

A Practical View of Regeneration

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THAT human nature has lost that moral purity and perfection with which it was originally endued, is a truth which lies at the heart of the Christian religion. Indeed, we see not how it can be denied by the deist, without casting a gross reflection on the character of God. It is only from the Scriptures, however, that we learn the origin of evil. Here we read, that God made man upright, but he hath sought out many inventions. Man being in honor continued not. When God created man he formed him in his own image and after his own likeness; and what that image consisted in, the apostle Paul informs us, when he speaks of the new creation. "And that ye be renewed in the spirit of your mind. And that ye put on the new man which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." The phrase "after God," means after the image of God. This is expressed in the parallel passage, "Seeing that 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." By the fall this moral image was effaced. The mind which had been illumined by divine truth became spiritually blind; the heart whose exercises had been holy and harmonious, became corrupt, the hot-bed of every vicious propensity, and the center of darkness and disorder. Instead of moral beauty, there was now deformity. In the place of pure felicity, misery succeeded. The soul was now turned with aversion from God and holiness, and the affections attached themselves to the creature. Reason and conscience no longer had control over the inferior passions and appetites; but these, seizing the reins of government, urged man on to carnal indulgences inconsistent with purity and peace. Being now alienated from God, man became his own center around which he endeavored to make all things revolve, from which the most direful disorder ensued; yet he persists in acting upon this principle of supreme selfishness. Although this depravity was from its commencement total, inasmuch as all holy exercise and all holy motives were banished from the mind; yet is human iniquity capable of indefinite increase. Its natural progress is from bad to worse, without a conceivable limit. All therefore are not equal in sin and guilt. The same person is comparatively innocent when he commences his course, to what he becomes at the end of a long life of transgression. And the enormity of his guilt, as well as the obstinate perverseness of his evil nature, depends on the clearness of the light resisted, and the multitude of the mercies abused. Wickedness may attain its greatest visible height among the heathen, but in the sight of God, self-righteous Pharisees are more guilty than Publicans; and Bethsaida, Chorazin and Capernaum will have a more intolerable doom than Tyre and Sidon, or even than Sodom itself. The deepest guilt is contracted under the clear sunshine of the gospel, and by those

whose privileges, opportunities, calls and professions, lay them under the strongest obligations to love and serve their Creator.

The proof of the wickedness of man is found in every part of the Bible; and it is a truth confirmed by all history and experience. That a reformation would be desirable, and that all men need to be made better than they are, will not be denied. But there is a deep-rooted opinion in the minds of men, that this reformation and return to the service of God, will be easy whenever they shall determine upon it. The need for supernatural power to regenerate the soul is not commonly felt; and when men begin to be convinced of their impotence as it relates to holy acts, they are prone to make their depravity, which is the only cause of their inability, their excuse.

The necessity of regeneration arises from the fact, that man by the fall has become dead in sin. Spiritual life is extinct, and, therefore, if any are saved, they must be regenerated. Life cannot spring from death. Life is a gift of God in all cases. He breathed into man, when his body was formed out of the clay, the breath of life. It would be as reasonable to believe that the organized body could inspire itself with life, as that the dead soul can perform acts of spiritual life. All men having fallen into the same spiritual death, all need regeneration. Some men are amiable in their natural temper, and regular in their external behavior; but these also are naturally blind and depraved. They have no right apprehensions of God, no holy affections towards him, no cheerful and habitual purpose to serve him. They need therefore to be converted, however highly they may be esteemed among men. Though such, like the young ruler who came to Christ, may have many amiable qualities which entitle them to the love of their friends, yet, like him, they may lack one thing. Their hearts may be fixed, like his, on worldly objects. Let all such, therefore, be assured that, as well as others, they must be born again. Man looketh on the outward appearance, but God searcheth the heart; and often that which is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God. Under a fair exterior there often lies concealed a heart full of unbelief, pride, and ingratitude. By the restraints of education, an enlightened conscience, and a regard to reputation, sin may be kept from breaking out into enormous and shameful actions; but the seeds of all iniquity are concealed in every heart. Men are satisfied commonly if they can so regulate their lives as to escape the censure of men, and the disgrace which follows wicked actions, but they pay little attention to their hearts which are as a cage of unclean birds. Most men are not in the habit of judging of their thoughts, imaginations and feelings, by the holy law of God, which condemns every wandering of desire, every unhallowed temper, and every want of supreme and perfect love. If we look upon our own hearts we must be convinced that all is not right within. If our hearts are naturally good, why do they turn away with strong secret aversion from the spiritual service of God? If our hearts are not dead to God, why are we not daily delighted with the

contemplation of his glorious attributes? Why is prayer a burden? Why are we so entirely engrossed with sensible and worldly pursuits and pleasures? And if the moral and amiable need regeneration, what shall we say of the multitudes who are living in open rebellion against God? The profane, the unjust, the intemperate, the licentious, the scoffer, the false-swearer, the defrauder of the widow and the orphan, the sabbath-breaker, the liar, the neglecters of God's worship, the slanderer, and a multitude of others who live habitually in known sin, surely need to be reformed, and they will never be thoroughly reformed until they are regenerated. Such must put off the old man with his corrupt deeds, and put on the new man. "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 who will abundantly pardon." There is an urgent necessity that every sinner should repent, for true repentance is unto life. And what our Lord declared to the Jews is true of all, and was intended for all. "Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish," and Paul preached to the Athenians that "God now commandeth all men every where to repent, because he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained, of which he hath given assurance unto all men in that he hath raised him from the dead." Evangelical repentance, conversion and regeneration, are substantially the same. They all signify a thorough change of views, affections, purposes and conduct; and this change is every where declared to be essential to salvation. And this is not a merely arbitrary constitution. No one is capable of the enjoyment of heavenly felicity who has never been born again. Without spiritual life, what would the sinner do in heaven? If men have no love to God, nor relish for his service, heaven is no place for them. Heaven is a holy place, and all the exercises and employments are holy, therefore, "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." And to be holy, ye must be born again.

