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SERMONS ON IMPORTANT SUBJECTS

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SERMON II.

HOW TO CHANGE YOUR HEART.

-- Ezekiel xviii. 31.--

"Make you a new heart, and a new spirit, for why will ye die?"

This lecture was typed in by Liz Groman.

In the former discourse upon this text, I discussed three points, viz.

1. The meaning of the command in the text.
2. Its reasonableness.
3. Its consistency with those passages which declare a new heart to be the gift and work of God.

In answer to the first question, "what are we to understand by the requirement to make a new heart and a new spirit?" I endeavored to show negatively,

1st. What is not the meaning of the requirement. That it does not mean the fleshly heart, or that bodily organ which is the seat of animal life.

2dly. That it does not mean a new soul. Nor,

3dly. Are we required to create any new faculties of body or mind; nor to alter the constitutional powers, propensities, or susceptibilities of our nature. Nor to implant any new principle, or taste, in the substance of either mind or body.

I endeavored to show that a change of heart is not that in which a sinner is passive, but that in which

he is active. That the change is not physical, but moral. That it is the sinner's own act. That it consists in changing his mind, or disposition, in regard to the supreme object of pursuit. A change in the end at which he aims, and not merely in the means of obtaining his end. A change in the governing choice or preference of the mind. That it consists in preferring the glory of God, and the interests of his kingdom, to one's own happiness, and to every thing else. That it is a change from a state of selfishness in which a person prefers his own interest above every thing else, to that disinterested benevolence that prefers God's happiness and glory, and the interests of his kingdom, to his own private happiness.

Under the second head, I endeavored to establish the reasonableness of this duty, by showing the sinner's ability, and the reasons for its performance.

And under the third head, that there was no inconsistency between this and those passages which declared a new heart to be the gift and work of God.

I come now to a fourth inquiry, to which the discussion of the above named topics naturally leads, viz. How shall I perform this duty, and change my own heart? This is an inquiry often made by anxious sinners, when they are commanded to change their hearts, and convinced that it is their duty to do so, and of the dreadful consequences of neglecting to obey. They anxiously inquire, HOW SHALL I DO IT? By what process of thought or feeling is this great chancre to be wrought in my mind? The design of this discourse is to help you out of this dilemma; to remove, if possible, the darkness from your minds; to clear up what seems to you to be so mysterious; to hold the lamp of truth directly before you; to pour its blaze full upon your path, so that if you stumble and fall, your blood; shall be upon your own head.

I. HOW THE HEART CANNOT BE CHANGED.

- 1st. I observe, negatively, that you cannot change your heart by working your imagination and feelings into a state of excitement. Sinners are apt to suppose that great fears and terrors, great horrors of conscience, and the utmost stretch of excitement that the mind is capable of bearing, must necessarily precede a change of heart. They are led to this persuasion, by a knowledge of the fact, that such feelings do often precede this change. But, sinner, you should understand, that this highly excited state of feeling, these fears, and alarms, and horrors, are but the result of ignorance, or obstinacy, and sometimes of both. It often happens that sinners will not yield, and change their hearts, until the Spirit of God has driven them to extremity; until the thunders of Sinai have been rolled in their ears, and the lurid fires of hell have been made to flash in their faces. All this is no part of the work of making a new heart; but is the result of resistance to the performance of this duty. These terrors and alarms are, by no means essential to its performance, but are rather an embarrassment and a hinderance. To suppose that, because, in some instances, sinners have those horrors of conscience, and fears of hell before they would yield, [and] that, therefore, they are necessary, and that all sinners must experience them before they can change their hearts, is a as unwarrantable an inference as if all your children should maintain that they must necessarily be threatened with severe punishment, and see the rod uplifted, and thus be thrown into great consternation, before they can obey; because one of your children had been thus obstinate, and had refused obedience until driven to extremities. If you are willing to do your duty when you are shown what it is, fears, and terrors, and great

excitement of mind are wholly unnecessary: God has no delight in them for their own sake, and never (sic.) causes them only when driven to the necessity by pertinacious obstinacy. And when they are obstinate, God often sees it unwise to produce these great terrors, and will sooner let the sinner go to hell without them.

