

Alarm to the Unconverted

The Nature of Conversion

By [Joseph Alleine](#)

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I dare not leave you with your eyes half open, like him who saw 'men as trees walking' [Mark 8:24]. The Word is profitable for doctrine as well as reproof. And therefore, having thus far conducted you by the shelves and rocks of so many dangerous mistakes, I would guide you at length into the haven of truth.

Conversion then, in short, lies in the thorough change both of the heart and life. I shall briefly describe it in its nature and causes.

1. The **AUTHOR** of conversion is the Spirit of God

and therefore it is called 'the sanctification of the Spirit' (2 Thess 2:13) and 'the renewing of the Holy Spirit' (Titus 3:5). This does not exclude the other persons in the Trinity, for the apostle teaches us to bless the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who 'has begotten us again unto a living hope' (1 Pet 1:3). And Christ is said to 'give repentance unto Israel' (Acts 5:31); and is called the 'everlasting Father' (Isa 9:6) and we His seed, and 'the children whom God has given Him' (Heb 2:13). Yet this work is principally ascribed to the Holy Spirit, and so we are said to be 'born of the Spirit' (John 3:5-6).

So then, conversion is a work above man's power. We are 'born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man—but of God' (John 1:13). Never think you can convert yourself. If ever you would be savingly converted, you must despair of doing it in your own strength. It is a resurrection from the dead (Eph 2:1), a new creation (Gal 6:15; Eph 2:10), a work of absolute omnipotence (Eph 1:19). Are not these out of the reach of human power? If you have no more than you had by your first birth—a good nature, a meek and chaste temper etc.—you are a stranger to true conversion. Conversion is a supernatural work.

2. The efficient **CAUSE** of conversion is both internal and external.

[1] The **INTERNAL** cause is free grace alone.

'Not by works of righteousness which we have done—but of his mercy he saved us', and 'by the renewing of the Holy Spirit' (Titus 3:5). 'Of his own will he begat us' (James 1:18). We are chosen and called unto sanctification, not for it (Eph 1:4).

God finds nothing in man to turn His heart—but enough to turn His stomach; He finds enough to provoke His loathing—but nothing to excite His love. Look back upon yourself, O Christian! Reflect upon your swinish nature, your filthy swill, your once beloved mire (2 Pet 2). Behold your slime and corruption. Do not your own clothes abhor you? (Job 9:31). How then should holiness and purity love you? Be astonished, O heavens, at this; be moved, O earth. Who but must needs cry, Grace! Grace! (Zech 4:7). Hear and blush, you children of the Most High God. O unthankful men, that free grace is no more in your mouths, in your thoughts; no more adored, admired and commended by such as you! One would think you should be doing nothing but praising and admiring God wherever you are. How can you forget such grace, or pass it over with a slight and formal mention? What but free grace could move God to love you, unless enmity could do it, unless deformity could do it? How affectionately Peter lifts up his hands, 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus, who in his abundant mercy has begotten us again.' [1 Pet 1:3] How feelingly does Paul magnify the free mercy of God in it, 'God who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, has quickened us together with Christ. By grace are you saved' (Eph 2:4-5)!

[2] The EXTERNAL cause is the merit and intercession of the blessed Jesus.

He has obtained gifts for the rebellious (Psalm 68:18), and through Him it is that God works in us that which is well-pleasing in His sight (Heb 13:21). Through Him are all spiritual blessings bestowed upon us in heavenly places (Eph 1:3). He intercedes for the elect that believe not (John 17:20). Every convert is the fruit of His travail. Never was an infant born into the world with that difficulty which Christ endured for us. All the pains that He suffered on the cross were our birth-pains. He is made sanctification to us (1 Cor 1:30). He sanctified Himself, that is, set apart Himself as a sacrifice, that we might be sanctified (John 17:19). We are sanctified through the offering of His body once for all (Heb 10:10).

It is nothing, then, but the merit and intercession of Christ, that prevails with God to bestow on us converting grace. If you are a new creature, you know to whom you owe it; to Christ's pangs and prayers. The foal does not more naturally run after the dam, nor the suckling to the bosom, than a believer to Jesus Christ. And where else should you go? If any in the world can show for your heart what Christ can, let them do it. Does Satan claim you? Does the world court you? Does sin sue for your heart? Why, were these crucified for you? O Christian, love and serve your Lord while you have a being.

3. The INSTRUMENT of conversion is personal and real.

[1] The PERSONAL instrument is the ministry.

'In Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel' (1 Cor 4:15). Christ's ministers are those who are sent to open men's eyes, and to turn them to God (Acts 26:18). O unthankful world! Little do you know what you are doing when you are persecuting the messengers of the Lord. These are they whose business it is, under Christ, to save you. Whom have you reproached and blasphemed? (Isa 37:23). These are the servants of the most high God that show unto you the way of salvation (Acts 16:17), and do you requite them thus, O foolish and unwise? (Deut 32:6). O sons of ingratitude, against whom do you sport yourselves? These are the instruments that God uses to convert and save sinners: and do you revile your physicians, and throw your pilots overboard? 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.' [Luke 23:34]

[2] The REAL instrument is the Word. We are begotten by the word of truth.