Having considered the necessity of regeneration, we come now to speak of the power by which it is effected — of the instrument in accomplishing it — and of its nature and effects.

Regeneration must be the peculiar work of God, because it is "a new creation," and no power but that of God is adequate to such a work. It is a resurrection from the worst kind of death, and none can inspire the dead with life but the Almighty. It is giving sight to the blind, and opening the eyes which never saw the light of day, to behold the beauty of holiness, and the glory of God; but the same power which in the beginning caused light to shine out of darkness, must shine into our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. "Except a man be born of water and the spirit he cannot see the kingdom of God." "The wind bloweth where it listeth, etc., so is every one that is born of the spirit." "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit." Those who are the sons of God are not "born of blood, nor of

the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." Paul calls this change "the washing of regeneration," and "the renewing of the Holy Ghost." And David prays, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." But why multiply proofs of a truth so evident from reason as well as Scripture? If there be any such internal change of the heart, God must be its author; for how else could it be produced? "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one." If a tree be evil, who can make it good, but he who created it? If the heart be deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, will it purify itself? If all the thoughts and imaginations of man's heart are evil and only evil and that continually, whence will spring a holy nature? For a sinner to regenerate himself would be as absurd an idea, as for a man to create or beget himself. It is God that begins this good work within his people, and he will carry it on.

As God the Holy Spirit is the Author of regeneration; so the instrument employed is the Word of God. This is as clearly taught in Scripture as that God is the author or efficient cause. God is able to work without means, but both in the worlds of nature and grace it has pleased him to employ appropriate means for the accomplishment of his own ends. But although we know the fact that there is an established connection between means and ends; yet we are not competent to explain, in any case, how the end is produced by the means employed. Our animal frame is formed, and organized, and nourished, and kept alive, and recovered from disease by means adapted to these ends, but no one can explain the secret process of nature in these operations. Curious inquiries respecting the way in which the word is instrumental in the production of this change are not for edification. Sometimes regeneration is considered distinctly from the acts and exercises of the mind which proceed from it, but in the Holy Scriptures the cause and effect are included; and we shall therefore treat the subject in this practical and popular form. The instrumentality of the word can never derogate from the efficient agency of the Spirit in this work. The Spirit operates by and through the word. The word derives all its power and penetrating energy from the Spirit. Without the omnipotence of God the word would be as inefficient as clay and spittle, to restore sight to the blind. Ezekiel was commanded to prophesy over the dry bones in the valley of vision. Thus ministers are now sent to call upon those who are dead in trespasses and sins, to awake and arise from the dead, but none will obey their voice, unless a divine power accompanies their words. Men, it is true, are rational and accountable agents, and are therefore proper subjects of commands and exhortations; yet are they destitute of spiritual life, and no power but that of God as we have seen can communicate life. When the Spirit operates by the word, the soul before dead in sin is rendered susceptible of impressions from divine truth. The entrance of the truth under this divine influence gives light, and excites holy affections, which prompt to good purposes, and as a matter of course, the external actions are in obedience to the law of God. The man becomes a new creature. His wicked life is reformed. Actions before materially good are now performed from love to God and with a view to his glory. That the word of God is indeed the instrument or means of producing this change is evident from many plain testimonies of Scripture; such as the following, "The Law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul." "The testimonies of the Lord are sure