- 2. You cannot change your heart by an attempt to force yourself into a certain state of feeling. When sinners are called upon to repent, and give their hearts to God, it is common for them, if they undertake to perform this duty, to make an effort to feel emotions of love, repentance, and faith. They seem to think that all religion consists in highly excited emotions or feelings, and that these feelings can be bidden into existence by a direct effort of the will. They spend much time in prayer for certain feelings, and make many agonizing efforts to call into existence those highly wrought emotions and feelings of love to God of which they hear Christians speak. But these emotions can never be brought into existence by a direct effort to feel. They can never be caused to start into existence, and glow and burn in the mind at the direct bidding of the will. The will has no direct influence over the them [emotions], and can only bring them into existence through the medium of the attention. Feelings, or emotions, are dependent upon thought, and arise spontaneously in the mind when the thoughts are intensely occupied with their corresponding objects. Thought is under the direct control of the will. We can direct our attention and meditations to any subject, and the corresponding emotions will spontaneously arise in the mind. If a hated subject is under consideration, emotions of hatred are felt to arise. If an object of terror, of grief, or of joy, occupies the thoughts, their corresponding emotions will of course arise in the mind, and with a strength corresponding to the concentration and intensity of our thoughts upon that subject. Thus our feelings are only indirectly under the control of the will. They are sinful or holy only as they are thus indirectly bidden into existence by the will. Men often complain that they cannot control their feelings; they form overwhelming attachments, which they say they cannot control. They receive injuries - their anger arises - they profess that they cannot help it. Now, while the attention is occupied with dwelling upon the beloved object in the one case, the emotions, of which they complain, will exist of course; and if the emotion be disapproved of by the judgment and conscience, the subject must be dismissed from the thoughts, and the attention directed to some other subject, as the only possible way of ridding themselves of the emotion. So in the other case, the subject of the injury must be dismissed, and their thoughts occupied with other considerations, or emotions of hatred will continue to fester and rankle in their minds. "If a man look on a woman, to lust after her, he has committed adultery with her already in his heart;" he is responsible for the feelings consequent upon suffering such a subject to occupy his thoughts.

II. THE EXERCISE OF THE WILL, AND THE PLACE OF THE EMOTIONS IN MAKING A NEW HEART.

Voluntariness is indispensable to moral character; it is the universal and irresistible conviction of men, that an action, to be praise or blame-worthy, must be free. If, in passing through the streets, you should see a tile fall from a building upon which men were at work, and kill a man, and upon inquiry you found it to be the result of accident, you could not feel that there was any murder in the case. But if, on the contrary, you learnt that the tile was maliciously thrown upon the head of the deceased by one of the workmen, you could not resist the conviction that it was murder. So, if God, or any other being, should force a dagger into your hand, and force you against your will to stab your neighbor, the

universal conscience would condemn, not you, but him who forced you to this deed. So, any action, or thought, or feeling, to have moral character, must be directly or indirectly under the control of the will. If a man voluntarily place himself under such circumstances as to call wicked emotions into exercise, he is entirely responsible for them. If he place himself under circumstances where virtuous emotions are called forth, he is praiseworthy in the exercise of them, precisely in proportion to his voluntariness in bringing his mind into circumstances to cause their existence.

Love, repentance, and faith, may exist in the mind, either in the form of volition or emotion. Love, when existing in the form of volition, is a simple preference of the mind for God and the things of religion to every thing else. This preference may, and often does exist in the mind, so entirely separate from what is termed emotion, or feeling, that we may be entirely insensible to its existence. But although its existence may not be a matter of consciousness, by being felt, yet its influence over our conduct will be such as that the fact of its existence will in this way be manifest. The love of family and friends may, in like manner, exist in the mind in both these forms. When a man is engaged in business, or journeying from home, and his attention taken up with other subjects, he exercises no sensible or felt love for his family; but still his preference remains, and is the mainspring that directs his movements in the business about which he is engaged, in order to make provision for them. He does not forget his wife or family, nor act as if he had none; but, on the contrary, his conduct is modified and governed by this abiding, though insensible preference for them; while at the same time his thoughts are so entirely occupied with other things, that no emotion or feeling of affection exists in his mind.