It is this that enlightens the eye, that converts the soul (Psalm 19:7-8), that makes us wise to salvation (2 Tim 3:15). This is the incorruptible seed by which we are born again (1 Pet 1:23). If we are washed, it is by the Word (Eph 5:26). If we are sanctified, it is through the truth (John 17:17). This generates faith, and regenerates us (Rom 10:17; James 1:18).

O you saints, how you should love the Word, for by this you have been converted! You that have felt its renewing power, make much of it while you live; be ever thankful for it. Tie it about your neck, write it upon your hand, lay it in your bosom. When you go let it lead you, when you sleep let it keep you, when you wake let it talk with you (Prov 6:21-22). Say with the Psalmist, 'I will never forget your precepts, for by them you have quickened me' (Psalm 119:93). You who are unconverted, read the Word with diligence; flock to where it is powerfully preached. Pray for the coming of the Spirit in the Word. Come from your knees to the sermon, and come from the sermon to your knees. The sermon does not prosper—because it is not watered by prayers and tears, nor covered by meditation.

4. The final END of conversion is man's salvation, and God's glory.

We are chosen through sanctification to salvation (2 Thess 2:13), called that we might be glorified (Rom 8:30), but especially that God might be glorified (Isa 60:21), that we should show forth His praises (1 Pet 2:9), and be fruitful in good works (Col 1:10).

O Christian, do not forget the end of your calling. Let your light shine, let your

lamp burn, let your fruits be good and many and in season (Psalm 1:3). Let all your designs fall in with God's, that He may be magnified in you (Phil 1:20).

5. The SUBJECT of conversion is the elect sinner—and that in all his parts and powers, members and mind.

Whom God predestinates, them only He calls (Rom 8:30). None are drawn to Christ by their calling, nor come to Him by believing—but His sheep, those whom the Father has given Him (John 6:37,44). Effectual calling runs parallel with eternal election (2 Pet 1:10).

You begin at the wrong end if you first dispute about your election. Prove your conversion, and then never doubt your election. If you cannot yet prove it, set upon a present and thorough turning. Whatever God's purposes be, which are secret, I am sure His promises are plain. How desperately do rebels argue! 'If I am elected I shall be saved, do what I will. If not, I shall be damned, do what I can.' Perverse sinner, will you begin where you should end? Is not the word before you? What says it? 'Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.' 'If you mortify the deeds of the body you shall live.' 'Believe and be saved' (Acts 3:19; Rom 8:13; Acts 16:31). What can be plainer? Do not stand still disputing about your election—but set to repenting and believing. Cry to God for converting grace. Revealed things belong to you; in these busy yourself. It is just, as one well said, that they who will not feed on the plain food of the Word should be choked with the bones. Whatever God's purposes may be, I am sure His promises are true. Whatever the decrees of heaven may be, I am sure that if I repent and believe, I shall be saved; and that if I do not repent, I shall be damned. Is not this plain ground for you; and will you yet run upon the rocks?

More particularly, this change of conversion extends to the whole man. A carnal person may have some shreds of good morality—but he is never good throughout the whole cloth. Conversion is not a repairing of the old building; but it takes all down, and erects a new structure. It is not the sewing on a patch of holiness; but with the true convert, holiness is woven into all his powers, principles and practice. The sincere Christian is quite a new fabric, from the foundation to the top-stone. He is a new man, a new creature; all things are become new (2 Cor 5:17). Conversion is a deep work, a heart work. It makes a new man in a new world. It extends to the whole man, to the mind, to the members, to the motions of the whole life.

[1] The MIND.

Conversion turns the balance of the judgment, so that God and His glory outweigh all carnal and worldly interests. It opens the eye of the mind, and makes the scales of its native ignorance fall off, and turns men from darkness to light. The man who before saw no danger in his condition, now concludes himself

lost and forever undone (Acts 2:37) except renewed by the power of grace. He who formerly thought there was little hurt in sin, now comes to see it to be the chief of evils. He sees the unreasonableness, the unrighteousness, the deformity and the filthiness of sin; so that he is affrighted with it, loathes it, dreads it, flees from it, and even abhors himself for it (Rom 7:15; Job 42:6; Ezek 36:31). He who could see little sin in himself, and could find no matter for confession, now sees the rottenness of his heart, the desperate and deep pollution of his whole nature. He cries, 'Unclean! Unclean! Lord, purge me with hyssop, wash me thoroughly, create in me a clean heart.' He sees himself altogether filthy, corrupt both root and branch (Psalm 14:3; Matt 7:17-18). He writes 'unclean' upon all his parts, and powers, and performances (Isa 64:6; Rom 7:18). He discovers the filthy corners that he was never aware of, and sees the blasphemy, and theft, and murder, and adultery, that is in his heart, of which before he was ignorant. Hitherto he saw no form nor loveliness in Christ, no beauty that he should desire Him; but now he finds the Hidden Treasure, and will sell all to buy this field. Christ is the Pearl he seeks.

Now, according to this new light, the man is of another mind, another judgment, than he was before. Now God is all with him, he has none in heaven nor in earth like Him; he truly prefers Him before all the world. His favor is his life, the light of His countenance is more than corn and wine and oil (the good that he formerly enquired after, and set his heart upon. Psalm 4:6-7). A hypocrite may come to yield a general assent that God is the chief good; indeed, the wiser heathens, some few of them, have at least stumbled upon this. But no hypocrite comes so far as to look upon God as the most desirable and suitable good to him, and thereupon to acquiesce in Him. This is the convert's voice: 'The Lord is my portion, says my soul. Whom have I in heaven but you? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside you. God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever' (Lam 3:24; Psalm 73:25-26).