making wise the simple." "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth." "Being born again not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible, by the word of God which liveth and abideth forever." Therefore the word of God is called "the sword of the Spirit," and is said to be "quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder the soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner to the thoughts and intents of the heart." So in the exposition of the parable of the sower, our Lord says, "The seed is the word of God." And this seed, when sown on good ground bringeth forth fruit manifold. "For these are they which hear the word and receive it and bring forth fruit." The most precious seed never vegetates nor brings forth fruit, until it receives a vivifying influence from without; so the word of God, unaccompanied by the influences of the Holy Spirit, remains unfruitful, however often it may be heard or read; or however it may be treasured in the memory or theoretically understood. To have fruit it is not only necessary to have good seed, but good ground. Make the tree good and the fruit shall be good; for a corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit. There is need of a quickening influence on the dead soul of the sinner to render it capable of apprehending and appreciating the truth. In the order of causation life must precede action, but in the order of time the communication of life and the acts of the new creature are simultaneous. Lazarus was called from the dead by the voice of Christ, but he must have been inspired with life before he could hear that voice. But still it is proper to say, that he was called into life by the omnipotent voice of our Savior. So when the gospel is preached, the dead hear the voice of the Son of God and live. Or we may illustrate the instrumentality of the word by the case of the blind man whose eyes our Lord opened. This man, when he first looked up, saw objects indistinctly, "men as trees walking;" but when he looked a second time, he saw things clearly. Christ caused this man to see by the light of heaven which shone around him; but the power causing him to see was exerted on the eye, removing the obstacles to vision, or supplying what was defective in the organ. As soon as this was done, the light was the medium of the perception of surrounding objects. Thus the soul of every man is by nature blind. The light may shine around him, but he comprehendeth it not. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned." By the energy of the Holy Spirit this incapacity of spiritual vision is taken away; the eyes of the understanding are enlightened. The blindness is removed, and spiritual objects are perceived; but alas! with most, very indistinctly at first. "The light of the just increaseth more and more unto the perfect day." Truth is just as necessary to every spiritual act and exercise, as light is to vision. Where the truth is not apprehended there can be no faith, for faith is a belief of the truth; there can be no love, for it is by the truth that the excellencies of the character of God and Christ are made known. Without the knowledge of the truth, there can be no repentance, for this is the light which shows the holiness and extent of the law and the evil of sin. Thus it is evident that without the truth there can be no holy exercise and no true obedience. Therefore, we never find the Holy Spirit operating on adults but as accompanying the word of truth. We can conceive of a preparation of the heart to receive the truth before it is known, as in fact the knowledge of the

truth is acquired very gradually. Thus we can conceive of a divine agency on the heart of a heathen, by which he would be disposed to receive the truth as soon as it should be made known. Such a divine influence does probably prepare the way for the success of the gospel; but where the word is never sent, there we have no evidence that the Spirit exerts his renovating influence on the minds of men. Thus also we can form some idea how infants are regenerated. As they are capable of no moral exercises at present, they do not need the truth; but the Spirit of God can so renovate their depraved souls as to render them capable of apprehending and feeling the truth, as soon as their faculties are sufficiently developed; whether in this world or in another. And as we are all by nature the children of wrath — conceived in sin — and dead, infants need regeneration as really as adults, and cannot enjoy the holy happiness of heaven without such a renovation of their fallen nature.

From the connection which God has established in ordinary cases between the word and regeneration, we see the importance of sending the gospel to the heathen, and of having the good seed of the word sown as much as possible in every soul. The word should be preached in season and out of season, and the truth should be inculcated on the minds of children from their earliest years. Here is work in which all may engage and be useful. Hence also we learn how precious the book of God is which contains his holy word, and how desirable it is to have it faithfully translated into all languages, and circulated round the earth, until every family shall be in possession of the oracles of God. For not only in the preaching of the word of God, but also the reading of the Holy Scriptures, an effectual means of salvation. Agreeably to that in the Westminster Shorter Catechism, "The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the word, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith unto salvation." Paul was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, "for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth."

That usually a conviction of sin takes place previously to a change of heart, is a fact of common experience: and there seems to be a solid reason for this, that the sinful moral agent may be sensible of his miserable condition before he is delivered from it. As man naturally seeks to justify himself by his own righteousness, it is necessary that he should be cut off from this dependence on a broken law, which is now 'weak through the flesh,' and cannot bring him to life; and that he should see and feel that he is already justly condemned, and must despair of relief from the law. God permits the awakened sinner to try what he can do towards saving himself, until wearied with his own ineffectual efforts, he is brought to feel that he is indeed a lost sinner, and that there is no hope for him but in the sovereign mercy of God, on which he has no claim. It is suitable that when so great a benefit as pardon and eternal life is bestowed, it should be so conferred, as that the unworthy recipient should be fully convinced that it is a free gift, and an undeserved favor which might be most justly withheld. Otherwise the saved sinner would not feel a deep sense of his obligations; and his gratitude for free grace through eternity would not be so ardent. Some, however, are inclined to the opinion that conviction of sin, which is of any real value, is subsequent

to regeneration, and forms a part of that evangelical repentance which all the chosen of God experience. They suppose, that mere legal terrors, which are often felt by the reprobate here, and by all the wicked in hell, can have no necessary connection with regeneration; and that that deep sense of the turpitude and demerit of sin, which commonly precedes a sense of reconciliation, and is by many thought to precede regeneration, is really a consequence of that spiritual change, and a sure evidence that it has taken place. As the question only relates to the order of the exercises of the true penitent, it seems unnecessary to occupy time in discussing it. On both sides it is agreed that mere legal convictions, however the conscious may be awakened, and the soul agitated with terror, are no evidences of a change of heart. And it is also agreed, that all regenerate persons are brought to a deep sense of the intrinsic evil of sin, and this leads them inevitably to the conclusion, that God would be just if he should inflict upon them the condign punishment which he has threatened in his word. Indeed, when the mind is spiritually enlightened to see something of the great evil of sin, the penitent soul cannot help taking the part of God against itself, and approving of its own condemnation.

