friends, if the Lord had not awakened me to believe and to lay to heart these things myself, I should have remained in a dark and selfish state, and have perished for ever: but, if he have truly made me sensible of them, it will constrain me to compassionate you as well as myself. If your eyes were so far opened as to see hell, and you saw your neighbours, that were unconverted, dragged thither with hideous cries, though they were such as you accounted honest people on earth, and feared no such matter by themselves, such a sight would make you go home and think of it; and think again, and make you warn all about you as that damned worldling in *Luke* xvi. 28. would have had his brethren warned, lest they come to that place of torment. Why, faith is a kind of sight; it is the eye of the soul, the evidence of things not seen. If I believe God, it is next to seeing; and therefore I beseech you excuse me, if I be half as earnest with you about these matters as if I had seen them. If I must die to-morrow, and it were in my power to come again from another world, and tell you what I had seen, would you not be willing to hear me? and would you not believe and regard what I should tell you? If I might preach one sermon to you after I am dead, and have seen what is done in the world to come, would you not have me plainly speak the truth and would you not crowd to hear me? and would you not lay it to heart? But this must not be; God hath his appointed way of teaching you by scripture and ministers, and he will not humour unbelievers so far as to send men from the dead to them, and to alter his established way. If any man quarrel with the sun, God will not humour him so far as to set up a clearer light. Friends, I beseech you, regard me now as you would do if I should come from the dead to you; for, I can give you as full assurance of the truth of what I say to you as if I had been there and seen it with my eyes: For, it is possible for one from the dead to deceive you; but Jesus Christ can never deceive you: but Jesus Christ can never deceive you.—The word of God. delivered in scripture, and sealed by the miracles and holy workings of the Spirit, can never deceive you. Believe this, or believe nothing. Believe and obey this, or you are undone. Now, as ever you believe the word of God, and as ever you care for the salvation of your souls, let me beg of you this reasonable request; and I beseech you deny me not: that you would, without any more delay, when you are gone from hence, remember what you heard, and enter into an earnest search of your hearts, and say to yourselves, “Is it so indeed? Must I turn or die? Must I be converted or condemned? It

is time for me then to look about me, before it be too late. O why did not I look after this till now? Why did I venturously post off so great a business? Was I awake, or in my wits? O blessed God, what a mercy is it that thou didst not cut off my life all this while, before I had any certain hope of eternal life!—Well, God forbid that I should neglect this work any longer. What state is my soul in? Am I converted, or am I not? Was ever such a change or work done upon my soul? Have I been illuminated by the word and spirit of the Lord to see the odiousness of sin, the need of a Saviour, the love of Christ, and the Excellency of God and glory? Is my heart broken or humbled within me for my former life? Have I thankfully entertained my Saviour and Lord that offered himself with pardon and life for my soul? Do I hate my former sinful life, and the remnant of every sin that is in me? Do I fly from them as my deadly enemies? Do I give up myself to a life of holiness and obedience to God? Do I love and delight in it? Can I truly say that I am dead to the world and carnal self, and that I live for God, and the glory which he hath promised? Hath heaven more of my estimation and resolution than earth? and is God the dearest and highest in my soul? Once, I am sure, I lived principally to the world and flesh, and God had nothing but some heartless services which the world could spare, and which were the leavings of the flesh.—Is my heart now turned another way? Have I a new design, and a new end, and a new train of holy affections? Have I set my hopes and heart in heaven? And is it not the scope, and design, and bent of my heart and life, to get well to heaven, and see the glorious face of God, and live in his everlasting love and praise? And when I sin, is it against the habitual bent and design of my heart? And do I conquer all gross sins, and am I weary and willing to be rid of mine infirmities? This is the state of a converted soul, and thus it must be with me, or I must perish. Is it thus indeed with me, or is it not? It is time to get this doubt resolved, before the dreadful judge resolve it. I am not such a stranger to my own heart and life, but I may somewhat perceive whether I am thus converted or not: if I be not, it will do me no good to flatter my soul with false conceits and hopes. I am resolved no more to deceive myself, but endeavour to know truly, off or on, whether I be converted, yea or no: that, if I be, I may rejoice in it; and glorify my gracious Lord, and comfortably go on till I reach the crown: And If I am not, I may set myself to beg and seek after the grace that should convert me, and may turn without any more delay:—For, if I find in time that I am out of the way, by the help of Christ I may turn and be recovered; but, if I stay till either my heart be forsaken of God, in blindness or hardness, or till I be caught away

by death, it is then too late. There is no place for repentance and conversion then: I know it must be now or never.”

Sirs, this is my request to you, that you will but take your hearts to task, and thus examine them, till you see, if it may be, whether you are converted or not; and, if you cannot find it out by your own endeavours, go to your ministers, if they be faithful and experienced men, and desire their assistance. The matter is great, let not bashfulness, nor carelessness hinder you. They are set over you to advise you, for the saving of your soul, as physicians advise you for the curing of your bodies. It undoes many thousands, that they think they are in the way to salvation when they are not; and thinking that they are converted, when it is no such thing. And then, when we call to them to turn, they go away as they came, and think that this concerns not them; for they are turned already, and hope they shall do well enough in the way that they are in; at least if they do but pick the fairest path, and avoid some of the foulest steps; when, alas! all this while they live but to the world and flesh, and are strangers to God and eternal life, and are quite out of the way to heaven. And all this is much, because we cannot persuade them to a few serious thoughts of their condition, and to spend a few hours in the examining of their states. Is there not many a self-deceiving wretch that hears me this day, that never bestowed one hour in all their lives to examine their souls, and try whether they are truly converted or not?—O merciful God, that will care for such wretches as care no more for themselves, and that will do so much to save them from hell, and help them to heaven, who will do so little for it themselves! If all that are in the way to hell did but know it, they durst not continue in it. The greatest hope that the devil hath of bringing you to damnation without a rescue, is by keeping you blind-fold and ignorant of your state, and making you believe that you may do well enough in the way that you are in. If you knew that you were out of the way to heaven, and were lost forever if you should die as you are; durst you sleep another night in the state that you are in? durst you live another day in it? Could you heartily laugh or be merry in such a state? What! and not know but you may be snatched away to hell in an hour! Sure it would constrain you to forsake your former company and course and to betake yourselves to the ways of holiness and the communion of saints: Sure it would drive you to cry to God for a new heart, and to seek help of those that are fit to counsel you. There is none of you sure that cares not for being damned. Well then, I beseech you presently make inquiry into your hearts, and give them no rest till you find out your condition;

that, if it be good, you may rejoice in it, and go on; and, if it be bad, you may presently look about you for recovery, as men that believe they must turn or die. What say you, Sirs? Will you resolve, and promise, to be at thus much labour for your own souls? Will you fall upon this self-examination when you get home? Is my request unreasonable? Your consciences know it is not.—Resolve on it, then, before you stir; knowing how much it concerneth your souls. I beseech you, for the sake of that God that doth command you, at whose bar you will shortly all appear, that you do not deny me this reasonable request: for the sake of souls that must turn or die, I beseech you deny me not; even but to make it your business to understand your own conditions, and build upon sure ground, and know, off and on, whether you are converted or not, and venture not your souls on negligent security.