Conversion turns the bias of the WILL both as to means and end. The intentions of the will are altered. Now the man has new ends and designs. He now intends God above all, and desires and designs nothing in all the world, so much as that Christ may be magnified in him. He counts himself more happy in this than in all that the earth could yield, that he may be serviceable to Christ, and bring Him glory. This is the mark he aims at, that the name of Jesus may be great in the world.

Reader, do you read this without asking yourself whether it be thus with you? Pause a while, and examine yourself.

The CHOICE is also changed. He pitches upon God as his blessedness, and upon Christ and holiness as means to bring him to God. He chooses Jesus for his Lord. He is not merely forced to Christ by the storm, nor does he take Christ for bare necessity—but he comes freely. His choice is not made in a fright, as with the terrified conscience, or the dying sinner—who will seemingly do anything

for Christ—but only takes Christ rather than hell. He deliberately resolves that Christ is his best choice, and would rather have Him than all the good of this world, might he enjoy it while he would (Phil 1:23). Again, he takes holiness for his path; he does not out of mere necessity submit to it—but he likes it and loves it. 'I have chosen the way of your precepts' (Psalm 119:173). He takes God's testimonies not as his bondage—but his heritage; yes, heritage forever. He counts them not his burden—but his bliss; not his cords—but his cordials (1 John 5:3; Psalm 119:14,16,47). He does not only bear—but takes up Christ's yoke. He takes not holiness as the stomach does the loathed medicine, which a man will take rather than die—but as the hungry man does his beloved food. No time passes so sweetly with him, when he is himself, as that which he spends in the exercises of holiness. These are both his nutriment and element, the desire of his eyes and the joy of his heart.

Put it to your conscience whether you are the man. O happy man, if this be your case! But see that you are thorough and impartial in the search.

Conversion turns the bent of the AFFECTIONS. These all run in a new channel. The Jordan is now driven back, and the water runs upwards against its natural course. Christ is his hope. This is his prize. Here his eye is: here his heart. He is content to cast all overboard, as the merchant in the storm about to perish—so he may but keep this jewel.

The first of his desires is not after gold—but grace. He hungers for it, he seeks it as silver, he digs for it as for hidden treasure. He had rather be gracious than great. He had rather be the holiest man on earth than the most learned, the most famous, the most prosperous. While carnal, he said, 'O if I were but in great esteem, rolling in wealth, and swimming in pleasure; if my debts were paid, and I and mine provided for, then I would be a happy man.' But now the tune is changed. 'Oh!' says the convert, 'if I had but my corruptions subdued, if I had such a measure of grace, and fellowship with God, though I were poor and despised—I would not care, I would account myself a blessed man.' Reader, is this the language of your soul?

His JOYS are changed. He rejoices in the way of God's testimonies as much as in all riches. He delights in the law of the Lord, in which he once had little savor. He has no such joy as in the thoughts of Christ, the enjoyment of His company, the prosperity of His people.

His CARES are quite altered. He was once set for the world, and any scrap of spare time was enough for his soul. Now his cry is, 'What must I do to be saved?' (Acts 16:30). His great concern is how to secure his soul. O how he would bless you, if you could but put him out of doubt concerning this!

His FEARS are not so much of suffering—as of sinning. Once he was afraid of nothing so much as the loss of his estate or reputation; nothing sounded so

terrible to him as pain, or poverty, or disgrace. Now these are little to him, in comparison with God's dishonor or displeasure. How warily does he walk, lest he should tread upon a snare! He looks in front, and behind: he has his eye upon his heart, and is often casting it over his shoulder, lest he should be overtaken with sin. It kills his heart to think of losing God's favor; this he dreads as his only undoing. No thought pains him so much as to think of parting with Christ.

His LOVE runs in a new course. 'My Love was crucified', says Ignatius, that is, my Christ. 'This is my beloved', says the spouse (Song 5:16). How often does Augustine pour his love upon Christ! He can find no words sweet enough. 'Let me see You, O Light of my eyes. Come, O Joy of my spirit; Let me behold You, O Gladness of my heart. Let me love You, O Life of my soul. Appear unto me, O my great delight, my sweet comfort, O my God, my life, and the whole glory of my soul. Let me find You, O Desire of my heart; let me hold You, O Love of my soul. Let me embrace You, O Heavenly Bridegroom. Let me possess You.'

His SORROWS have now a new vent (2 Cor 7:9-10). The view of his sins, the sight of Christ crucified—which could scarcely stir him before, now how much do they affect his heart!

His hatred boils, his anger burns against sin. He has no patience with himself; he calls himself fool, and beast; and thinks any name too good for himself, when his indignation is stirred up against sin (Psalm 73:22; Prov 30:2). He could once wallow in it with much pleasure; now he loathes the thought of returning to it as much as of licking up the filthiest vomit!