The question is sometimes asked, whether is regeneration an instantaneous or a gradual work? This is not a merely speculative question. If this is a gradual work, the soul may for some time, yea, for years, be hanging between life and death, and be in neither one state or nor the other, which is impossible. Suppose a dead man to be brought to life by a divine power, as Lazarus was, could there be any question of whether the communication of life was immediate? Even if the vital principle was so weak as not to manifest itself at once, yet its commencement must be instantaneous; because it may be truly asserted that such a man is dead or alive; if the former, life has not commenced, and whenever that state ceases, the man lives, for there is no intermediate state. So in regard to the communication of spiritual life, the same thing may be asserted; for whatever regeneration is, the transition from a state of nature to a state of grace must occur at some point of time, the moment before the sinner was unregenerate. This will be true even upon the principles of those who believe that the exercises of the regenerate man are not specifically different from those which are found in natural men under the common operations of the Spirit, but that the difference is merely in degree. For according to this theory, there will be some certain degree at which the man may be pronounced regenerate; at any inferior degree he is unregenerate; then the moment in which he passes from the next inferior degree to that in which regeneration consists is the moment of regeneration. We suppose that they who are pleased with this notion of the nature of regeneration would fix upon the time when pious feelings and desires become predominant as the period when the man is regenerated; but this must occur at some particular moment, and thus, regeneration is immediate and not gradual. By gradual regeneration, however, they may mean a gradual preparation for that state, by a continual increase of good desires and resolutions up to the time when the man becomes a true Christian. Upon this hypothesis, the correct way of speaking would be to say that the preparatory work was gradual, but regeneration itself was instantaneous. As if the change were compared to the entrance into some enclosure. The line of separation between

the space within and the space without is passed in a moment; yet in coming to it many steps may have been required, and much time employed. But this theory of regeneration which makes it to be nothing else but an increase of previously existing principles is not consistent with reason, experience, or Scripture. Indeed, there would be no propriety in the use of the word on this hypothesis: for such a change would be nothing else but the growth of a principle already in existence. To regenerate is to beget again, to give origin to a kind of life not already existing in the person. Again, according to this theory, there may be an almost inconceivably small difference between the regenerate and unregenerate. Suppose the latter to have advanced to the point nearest to the line of demarcation, of course the difference between him and the man who has actually passed the line may be so small that it cannot be distinctly conceived: and yet one of these is supposed to go to heaven, while the other is sent to hell. It is true that grace in the feeblest saint prevails over sin and the world habitually; but sometimes iniquities prevail against him for a season, as in the case of David and Peter. Upon this theory the believer, in every such case, must be fallen from grace; for if regeneration took place when good affections predominated, when at any time they lose their predominance, the believer must have fallen from his regenerate state, which opinion is held by some Arminians, who maintain that both David and Peter had entirely lost the principle of grace and had fallen into condemnation. But the true Scriptural doctrine is, that there is a specific difference between the exercises of the regenerate and the unregenerate. In the one there is true faith, sincere love to God, and genuine repentance, whereas in the other, there are no such exercises, in any degree. There may be resemblances and counterfeits, but in souls dead in trespasses and sins, there exists no faith, no sincere love, nor any other exercise of the spiritual life. The carnal mind is enmity against, and is not subject to the law of God, neither can be. But when regeneration takes place, although the exercises of piety may for a time be feeble, yet everlasting life is begun; such a soul can never perish for it is united to Christ by an indissoluble union.

The commencement of this work is often involved in much obscurity, as in the case of those who have been religiously educated, and have been early made the subjects of the saving operations of the Holy Spirit. Such persons having never run to the same excess of wickedness as many others, the change in their external conduct is not very perceptible; and having been regenerated at a period of life when their knowledge was small, and their judgment weak, they are unable to determine satisfactorily the nature of their early impressions. In consequence of this, and from observing a more remarkable change in others, they are led to call in question the reality of their conversion. Indeed, there is much danger lest unregenerate persons should, through the exceeding deceitfulness of the heart, confound the tender impressions which are sometimes experienced by youth religiously instructed, with the saving work of the Holy Spirit. External regularity and decency of deportment, with a respect for religion, and occasional fits of compunction, and strong desires of salvation, have induced many to cherish a fallacious hope; and sometimes pious parents and ministers from a solicitous desire to see the young taking their place in the church, have been accessory to this delusion. And the danger of deception is greatly

increased, when artificial means of excitement are applied to a mind tenderly awake to the importance of religion. Under such influences, many, after a season of agitation, have experienced an animal exhilaration, or a calm which naturally succeeds a storm, and have hastily taken up the fond persuasion that they had experienced a change of heart, when all that has been felt is nothing more than the workings of nature, or at most the convictions and desires which arise from the common influences of the Spirit. When such persons are persuaded to enter the communion of the church hastily, one of two events will ensue. Either they will forsake their profession and fall back to the world; or they will become formalists, and perhaps hypocrites, for life; secretly practicing iniquity, and utterly neglecting the religion of the heart, and often of the closet, while their public duties in the church are regularly, and it may be zealously performed. For as such professors have it as an object to lead others to think well of their religion, they will sometimes affect a zeal which is not genuine, and will manifest a strictness bordering on rigor, in external rites and observances. The savor of piety is however wanting, and the spirit of Christian humility and meekness cannot be counterfeited: the very attempt betrays the want of these tempers. And God in his righteous providence often brings false professors into such circumstances, that their true character is manifested to all men. They are permitted to fall into disgraceful sins in the sight of men, or their secret crimes, in which they had long indulged, are made public.