But when the business of the day is past, and other objects cease to crowd upon his attention, this preference of home, of wife and family, comes forth and directs the thoughts to those beloved objects. No sooner are they thus bidden before the mind, than the corresponding emotions arise, and all the father and the husband are awake and felt to enkindle in his heart. So the Christian, when his thoughts are intensely occupied with business or study, may have no sensible emotions of love to God existing in his mind. Still, if a Christian, his preference for God will have its influence over all his conduct, he will neither act nor feel like an ungodly man under similar circumstances; he will not curse, nor swear, nor get drunk; he will not cheat, nor lie, nor act as if under the dominion of unmingled selfishness; but his preference for God will so modify and govern his deportment, that while he has no sensible or felt enjoyment of the presence of God, he is indirectly influenced in all his ways by a regard to his glory. And when the bustle of business is past, his abiding preference for God naturally directs his thoughts to him, and to the things of his kingdom; when, of course, corresponding feelings or emotions arise in his mind, and warm emotions of love enkindle, and glow, and happify the soul. He understands the declaration of the Psalmist, when he says, "While I mused the fire burned."

I said also, that repentance may exist in the mind, either in the form of an emotion or a volition. Repentance properly signifies a change of mind in regard to the nature of sin, and does not in its primary signification necessarily include the idea of sorrow. It is simply an act of will, rejecting sin, and choosing or preferring holiness. This is its form when existing as a volition. When existing as an emotion, it sometimes rises into a strong abhorrence of sin and love of holiness. It often melts away into ingenuous relentings of heart; in gushings of sorrow, and the strongest feelings of disapprobation and self- abhorrence in view of our own sins.

So faith may exist, simply as a settled conviction or persuasion of mind, of the truths of revelation, and will have greater or less influence according to the strength and permanency of this persuasion. It is not evangelical faith, however, unless this persuasion be accompanied with the consent of the will to the truth believed. We often believe things to exist, the very existence of which is hateful to us. Devils and wicked men may have a strong conviction of the truth upon their minds, as we know they often do; and so strong is their persuasion of the truth, that they tremble; but still they hate the truth. But when the conviction of Gospel truth is accompanied with the consent of the will, or the mind's preference of it, it is evangelical faith, and in proportion to its strength will uniformly influence the conduct. But this is faith existing as a volition. When the objects of faith, revealed in the Gospel, are the subjects of intense thought, faith rises into emotion: it is then a felt confidence and trust, so sensible as to calm all the anxieties, and fears, and perturbations of the soul.

Emotions of love or hatred to God, that are not directly or indirectly produced by the will, have no moral character. A real Christian, under circumstances of strong temptation, may feel emotions of opposition to God rankling in his mind. If he has voluntarily placed himself under these circumstances of temptation, he is responsible for these emotions. If the subject that creates these emotions is forced upon him by Satan, or in any way against his will, he is not responsible for them. If he divert his attention, if he flee from the scene of temptation, if he does what belongs to him to resist and repress these emotions, he has not sinned. Such emotions are usually brought to exist in the mind of a Christian by some false view of the character or government of God. So emotions of love to God may exist in the mind that are purely selfish, they may arise out of a persuasion that God has a particular regard for us, or some vain assurance of our good estate and the certainty of our salvation. Now, if this love be not founded upon a preference for God for what he really is, it is not virtuous love. In this case, although the will may have indirectly produced these emotions, yet as the will prefers God, not for what he is, but for selfish reasons, the consequent emotions are selfish.

III. WHAT NEEDS TO BE CHANGED IN ORDER TO CHANGE THE HEART.

To change your heart, as I have shown in the former discourse, and repeated in this, is to change the governing preference of your mind. What is needed, is, that your will should be rightly influenced, that you should reject sin, and prefer God and obedience to every thing else. The question is, then, how is your will to be thus influenced? By what process is it reasonable to expect thus to influence your mind? Until your will is right, it is vain to expect felt emotions of true love to God, of repentance and faith. These feelings, after which perhaps you are seeking, and into which you are trying to force yourself, need not be expected until the will is bowed, until the ruling preference of the mind is changed.