Commune then with your own heart, and attend to the general current of your affections, whether they be towards God in Christ above all other concerns. Indeed, sudden and strong motions of the affections are often found in hypocrites, especially where the natural temperament is warm. And contrariwise, the sanctified themselves are often without conscious stirring of the affections, where the temperament is more slow, dry, and dull. The great inquiry is, whether the judgment and will are steadily determined for God above all other good, real or apparent. If so, and if the affections do sincerely follow their choice and conduct, though it be not so strongly and feelingly as is to be desired, there is no doubt but the change is saving.

[2] The MEMBERS.

These members which before were the instruments of sin—are now become the holy utensils of Christ's living temple. He who before dishonored his body, now possesses his vessel in sanctification and honor, in temperance, chastity, and sobriety, and dedicates it to the Lord.

The EYE, which was once a wandering eye, a wanton eye, a haughty, a covetous eye—is now employed, as Mary's, in weeping over its sins, in beholding

God in His works, in reading His Word, or in looking for objects of mercy and opportunities for His service.

The EAR, which was once open to Satan's call, and which did relish nothing so much as filthy, or at least frothy talk, and the laughter of fools—is now bored to the door of Christ's house, and open to His disciples. It says, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant hears.' [1 Sam 3:10] It waits for His words as the rain, and relishes them more than the appointed food (Job 23:12), more than the honey and the honeycomb (Psalm 19:10).

The HEAD, which was full of worldly designs—is now filled with other matters, and set on the study of God's will, and the man employs his head, not so much about his gain—as about his duty. The thoughts and cares that fill his head are, principally, how he may please God and flee sin.

His HEART, which was a sty of filthy lusts—is now become an altar of incense, where the fire of divine love is ever kept burning, and from which the daily sacrifice of prayer and praise, and the sweet incense of holy desires, ejaculations and prayers, are continually ascending.

The MOUTH is become a well of life; his tongue as choice silver, and his lips feed many. Now the salt of grace has seasoned his speech, has eaten out the corruption (Col 4:6), and cleansed the man from his filthy conversation, flattery, boasting, railing, lying, swearing, backbiting—which once came like flashes proceeding from the hell which was in the heart (James 3:6). The throat, that once was an open sepulcher, now sends forth the sweet breath of prayer and holy discourse, and the man speaks in another tongue, in the language of Canaan, and is never so well as when talking of God and Christ, and the matters of another world. His mouth brings forth wisdom; his tongue is become the silver trumpet of his Maker's praise, his glory and the best member that he has.

Now here you will find the hypocrite sadly deficient. He speaks, it may be, like an angel—but he has a covetous eye, or the gain of unrighteousness is in his hand. His hand is white—but his heart is full of rottenness (Matt 23:27), full of unmortified cares, a very oven of lust, a shop of pride, the seat of malice. It may be, with Nebuchadnezzar's image, he has a *golden head*—a great deal of knowledge; but he has *feet of clay*—his affections are worldly, he minds earthly things, and his way and walk are sensual and carnal. The work is not thorough with him.

[3] The LIFE and PRACTICE.

The new man takes a new course (Eph 2:2-3). His conversation is in heaven (Phil 3:20). No sooner does Christ call by effectual grace but he straightway becomes a follower of Him. When God has given the new heart, and written His law in his mind—he henceforth walks in His statutes and keeps His judgments.

Though sin may dwell in him—truly a wearisome and unwelcome guest—yet it has no more dominion over him. He has his fruit unto holiness, and though he makes many a blot—yet the law and life of Jesus is what he looks at as his pattern, and he has an unfeigned respect to all God's commandments. He makes conscience even of little sins and little duties. His very infirmities which he cannot help, though he would, are his soul's burden, and are like dust in a man's eye, which though but little—is not a little troublesome. (O man, do you read this, and never stop to examine yourself?)

The sincere convert is not one man at church—and another at home. He is not a saint on his knees—and a cheat in his shop. He will not tithe mint and cummin, and neglect mercy and judgment, and the weightier matters of the law. He does not pretend piety—and neglect morality. But he turns from all his sins and keeps all God's statutes, though not perfectly, except in desire and endeavor—yet sincerely, not allowing himself in the breach of any. Now he delights in the Word, and sets himself to prayer, and opens his hand and draws out his soul to the hungry. He breaks off his sins by righteousness, and his iniquities by showing mercy to the poor (Dan 4:27). He has a good conscience willing in all things to live honestly (Heb 13:18), and to keep without offence towards God and men.

Here again you find the unsoundness of many, who take themselves for good Christians. They are partial in the law (Mal 2:9), and take up the *cheap* and *easy* duties of religion—but they do not go through with the whole work. They are as a cake half-baked and half-raw. It may be, you find them exact in their words, punctual in their dealings—but then they do not exercise themselves unto godliness; and as for examining themselves and governing their hearts, to this they are strangers. You may see them duly at church; but follow them to their families, and there you shall see little but the world minded. Or if they have family duties, follow them to their closets, and there you shall find their souls are little looked after. It may be that they seem religious—but they do not bridle their tongues, and so all their religion is vain (James 1:26). It may be they come to closet and family prayer; but follow them to their shops, and there you find them in the habit of lying, or some fashionable way of deceit. Thus the hypocrite is not thorough in his obedience.

6. The OBJECTS from which we turn in conversion are, sin, Satan, the world, and our own righteousness.

[1] We turn from SIN.