The conversion of some persons is so remarkable, either on account of the greatness and suddenness of the change, or the clearness with which God reveals Christ to their souls, that it is almost impossible for them to doubt the genuineness of their conversion. Such a case was that of Paul. Such also was the conversion of Col. Gardiner. The cases of John Newton and Richard Cecil are somewhat different. They had both gone to great lengths in infidelity and profligacy, so that the change was very great, yet it was not sudden but gradual. Still they seem never to have doubted of the reality of their change.

The views and feelings of all regenerated souls are of the same kind, although they may be exceedingly different in degree, and greatly modified by a variety of circumstances. Probably every case of genuine religious experience has something peculiar. The circumstances which commonly give complexion to these exercises are constitutional temperament, early habits and associations, the doctrinal knowledge possessed, the degree of terror or pungency of conviction which preceded, and the nature of the truths which happen to be first contemplated by the regenerated mind. It is a vain thing, therefore, to attempt to give in exact detail and order, the exercises of the new creature. For one man to make his own experience the standard by which to measure all other Christians is as unreasonable as it would be to insist that all men should be of the same stature, strength, and complexion. But in the midst of this diversity there is a general likeness. The same truths operate on all, and the same affections are excited in all. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature, old things are passed away, behold all things are become new." Without undertaking to describe the feelings of the renewed man in their actual succession, we will speak of them in

relation to the truths by which they are produced. A regenerated soul has views of God's holy character and of his law, different from any experienced before. The doctrinal or speculative notions may have been correct or extensive, but to the intrinsic excellence of spiritual objects, the unregenerate man is blind. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned." The view now enjoyed may be faint and indistinct, but still it is of the right kind, and the emotions which accompany it are new. A reverential fear of God is spread over the soul; a holy awe takes possession of the mind. There is also a deeper impression of the presence, power and majesty of God. His holiness is most distinctly contemplated in the moral law, and we cannot behold the divine image in the glass, without a deep conviction of our own sinfulness, and lively sorrow for the sins which we have committed. These sins appear now to be exceeding base, and the soul is not only penetrated with grief, but overwhelmed with shame, ceases not to condemn itself for having consented thus to transgress a holy law, and is deeply humbled in self-abasement before God. There is no longer any disposition to entertain hard thoughts of God as being too severe, but he is fully justified in the inmost convictions of the heart, and the penitent, instead of excusing or palliating his own sins, takes upon himself the whole blame, and freely acknowledges that God would be perfectly just in the infliction of the tremendous penalty of his holy law. Indeed, the view of divine justice is sometimes so clear, and that attribute appears so excellent, that the enlightened soul cannot but approve his own condemnation. He fully acquiesces in the righteousness of the divine administration, although he should be sent to hell. "And if my soul were sent to hell, Thy righteous law approves it well."

Another emotion which is common to all penitents, is a pungent sense of ingratitude to the best of beings and kindest of benefactors. There is no view which so certainly breaks and melts the hard heart as a sense of God's goodness; especially of his long suffering and patience which bore with us while we were wickedly rebelling against him. If tears ever flow, this feeling will draw them forth in copious floods. There is one view of sin however which produces an effect without parallel. It is the representation of its abominable nature in the cross of Christ, in the painful wounds inflicted on his body, in the ignominy to which he was exposed, and above all, in the vials of wrath which were poured out without mixture or mitigation on his holy soul. Here, as it were in characters of blood, we see depicted the unspeakable turpitude and guilt of sin. Here, at the foot of the cross, the love of sin receives a death-wound, and the heart is divorced from all its long cherished idols. Now the solemn purpose is formed to forsake sin, and to endeavor to live to God, in all holy obedience. Christ appears glorious and lovely not only as a Savior but as a Lord; and there is now no reluctance or hesitation about receiving him and trusting in him. For a while the convinced and humbled sinner is kept back from closing with the gracious terms of the gospel, by a legal spirit, by a sense of its own unworthiness, and a fear that if it comes it will not be received. It cannot conceive of that riches and freeness of grace which will welcome the chief of sinners to the house of mercy. A lingering thought of some previous cleansing or preparation; or at least of some

deeper conviction, or more tender relentings, prevents a speedy approach to Jesus. But O, when he manifests his love which brought him from a throne to a cross, doubt and unbelief are driven away, and like Thomas, the believing penitent exclaims, "My Lord and my God."

Where sin is truly repented of, there is always a willingness, and even a desire to confess it. Therefore we read, "That with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." Our confession should be made chiefly unto God, for him have we offended. "Against thee, thee only have I sinned and done this evil." And the sincere penitent spends much time in humble prostration of soul before God, confessing with brokenness of heart his multiplied and aggravated sins. He is ready to confess faults before men, and especially before the church, so far as it is thought to be for the glory of God and edification of the church. And if he has done injustice to individuals, he wishes to confess the wrong, and is anxious to make reparation, and even to do more. "Half my goods," said the converted publican, "I give to the poor, and if I have wronged any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold." The prayer of another publican was, "God be merciful to me a sinner."