And here you ought to understand that there are three classes of motives that decide the will:

- First, those that are purely selfish. Selfishness is the preference of one's own interest and happiness to God and his glory. Whenever the will chooses, directly or indirectly, under the influence of selfishness, the choice is sinful, for all selfishness is sin,
- A second class of motives that influence the will, are those that arise from self-love. Self-love is a constitutional dread of misery and love of happiness, and whenever the will is influenced purely by considerations of this kind, its decisions either have no moral character at all, or they

are sinful. The constitutional desire of happiness and dread of misery is not in itself sinful, and the consent of the will to lawfully gratify this constitutional love of happiness and dread of misery is not sinful. But when the will consents, as in the case of Adam and Eve, to a prohibited indulgence, it then becomes sinful.

- A third class of motives that influence the will, are connected with conscience. Conscience is the judgment which the mind forms of the moral qualities of actions. When the will is decided by the voice of conscience, or a regard to right, its decisions are virtuous. When the mind chooses at the bidding of principle, then, and only then, are its decisions according to the law of God.

The Bible never appeals to selfishness. It often addresses self-love, or the hopes and fears of men; because self-love, or a constitutional love of happiness, or dread of misery, is not in itself sinful. By thus appealing to the hopes, fears, and conscience, the mind, even of selfish beings, is led to such an investigation as to prepare the way for the enlightened and powerful remonstrances of conscience. Thus the investigation is carried on under the influence of these principles; but it is not the constitutional principle of self-love that finally determines the mind in its ultimate choice of obedience to God. When, under the combined influence of hope, fear, and conscience, the mind has been led to the full investigation and consideration of the claims of God, - when these principles have influenced the mind so far as to admit and cherish the influences of the Holy Spirit, as that it becomes enlightened, and is led to see what duty is, the mind is then ripe for a decision; conscience then has firm footing; it then has the opportunity of exerting its greatest power upon the will. And if the will decide virtuously, the attention is not at the instant occupied either with hopes or fears, or with those considerations that excite them. But at the moment when the decision is made, the attention must be occupied either with the reasonableness, fitness and propriety of its Maker's claims, or with the hatefulness of sin, or the stability of his truth. The decision of the will, or the change of preference is made, not mainly because, at the instant, you hope to be saved or fear to be damned, but because to act thus is right; [because] to obey God, to serve him, to honor him, and promote his glory, is reasonable, and right, and just. This is a virtuous decision: this is a change of heart. It is true, the offer of pardon and acceptance has a powerful influence, by more fully demonstrating the unreasonableness of rebellion against such a God. While in despair, the sinner would flee rather than submit. But the offer of reconciliation annihilates the influence of despair, and gives to conscience its utmost power.

- Fourthly, You cannot change your heart by attending to the present state of your feelings. It is very common when persons are called upon to change their hearts, for them to turn their thoughts upon themselves, to see whether they possess the requisite state of feeling; whether they have conviction enough, and whether they have those emotions which they suppose necessarily precede a change of heart. They abstract their attention from those considerations that are calculated to decide their will, and think of their present feelings. In this diversion of their mind from the motives to change their heart, and fixing their attention upon their present mental state, they inevitably lose what feeling they have, and for the time being render a change impossible. Our present feelings are subjects of consciousness, they have a felt existence in the mind; but if they be made, for a moment, the subject of attention, they cease to exist. While our

thoughts are warmly engaged, and intensely occupied with objects without ourselves, with our past sins, with the character or requirements of God, with the love or sufferings of the Savior, or with any other subjects, corresponding emotions will exist in our minds. But if from all these, we turn our attention to our present feelings and attempt to examine them, there is no longer any thing before the mind to make us feel; our emotions cease of course. While a man steadily looks at an object, its image is painted on the retina of his eye. Now, while he continues to direct his eye to the object, the image will remain upon the retina, and the corresponding impression will be upon his mind; but should he turn away his eye, the image upon the retina would no longer remain; and should he direct his attention to the mental impression instead of the object that caused it, the impression would at once be effaced from his mind.

Instead, therefore, of waiting for certain feelings, or making your present state of mind the subject of attention, please to abstract your thoughts from your present emotions, and give your undivided attention to some of the reasons for changing your heart.