When a man is converted, he is forever at enmity with sin; yes, with all sin—but most of all with his own sins, and especially with his bosom sin. Sin is now the object of his indignation. His sin swells his sorrows. It is sin which pierces him and wounds him; he feels it like a thorn in his side, like a splinter in his eye. He

groans and struggles under it, and not formally—but feelingly cries out, 'O wretched man!' [Rom 7:24] He is not impatient of any burden—so much as of his sin. If God should give him his choice, he would choose any affliction so he might be rid of sin; he feels it like the cutting gravel in his shoes, pricking and paining him as he goes.

Before conversion he had light thoughts of sin. He cherished it in his bosom, as Uriah his lamb; he nourished it up, and it grew up together with him; it did eat, as it were, of his own plate, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was to him as a sweet daughter. But when God opens his eyes by conversion, he throws it away with abhorrence, as a man would a loathsome toad, which in the dark he had hugged fast in his bosom, and thought it had been some pretty and harmless bird. When a man is savingly changed, he is deeply convinced not only of the danger but the defilement of sin; and O, how earnest is he with God to be purified! He loathes himself for his sins. He runs to Christ, and casts himself into the fountain set open for him and for uncleanness. If he falls into sin, what a stir is there to get all clean again! He has no rest until he flees to the Word, and washes and rubs and rinses in the infinite fountain, laboring to cleanse himself from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit.

The sound convert is heartily engaged against sin. He struggles with it, he wars against it; he is too often foiled—but he will never yield the cause, nor lay down the weapons, while he has breath in his body. He will make no peace; he will give no quarter. He can forgive his other enemies, he can pity them and pray for them; but here he is implacable, here he is set upon their extermination. He hunts as it were for the precious life; his eye shall not pity, his hand shall not spare, though it be a right hand or a right eye. Be it a gainful sin, most delightful to his nature or the support of his esteem with worldly friends—yet he will rather throw his gain down into the gutter, see his credit fail, or the flower of his pleasure wither in his hand—than he will allow himself in any known way of sin. He will grant no indulgence, he will give no toleration. He draws upon sin wherever he meets it, and frowns upon it with this unwelcome salute, 'Have I found you, O my enemy!'

Reader, has conscience been at work while you have been looking over these lines? Have you pondered these things in your heart? Have you searched the book within, to see if these things are so? If not, read it again, and make your conscience speak, whether or not it is thus with you.

Have you crucified your flesh with its affections and lusts; and not only confessed—but forsaken your sins, all sin in your fervent desires, and the ordinary practice of every deliberate and wilful sin in your life? If not, you are yet unconverted. Does not conscience fly in your face as you read, and tell you that you live in a way of lying for your advantage? that you use deceit in your calling? that there is some way of secret sin that you live in? Why then, do not deceive yourself. 'You are in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity.' [Acts 8:23]

Does your unbridled tongue, your indulgence of appetite, your wicked company, your neglect of prayer, of reading and hearing the Word, now witness against you, and say, 'We are your works, and we will follow you'? Or, if I have not hit you right, does not the monitor within tell you, there is such and such a way that you know to be evil, that yet for some carnal respect you tolerate in yourself? If this be the case, you are to this day unregenerate, and must be changed or condemned.

[2] We turn from SATAN.

Conversion binds the strong man, spoils his armor, casts out his goods, and turns men from the power of Satan unto God. Before, the devil could no sooner hold up his finger to the sinner to call him to his wicked company, sinful games, and filthy delights—but immediately he followed, 'like an ox going to the slaughter, like a deer stepping into a noose till an arrow pierces his liver, like a bird darting into a snare, little knowing it will cost him his life' (Prov 7:22-23). No sooner could Satan bid him lie—but immediately he had it on his tongue. No sooner could Satan offer a filthy object—but he was overcome with lust. If the devil says, 'Away with these family duties', be sure they shall be rarely performed in his house. If the devil says, 'Away with this strictness, this preciseness' he will keep far enough from it. If he tells him, 'There is no need of these secret-duties', he will go from day to day and scarcely perform them. But after he is converted he serves another Master, and takes quite another course; he goes and comes at Christ's bidding. Satan may sometimes catch his foot in a trap—but he will no longer be a willing captive. He watches against the snares and baits of Satan, and studies to be acquainted with his devices. He is very suspicious of his plots, and is very jealous in what comes across him, lest Satan should have some design upon him. He wrestles against principalities and powers; he entertains the messenger of Satan as men do the messenger of death. He keeps his eye upon his enemy, and watches in his duties, lest Satan should get an advantage.

[3] We turn from the WORLD.

Before a man has true faith, he is overcome by the world. He either bows down to mammon, or idolizes his reputation, or is a lover of pleasure more than a lover of God. Here is the root of man's misery by the fall. He is turned aside to the creature, and gives that esteem, confidence and affection to the creature—which is due to God alone.

O miserable man, what a deformed monster has sin made you! God made you a little lower than the angels; sin has made you little better than the devils! Sin has made you a monster that has his head and his heart where his feet should be--and his feet kicking against heaven--and everything out of place. The world which was formed to

serve you--now rules you! The deceitful harlot has bewitched you with her enchantments--and made you bow down and serve her!