It must not be passed over, though it would be understood by every experienced reader, that such views as have been described cannot but enkindle a holy flame of love to Christ, and to his cause and people. True faith cannot exist without love — it works by love. The views of faith cause the love of God to be shed abroad in the soul, and a sense of his love enkindles ours. "We love him because he first loved us." God is love. This is the brightest and most amiable aspect of his character; and when that divine excellence is manifested in unparalleled love to us, it cannot but produce a powerful effect in winning the affections, and drawing forth the heart in returns of love to him, "who has loved us and given himself for us." Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends: but God hath manifested his love by giving his only begotten Son to die for us while we were enemies. The cross becomes the great point of attraction to the believer, and the center of his warmest affections. From this point radiate the brightest rays of the divine glory. From the cross go forth the most potent influences to conquer the world, and to draw all men to the Savior. The regenerate man lives by faith upon his crucified Redeemer. Paul's experience is this, "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me, and the life which I now live I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." The new life inspired in regeneration is a life of dependence — of entire dependence upon Christ. The love of God in Christ is the animating principle of the new creature. But graces rise not alone, they cluster together, and mutually support and adorn each other. Faith works by love; faith and love united generate hope; for the good which is loved and looked for, is not present but future. And when hope rises to assurance it brings forth joy; and a sense of God's favor, and confidence in his mercy and protection fills the soul with abiding peace; a peace which the world cannot give, but which Christ often breathes into the hearts of his disciples. "My peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you, not as the world giveth give I unto you. Let not your heart be

troubled nor afraid."

But although true religion consists essentially in right feeling, it does not stop there, but goes forth into outward acts of obedience. Prayer and praise are no longer a task, but a delight. Searching the Scriptures, and meditation on the works and word of God, become the daily employments of the genuine convert; and his progress in divine knowledge is often astonishingly rapid. He thirsts after the knowledge of God, and his prayers for divine illumination are answered by the gracious influences of the Holy Spirit, who by degrees leads him into the knowledge of all necessary truth. The occasions of social and public worship are pleasant and refreshing to the renewed man, and the sacred rest and holy exercises of the Christian sabbath are in perfect correspondence with the taste and temper of his mind. He is ready to exclaim, "I was glad when they said unto me, let us go into the house of the Lord." "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts, my soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord." "One day in thy courts is better than a thousand." A renewed heart is not only a devotional but a benevolent heart. One of the strongest feelings experienced by the person truly converted is a desire for the salvation of others. This expansive desire may begin at home among his own kindred and friends, but it will go on to enlarge the circle until it has no other limits but the ends of the earth. Every man, however separated by distance or other circumstances, is viewed as a neighbor and a brother, and the desire of happiness for all who are not removed beyond the reach of mercy, becomes a cherished and predominate feeling, and prompts to active exertions as well as fervent prayers in behalf of those who are perishing in unbelief or for lack of knowledge. And the sincere inquiry is made, "Lord what would thou have me to do?" To promote the glory of God and the happiness of men are now the two great ends to which all plans and actions are directed. With cheerful alacrity and steady purpose the regenerated man begins a life of obedience and active usefulness. And as God has connected him with others by various relations, out of which spring an obligation to perform relative duties, he feels this obligation, and endeavors to fill up the circle of prescribed actions with diligence and fidelity. Whatever may be his condition in life, he will find enough to do. As a parent, a husband or wife, a child or brother, a magistrate or private citizen, a teacher or pupil, a master or servant, a friend or stranger, the law of God is so broad that it reaches his case and embraces every relation of human life, whether natural or artificial. The man who steadily performs these duties, and from day to day, like the sun, goes through his prescribed course, is indeed a regenerated man, for the tree is known by its fruits.

As this world is a place of trial and discipline, the child of God is not only called to act with energy, but to suffer with patience. He who is taught of God learns to be submissive to the divine will, and to bear with fortitude those evils which are incident to pilgrims and strangers in this world. But while the regenerated man experiences those exercises of piety which have been mentioned, he is not free from feelings of contrary nature. The old man, or the deep-rooted principle of sin, has received a deadly wound in regeneration, but the carnal life lingers, and sometimes struggles

with great force to recover the mastery of the soul. Innumerable corruptions are bred in the heart, and often these hidden evils are brought to view by the power of temptation, so that, for a season, "iniquities prevail," and the unwatchful Christian is led captive by his enemies; and if God did not reclaim him from his backsliding, he would be utterly lost. The existence, at the same time, of two opposite principles in the soul, of necessity produces a conflict. "The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, so that we cannot do the things that we would." This spiritual conflict is very painful, and the Christian soldier is often astonished at himself, and is led to bewail his own imperfection and inconsistency. He finds his enemies to be much more powerful and obstinate than he expected, when he enlisted under the banner of the cross. He pleased himself then with the prospect of an easy victory, and an almost unresisted progress. Sin appeared to be dead; but the appearance was deceitful, it only lay concealed in the depths of a deceitful heart. And when he finds the strength of his corruptions, and the feebleness of his graces, he is often much discouraged, and greatly fears that he shall one day fall by the hand of some of his numerous enemies. The stability of the covenant of grace, and the faithfulness of God's promises, are not at first fully understood; but gradually the sincere convert learns to live by faith, knowing and feeling that all his strength and comfort are treasured up in Christ. And after many painful contests, and some shameful defeats, he has the pleasure of finding that his enemies give him less disturbance than before, and learns to resist them more successfully, by means of the word, prayer and faith.

From what has been said we may deduce the following summary.

1. Regeneration is the commencement of spiritual life in a soul before dead in sin, by the omnipotent agency of God; and the exercises of this life are specifically different from all the exercises of an unregenerate heart.