IV. THINGS TO BE CONSIDERED TO INDUCE THE STATE OF MIND WHICH CONSTITUTES A CHANGE OF HEART.

Remember, the present object is, not to call directly into existence certain emotions, but, by leading your mind to a full understanding of your obligations, to induce you to yield to principle, and to choose what is right. If you will give your attention, I will try to place before you such considerations as are best calculated to induce the state of mind which constitutes a change of heart.

- 1. Fix your mind upon the unreasonableness and hatefulness of selfishness. Selfishness is the pursuit of one's own happiness as a supreme good; this is in itself inconsistent with the glory of God and the highest happiness of his kingdom. You must be sensible that you have always, directly or indirectly, aimed at promoting your own happiness in all that you have done; that God's glory and happiness, and the interests of his kingdom, have not been the leading motive of your life; that you have not served God, but have served yourself. But your individual happiness is of trifling importance, compared with the happiness and glory of God and the interests of his immense kingdom. To pursue, therefore, as a supreme good, your own happiness, is to prefer an infinitely less to an infinitely greater good, simply because it is your own. Is this virtue? Is this public spirit? Is this benevolence? Is this loving God supremely, or your neighbor as yourself? No, it is exalting your own happiness into the place of God; it is placing yourself as a center of the universe, and an attempt to cause God and all his creatures to revolve around you as your satellites.

Your success, in pushing your selfish aims, would ruin the universe. A selfish being can never be happy until his selfishness be fully gratified. It is certain, therefore, that but one selfish being can be fully gratified. Selfishness aims at appropriating all good to self. Give a selfish man a township, and he covets a state; give him a state, and he longs for a nation; give him a continent, and he cannot rest without the world: give him a world, and he is wretched if there is nothing more to gain. Give him all authority on earth, and while there was a God to rule the universe, his selfish heart would rankle with insatiable desire, until the world, the universe, and God himself were prostrate at his feet his ambition could not be satisfied, his selfish heart could not rest. If, then, you could succeed in your

selfish aims, your success would subordinate and injure, if not ruin every body else.

Is this right? But could you succeed in subduing the universe to yourself, then your happiness would not be obtained; for a selfish moral agent cannot be happy. Could you ascend the throne of Jehovah; could you wield the scepter of universal government; could you appropriate to yourself the honor and the wealth of the entire universe; could you receive the homage, the obedience of God and all his creatures, yet the very elements of your nature would be outraged, and while in the exercise of selfishness, conscience would condemn you, the very laws of your moral constitution would mutiny; self-accusation and reproach would rankle in your heart, and, in spite of you, you would be forced to abhor yourself.

Again. While you are selfish, all moral beings must hate and despise you; and it is impossible for a moral being to be happy under the consciousness of being deservedly hated and despised. The love of approbation is a law of our nature, it is laid in the very constitution of the mind by the hand that formed it. It is, therefore, as impossible for us to be happy under the consciousness that we are deservedly hated, as it is that we should alter the very structure of our being. It is in vain, therefore, for you to expect to be happy in the exercise of selfishness. God, angels and saints, wicked men and devils, the entire universe of moral beings must be conscientiously and heartily opposed to you while you sustain that character - while conscience gives forth the verdict that you deserve their hatred, and pronounces you unfit for any other world than hell.

- 2. Consider the guilt of selfishness.

In the next place, look at the guilt of this. No thanks to you, if there is a vestige of virtue or happiness in the universe. If your example should have its natural influence, and not be counteracted by God, it would, like a little leaven, leaven the whole lump. If all your acquaintances copied your example, and their acquaintances theirs, and so on, you can easily see that your influence would soon destroy all benevolence, and introduce universal selfishness and rebellion against God. No thanks to you, if there is an individual in the universe that respects the government of God. You have never obeyed it, and all your influences have been against it; and if God had not been constantly wakeful in using counteracting influences, his government had long since been demolished, and virtue and obedience, and love to God and man had been banished from the world.