But converting grace sets all in order again, and puts God on the throne, and the world at his footstool; Christ in the heart, and the world under the feet. 'I am crucified to the world, and the world to me' (Gal 6:14). Before this change, all the cry was 'Who will show us any worldly good?' but now he prays, 'Lord, lift you up the light of your countenance upon me', and take the corn and wine whoever will (Psalm 4:6-7). Before, his heart's delight and content were in the world; then the song was, 'Soul, take your ease—eat, drink, and be merry! You have much goods laid up for many years.' [Luke 12:19] But now all this is withered, and there is no loveliness, that we should desire it; and he tunes up with the sweet psalmist of Israel, 'The Lord is the portion of my inheritance; the lines are fallen to me in a fair place, and I have a goodly heritage.' [Psalm 16:5-6] Nothing else can make him content. He has written vanity and vexation upon all his worldly enjoyments, and loss and dross upon all human excellencies. He has life and immortality now in pursuit. He pants for grace and glory, and has an incorruptible crown in view. His heart is set to seek the Lord. He first seeks the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and religion is no longer a casual matter with him—but his main care. Before, the world had the sway with him. He would do more for gain than godliness—more to please his friend or his flesh, than the God that made him; and God must stand by until the world was first served. But now all must stand by; he hates father and mother, and life, and all, in comparison of Christ.

Well then, pause a little, and look within. Does not this concern you? You pretend to be for Christ—but does not the world sway you? Do you not take more real delight and contentment in the world than in Him? Do you not find yourself more at ease when the world is in your mind and you are surrounded with carnal delights, than when retired to prayer and meditation in your room, or attending upon God's Word and worship? There is no surer evidence of an unconverted state than to have the things of the world uppermost in our aim, love and estimation.

With the sound convert, Christ has the supremacy. How dear is His name to him! How precious is His favor! The name of Jesus is engraved on his heart. Honor is but air, and laughter is but madness, and mammon is fallen like Dagon before the ark, with hands and head broken—when once Christ is savingly revealed. Here is the pearl of great price to the true convert; here is his treasure; here is his hope. This is his glory, 'My beloved is mine, and I am his.' [Song 2:16] O, it is sweeter to him to be able to say, 'Christ is mine!', than if he could say, 'The kingdom is mine; the Indies are mine.'

[4] We turn from our own RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Before conversion, man seeks to cover himself with his own fig-leaves, and to make himself acceptable with God, by his own duties. He is apt to trust in

himself, and set up his own righteousness, and to reckon his pennies for gold, and not to submit to the righteousness of God. But conversion changes his mind; now he counts his own righteousness as filthy rags. He casts it off, as a man would the verminous tatters of a nasty beggar. Now he is brought to poverty of spirit, complains of and condemns himself; and all his inventory is, 'I am poor, and miserable, and wretched, and blind, and naked!' [Rev 3:17]. He sees a world of iniquity in his *holy* things, and calls *his once-idolized righteousness* but filth and loss; and would not for a thousand worlds be found in it!

Now he begins to set a high price upon Christ's righteousness. He sees the need of Christ in every duty, to justify his person and sanctify his performances; he cannot live without Him; he cannot pray without Him. Christ must go with him, or else he cannot come into the presence of God; he leans upon Christ, and so bows himself in the house of his God. He sets himself down for a lost undone man without Him; his life is hid in Christ, as the root of a tree spreads in the earth for stability and nourishment. Before, the gospel of Christ was a stale and tasteless thing; but now—how sweet is Christ! Augustine could not relish his once-admired Cicero, because he could not find in his writings the name of Christ. How emphatically he cries, 'O most sweet, most loving, most kind, most dear, most precious, most desired, most lovely, most fair!' all in a breath, when he speaks of and to Christ. In a word, the voice of the convert is, with the martyr, 'None but Christ!'

7. The OBJECT to which we turn in conversion is—God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—

whom the true convert takes as his all-sufficient and eternal blessedness. A man is never truly sanctified until his heart be truly set upon God above all things, as his portion and chief good. These are the natural breathings of a believer's heart: 'You are my portion.' 'My soul shall make her boast in the Lord.' 'My expectation is from him; he alone is my rock and salvation and my glory; the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God' (Psalm 119:57; Psalm 34:2; Psalm 62).

Would you be certain whether you are converted or not? Now let your soul and all that is within you attend. Have you taken God for your happiness? Where does the desire of your heart lie? What is the source of your greatest satisfaction? Come, then, and with Abraham lift up your eyes eastward, and westward, and northward, and southward, and look around you; what is it that you would have to make you happy? If God should give you your choice, as He did to Solomon, or should say to you, as Ahasuerus to Esther, 'What is your petition, and what is your request, and it shall be granted you?' [Esther 5:6] what would you ask? Go into the *gardens of pleasure*, and gather all the fragrant flowers there—would these satisfy you? Go to the *treasures of mammon*; suppose you may carry away as much as you desire. Go to the towers, to the *trophies of honor*. What do you think of being a man of renown, and having a

name like the name of the great men of the earth? Would any of these, would all of these satisfy you, and make you to count yourself happy? If so, then certainly you are carnal and unconverted.