2. The strength of the principle of life in the new birth, as in the natural birth, is exceedingly various; for while some are brought into the world of grace in the clear light of day, and are from the first active and vigorous, and enjoy much comfort in their pious exercises; others give very obscure evidence of being in possession of life, and remain long in a state of feebleness. Indeed, some are like children who seem at birth to be dead, but afterwards revive, and by degrees acquire vigor and maturity. But it by no means is a uniform fact that the children who are most healthy and vigorous at birth, continue to be so throughout life. Disease or other disasters may check their growth, and debilitate their constitution; while those who commence life in extreme weakness may acquire strength, and grow prosperously from year to year; so that, in mature age, they may have greatly surpassed many who were much more healthy and vigorous in the earliest stage of existence. Analogous to this are the facts observable in the spiritual life.

3. While some may experience this change so remarkably that they never can doubt of its reality, and can refer to the very day when they emerged from darkness to life, others, who nevertheless are truly regenerated, remain long in doubt about their spiritual state; and even when

the evidence of their conversion becomes satisfactory, they are utterly unable to fix the precise time when they began to live. And it is probable that many who speak with confidence of the time and place of their new birth, mistake entirely respecting this point: the time to which they refer the commencement of their spiritual life, is more probably the season of some clear manifestation of the divine favor, when darkness and sorrow were succeeded by joy and peace; and yet the principle of life may have existed long before. There is good reason to think that the exercises of a soul under conviction are often those of the sincere penitent.

4. Spiritual life is progressive in its nature. Habitual growth in grace is the best evidence of its reality. Those affections and joys which are temporary, however high they may arise, are not the exercises of a new creature. Under the influence of a strong love of happiness and dread of misery, and the convictions of an awakened conscience, many are greatly concerned about their salvation, and are induced to attend diligently and earnestly on the means of grace, and often are deeply impressed and shed many tears; and from some latent principle in the human constitution an oppressive burden of misery may suddenly be succeeded by a feeling of pleasure and lightness, accompanied by the persuasion that sin is pardoned and God appeased. This change of feeling may have its origin merely in the animal frame or nervous system, and may be illustrated by the effects produced by physical causes, such as opiates, carminatives, nitrous-oxide, etc. Or these sudden joys may originate in some suggestion to the mind, as that our sins are pardoned, or that God loves us, and the delusion is more complete if this sudden suggestion comes clothed in the language of Scripture, as son or daughter "thy sins are forgiven thee." These false conversions soon die away, and like the seed on stony ground, bring no fruit to maturity. But genuine piety is a growing principle, and proves that it has deep root by its regular advancement towards perfection. This gradual process in piety is beautifully represented by our Lord under the figure of seed vegetating and going on to maturity. "So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself, first the blade, then the ear; after that the full corn in the ear." Growth in piety resembles the growth of the human body from childhood to manhood. No progress is visible from one day to another, but in months and years the increase is manifest. And as the body, while rising to maturity, may for a season be retarded or thrown back by disease, so also the health of the soul is sometimes deeply impaired, and the exercises of piety in such a state of declension, become extremely feeble. But from these diseases the Great Physician knows how to recover the souls which he has redeemed.

5. Genuine piety is a permanent and undying principle, and thus it may be distinguished from transient impressions, however powerful; yet we should not suppose that the exercises of the real Christian are uniform, or that all experience equal fluctuations of feeling. We cannot ascertain, much less describe, all the causes which may singly, or in combination, give complexion to the frames and exercises of a child of God; nor can we determine, in many cases, why one believer

enjoys so much more tranquillity and cheerful hope than another, who may be equally sincere, and equally fervent in spirit.

A melancholy temperament, or a disposition to anticipate the worse in all matters, and to contemplate the dark side of the picture, has doubtless a great effect in modifying the exercises of many pious people. They are naturally gloomy and desponding, and they bring this temper with them into religion. They are always full of doubts and fears, and though they do really possess the characteristics of piety, they will not be encouraged to hope with confidence. They hang their heads daily like the bulrush, and are of a sorrowful spirit, and refuse to be comforted. On the other hand, persons of a sanguine temperament, as in other things, so in religion, are disposed to view every thing in the most favorable light; and although their evidences may really be no clearer than his who is forever in doubt and distress; yet they cherish a favorable opinion of their spiritual state. That, however, which we wish to inculcate is, that true piety is an abiding principle, which, however the feelings may fluctuate, never becomes extinct.

6. One of the certain effects of divine illumination is an increasing knowledge of the sinfulness of our own hearts. These views of inbred corruption are indeed most appalling and discouraging; they are also unexpected; but they are among the most salutary with which we are favored; and they furnish the best evidence of the genuineness of a work of grace. Hypocrites may talk much of the wickedness of their hearts, and even exceed all bounds in the accusations which they bring against themselves; but their words are like the parrot's, without meaning; they would be offended if any one believed only a small part of their self-accusations. Their object is not to be thought corrupt and sinful, but humble and holy. True humility, however, arises out of this knowledge of our own hearts, and is proportioned to the degree of self-knowledge which we possess. These spiritual views also cut up by the root self-righteousness and self-dependence. The man who knows the corruption of his own heart, and the secret defects of his holiest emotions and best affections, will never be disposed to place the least dependence on his own works. This knowledge also stirs him up to prayer, by showing him his urgent necessities.

7. The truly regenerated man hates, opposes, and endeavors to extirpate all sin. He can say with David, "I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right, and I hate every false way." Although on certain occasions sinful propensities may gain a temporary dominion, and he may fall, like Noah, David, and Peter, into grievous transgressions; yet is not a sinful life the choice of his heart, nor is it his purpose to indulge in sin: and when overcome by its power, like an elastic body bent out of its usual position, he quickly returns to his habitual state of feeling and acting. He soon finds the pleasure of sin turned into wormwood and gall; he weeps like Peter when he reflects upon his shameful ingratitude; and like David in the fifty-first Psalm, he makes penitent confession of his sin, and earnestly prays for pardon, cleansing, the restoration of divine favor and spiritual joy. These falls are like broken bones or dislocated joints; they are apt to give pain in the retrospect as long as life endures; but God over-rules even our faults sometimes for good, by

making them the occasion of teaching us more thoroughly our own weakness and the depth of our corruption, and by rendering us more watchful and more sensible of our dependence on divine aid for continuance in a state of grace.

8. As the word of God furnishes both the motive and the object of all spiritual affections, it cannot but be very dear to the renewed heart, especially as it reveals Christ in all his offices as the Redeemer of his people. As naturally and instinctively as the new born babe thirsts after the nutriment which flows from the mother's breast, so the young child of grace desires the sincere or unadulterated milk of the word, that it may grow thereby. "O how love I thy law" is the language of his heart. His estimation of the word is above all the most precious treasures of earth. "More to be desired than gold, yea than much fine gold." And pleasant as well as precious. "Sweeter also than honey or the honeycomb." Therefore, "he delights in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night." A lively relish for divine truth, and a cordial approbation of all God's word is one mark of a renovation of heart. Every true convert is a student of the Bible, a disciple at the feet of Jesus whom alone he acknowledges to be an infallible Teacher. The longer he lives the more highly does he appreciate the sacred Scriptures and he finds in them a well spring of life, a never failing source of consolation.

9. A regenerated man loves the people of God. "Hereby," says the apostle John, "we know that we are passed from death to life because we love the brethren." This, in the religion of Christ, is considered to be a principle of vital importance. Our Lord himself inculcated no duty more frequently or more urgently. This he calls "a new commandment;" and, indeed, makes it the badge by which his disciples should be known by the world. "Hereby shall all men know that ye are my disciples by the love which ye have for one another." The apostles also, in their writings, exhibited the obligation of Christians to exercise this holy affection, with great clearness and frequency. Brotherly love, when genuine, is excited by the consideration that Christians are the redeemed, adopted, and acknowledged brethren of their Lord. They are loved for the Master's sake. And again, they are loved because they bear the image of Christ. Love to the brethren is a vital branch springing out of the root of love to God himself. "Every one that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him. By this we know that we love the children of God when we love God and keep his commandments."

10. A soul that is born of God ardently and habitually desires to glorify God by all practicable means. This is the highest end, as it is the daily end of all the real children of God. They do not wish to live for themselves, but for him who gave himself for them. They endeavor to ascertain, from a consideration of their own talents and circumstances, and from the aspects of Providence, in what occupation, station, or profession, they can serve God most effectually. And they gladly seize opportunities of advancing the interests of Christ's kingdom. Their faculties, their learning, their influence, power, and property, are all consecrated to God; and they consider themselves as stewards of these several talents, which they are under the most sacred obligation to improve for his

advantage. This aim is not confined to actions comparatively important, but is extended to all the common concerns of this life. In eating, drinking, plowing, sowing, and in whatever they do, they study to glorify God. He who is born of God has his mind directed to God. He sets his affections on things above, and not on things on the earth.

11. A regenerated man has his will swallowed up in the will of God. "Thy will be done," is his daily prayer from his inmost soul. This acquiescence in the divine will is complete just so far as his heart is renewed, and every feeling of discontent, reluctance or opposition which he feels, in relation to God's administration, he condemns as sinful rebellion. When called to suffer, he bears the rod with filial submission, and though he may beg to be released from the pressure of heavy affliction, yet he asks this in submission to the will of God. If these chastisements, however grievous, can be for the glory of God, or so sanctified to him as to promote his faith and patience, he is willing to endure them, and even to have them increased. True piety never appears more genuine, and never more attractive, than when the people of God are suffering in deep affliction. Trials are to grace what the furnace is to metals: they prove its genuineness and purify it from its dross. Believers cannot know their own sincerity, nor the strength of their own faith, until they are tried.

12. The only other effect of regeneration which we shall mention is a grateful sense of the love and goodness of God. Gratitude is the soul of heart-religion. Unregenerate men may and often do experience a sensation of natural gratitude; and on some occasions it may come upon them with a gush of feeling. Such emotions are amiable and salutary, but they are transient, and involve no perception of the moral excellence of God. But the renewed man cherishes this lively sense of God's goodness continually. It is the most frequent emotion of the heart, and has the most powerful and practical influence upon his life. He is constrained by the love of Christ who died for him. He sees in the manifestation of that love, moral excellence beyond expression. It is the brightest point in his horizon. And the more he contemplates this glory, the more is he fired with the love of gratitude. His only wish to live, is for Christ: his strongest motive for wishing to depart, is to be with Christ. Heaven appears infinitely desirable because there, an eternity will be spent in praising the Redeemer.

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