If not, go farther; wade into the divine excellencies, the store of His mercies, the hiding of His power, the unfathomable depths of His all-sufficiency. Does this suit you best and please you most? Do you say, 'It is good to be here. Here will I pitch, here will I live and die'? Will you let all the world go rather than this? Then it is well between God and you: happy are you, O man—happy are you that ever you were born. If God can make you happy, you must be happy; for you have taken the Lord to be your God. Do you say to Christ as He to us, 'Your Father shall be my Father, and your God my God'? Here is the turning point. "Whom do I have in heaven but You? And I desire nothing on earth but You. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart, my portion forever." Psalm 73:25-26

An unsound convert never takes up his rest in God; but converting grace does the work, and so cures the fatal misery of the fall, by turning the heart from its idols—to the living God. Now the soul says, 'Lord, where shall I go? You have the words of eternal life.' [John 6:68] Here he centers, here he settles. It is the entrance of heaven to him; he sees his interest in God. When he discovers this, he says, 'Return unto your rest, O my soul, for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you' (Psalm 116:7). And he is even ready to breathe out Simeon's song, 'Lord, now let you your servant depart in peace' [Luke 2:29]; and says with Jacob, when his old heart revived at the welcome tidings, 'It is enough!' (Gen 45:28). When he sees he has a God in covenant to go to, this is all his salvation, and all his desire (2 Sam 23:5).

Is this the case with you? Have you experienced this? If so, then 'blessed are you of the Lord'. God has been at work with you; He has laid hold of your heart by the power of converting grace, or else you could never have done this.

More particularly, in conversion—

[1] We turn to CHRIST,

the only Mediator between God and man (1 Tim 2:5). His work is to bring us to God (1 Pet 3:18). He is the way to the Father (John 14:6), the only *plank* on which we may escape, the only *door* by which we may enter (John 10:9). Conversion brings the soul to Christ to accept Him as the only means of life, as the only way, the only name given under heaven. He does not look for salvation in any other but Him; he throws himself on Christ alone.

'Here', says the convinced sinner, 'I will venture; and if I perish, I perish; if I die, I will die here. But, Lord, do not let me perish under the eye of Your mercy. Entreat me not to leave You, or to return from following after You. Here I will throw

myself; if You slay me, I will not go from Your door.'

Thus the poor soul ventures on Christ and resolvedly adheres to Him. Before conversion, the man made light of Christ; he minded his farm, friends, pleasures, more than Christ; now, Christ is to him as his necessary food, his daily bread, the life of his heart, the staff of his life. His great desire is, that Christ may be magnified in him. His heart once said, as they to the spouse, 'What is your beloved more than another?' (Song 5:9). He found more sweetness in his merry company, wicked games, earthly delights, than in Christ. He took religion for a fancy, and the talk of great enjoyments for an idle dream; but now to him to live is Christ. Now he says, 'But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ!' Philippians 3:7-8

ALL of Christ is accepted by the sincere convert. He loves not only the *wages*—but the *work* of Christ; not only the *benefits*—but the *burden* of Christ. He is willing not only to tread out the corn—but to draw under the yoke. He takes up the *commands* of Christ, yes, the *cross* of Christ.

The unsound convert takes Christ by halves. He is all for the salvation of Christ—but he is not for sanctification. He is for the privileges—but does not appropriate the person of Christ. He divides the *offices* and *benefits* of Christ. This is an error in the foundation. Whoever loves life, let him beware here. It is an undoing mistake, of which you have been often warned, and yet none is more common. Jesus is a sweet Name—but men do not love the Lord Jesus in sincerity. They will not have Him as God offers, 'to be a *Prince* and a *Savior*' (Acts 5:31). They divide what God has joined, the *King* who rules—and the *Priest* who saves. They will not accept the salvation of Christ as He intends it; they divide it here. Every man's vote is for salvation from *suffering*—but they do not desire to be saved from *sinning*. They would have their lives saved—but still would have their lusts. Indeed, many divide here again; they would be content to have some of their sins destroyed—but they cannot leave the lap of Delilah, or divorce the beloved Herodias. They cannot be cruel to the right eye or right hand.

O be infinitely careful here; your soul depends upon it. The sound convert takes a whole Christ, and takes Him for all intents and purposes, without exceptions, without limitations, without reserve. He is willing to have Christ upon any terms; he is willing to have the *dominion* of Christ as well as *deliverance* by Christ. He says with Paul, 'Lord, what will you have me to do?' [Acts 9:6] Anything, Lord! He gives Christ the blank page—to write down His own conditions.

[2] We turn to the laws, ordinances, and ways of Christ.

The heart which once was set against these, and could not endure the strictness of these bonds, the severity of these ways—now falls in love with them, and

chooses them as its rule and guide forever.

Four things, I observe, God works in every sound convert, with reference to the laws and ways of Christ, by which you may come to know your state, if you will be faithful to your own souls. Therefore, keep your eyes upon your hearts as you go along.

(i) The judgment is brought to approve of them and to subscribe to them as most righteous and most reasonable. The mind is brought to like the ways of God; and the corrupt prejudices that were once against them as unreasonable and intolerable, are now removed. The understanding assents to them all as holy, just, and good (Rom 7:12). How is David taken up with the excellencies of God's laws! How does he expatiate on their praises, both from their inherent qualities and admirable effects! (Psalm 19:8-10, etc.).

There is a twofold judgment of the understanding, the absolute and the comparative. The *absolute* judgment is when a man thinks such a course best in general—but not for him, or not under his present circumstances. Now, a godly man's judgment is for the ways of God, and that not only the absolute—but comparative judgment. He thinks them not only the best in general—but best for *him!* He looks upon the rules of piety not only as tolerable—but desirable; yes, more desirable than gold, fine gold; yes, much fine gold.

His judgment is fully determined that it is best to be holy, that it is best to be strict, that it is in itself the most eligible course, and that it is for him the wisest and most rational and desirable choice. Hear the godly man's judgment; 'I know, O Lord, that your judgments are right; I love your commandments above gold, yes, above fine gold; I esteem all your precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way' (Psalm 119:127-128). Mark, he approves of all that God requires—and disapproves of all that He forbids. 'Righteous, O Lord, and upright are your judgments. Your testimonies that you have commanded are righteous and very faithful. Your word is true from the beginning, and everyone of your righteous judgments endures forever' (Psalm 119:138, 160). See how readily and fully he subscribes; he declares his assent and consent to it, and all and everything contained therein.

(ii) The desire of the heart is to know the whole mind of Christ. He would not have one sin undiscovered, nor be ignorant of one duty required. It is the natural and earnest breathing of a sanctified heart: 'Lord, if there be any way of wickedness in me—please reveal it. What I know not—teach me. If I have done iniquity—I will do it no more.' The unsound convert is willingly ignorant, he does not love to come to the light. He is willing to keep such and such a sin, and therefore is averse to know it to be a sin—so will not let in the light at that window. Now, the gracious heart is willing to know the whole latitude and compass of his Maker's law. He receives with all acceptance the Word which convinces him of any duty that he knew not, or minded not before, or which

uncovers any sin that lay hidden before.

(iii) The free and resolved choice of the will is for the ways of Christ, before all the pleasures of sin and prosperities of the world. His consent is not extorted by some extremity of anguish, nor is it only a sudden and hasty resolve—but he is deliberately purposed, and comes freely to the choice. True, the flesh will rebel—yet the prevailing part of his will is for Christ's laws and government, so that he takes them up not as his toil or burden—but as his bliss. While the unsanctified person goes in Christ's ways as in chains and fetters—the true convert does it heartily, and counts Christ's laws his liberty. He delights in the beauties of holiness, and has this inseparable mark— he had rather, if he might have his choice, live a strict and holy life, than the most prosperous and flourishing worldly life.

'There went with Saul a band of men whose hearts God had touched' (1 Sam 10:26). When God touches the hearts of His chosen, they presently follow Christ, and, though drawn, do freely run after Him, and willingly devote themselves to the service of the Lord, seeking Him with their whole desire. Fear has its uses; but this is not the mainspring of motion with a sanctified heart. Christ does not control His subjects by *force*—but is King of a *willing* people. They are, through His grace, freely devoted to His service. They serve out of choice, not as slaves—but as the son or spouse, from a spring of love and a loyal mind. In a word, *the laws of Christ are the convert's love, delight, and continual study.*

(iv) The bent of his course is directed to keep God's statutes. It is the daily care of his life to walk with God. He seeks great things, he has noble designs, though he falls too short. He aims at nothing less than perfection; he desires it, he reaches after it; he would not rest in any degree of grace, until he were quite rid of sin, and perfected in holiness (Phil 3:11-14).

Here the hypocrite's rottenness may be discovered. He desires holiness, as one well said, only as a bridge to heaven, and inquires earnestly what is the least that will serve his turn; and if he can get but so much as may bring him to heaven, this is all he cares for. But the sound convert desires holiness for holiness' sake, and not merely for heaven's sake. He would not be satisfied with so much holiness as might save him from hell—but desires the highest degree. Yet *desires* are not enough. What is your *way* and your *course*? Are the drift and scope of your *life* altered? Is holiness your pursuit, and piety your business? If not, you fall short of sound conversion.

And is this which we have described, the conversion which is of absolute necessity to salvation? Then be informed—that strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leads unto life—that there are few that find it—that there is need of divine power savingly to convert a sinner to Jesus Christ.

Again, be exhorted, O man, to examine yourself. What does conscience say?

Does it begin to accuse? Does it not pierce you as you go? Is this your judgment, and this your choice, and this your way, that we have described? If so, then it is well. But does your heart condemn you, and tell you of a certain sin you are living in against your conscience? Does it not tell you there is such and such a secret way of wickedness that you wish to pursue; such and such a duty that you make no conscience of?

Does not conscience carry you to your closet, and tell you how seldom prayer and Scripture reading are performed there? Does it not carry you to your family, and show you the charge of God, and the souls of your children who are neglected there? Does not conscience lead you to your shop, your trade, and tell you of some iniquity there? Does it not carry you to the public-house, or the private club, and blame you for the loose company you keep there, the precious *time* which you misspend there, the *talents* which you waste there? Does it not carry you into your secret chamber, and read there your condemnation?

O *conscience!* do your duty. In the name of the living God, I command you—discharge your office. Lay hold upon this sinner, fall upon him, arrest him, apprehend him, undeceive him. What! will you flatter and soothe him while he lives in his sins? Awake, O conscience! What do you mean, O sleeper? What! have you no reproof in your mouth? What! shall this soul die in his careless neglect of God and of eternity, and you altogether remain silent? What! shall he go on still in his trespasses, and yet have peace? Oh, rouse yourself, and do your work. Now let *the preacher in your bosom* speak. Cry aloud, and spare not; lift up your voice like a trumpet. Let not the blood of his soul be required at your hands.

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