Again, your influence has tended to establish for ever the dominion of Satan over men. Selfishness is the law of Satan's empire. You have hitherto perfectly obeyed it; and as example preaches louder than precept, you have used the most powerful means possible to induce all mankind to obey the devil. If God has a virtuous subject on earth, if all men are not in league with hell, and, by their example at least, shouting forth, "O Satan, live for ever!" no thanks to you, for the legitimate tendency of your conduct had been to produce this horrible result.

Again, no thanks to you, if all mankind are not for ever lost. You have done nothing to save them. Your whole life has had a natural tendency to destroy them. Your neglect and

contempt of God have exerted the strongest influence within your power to lead them in the way to death. You have done nothing to save yourself, and, by neglecting your own soul, you have virtually said to all around you, your family and friends, to all who are near and afar off "let religion alone," "who is the Lord that we should obey him, or what profit should we have should we pray unto him?" You need not thank yourself, nor expect the thanks of God, nor of the universe, if any soul from earth is ever saved.

Now, look at the guilt of this. The guilt of any action is equal to the evils which it has a natural tendency to produce. Now look at this. Your selfishness has the natural, and, if unrestrained, the inevitable tendency to ruin the world, to destroy God's government, to establish Satan's, and to people hell with all mankind.

- 3. Consider the reasonableness and utility of benevolence (to love your neighbor as yourself).

Next, look at the reasonableness and utility of benevolence. Benevolence is good will. Benevolence to God, is preferring his happiness and glory to all created good. Benevolence to men, is the exercise of the same regard to, and desire for their happiness, as we have for our own. Benevolence to God, or the preference of God's happiness and glory, is right in itself, because his happiness and glory are infinitely the greatest good in the universe. He prefers his own happiness and glory to every thing else, not because they are his own, but because they constitute the greatest good. All beings, when compared with him, are less than nothing, and vanity. His capacity for enjoying happiness or enduring pain is infinite, not only in duration but in degree. If all the creatures in the universe were completely happy, or perfectly miserable to all eternity, their happiness or misery, though endless in duration, would be but finite in degree. But God's happiness is not only endless in duration but infinite in degree. His happiness is, therefore, just as much more valuable than that of all his creatures, as infinite exceeds finite. Then, is it not right - is it not according to the moral fitness of things, that all his creatures should value his happiness and glory infinitely above their own? Is it not right that he should do this, not because it is his own happiness, but because it is an infinitely greater good?

Does not moral fitness, does not the eternal law of right demand, that he should regard his own happiness according to its real value? Has he any right to prefer the happiness of his creatures above his own? Does not justice require that he should regard every thing in the universe according to its relative importance? and should he not regard his own happiness and glory infinitely above all things else; and should he not require all his intelligent creatures to do the same; would it not be a manifest departure from the immutable principles of right? Therefore, to have a supreme regard to your own happiness, to value it, and to desire it more than you do the happiness and glory of God, is to trample upon the eternal principles of justice and moral fitness which God is bound to maintain; to array yourself in the attitude of open and outrageous war against God, against the universe, against heaven, against the principles of your own nature, and against whatever is right, whatever is lovely and of good report.

Again. That you should love your neighbor as yourself is agreeable to the immutable law of right. That you should regard your neighbor's happiness according to its real value, and

the happiness of all mankind according to the relative importance of each one's individual happiness, and the happiness of the whole as much above your own as the aggregate amount of theirs is more valuable than yours, is right in itself. To refuse to do this, is at once to sin against God, to declare war with all men.

But again look at the utility of benevolence. It is a matter of human consciousness that the mind is so constituted that benevolent affections are the source of happiness, and malevolent ones the source of misery. God's happiness consists in his benevolence. Wherever unmingled benevolence is, there is peace. If perfect benevolence reigned throughout the universe, universal happiness would be the inevitable result. The happiness of heaven is perfect, because benevolence is there perfect. They love God with all their heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, and their neighbors as themselves; and who that knows the joy there is in holy love, does not know that the full tide of benevolence is but another name for the full tide of happiness? Perfect benevolence to God and man would at once give us a share in all the happiness of earth and heaven. Benevolence is good will, or willing good to the object of it. If we desire the happiness of others, their happiness will increase our own, according to the strength of our desire. If we desire their welfare as much as we do our own, we are made as happy by good, known to be conferred on them as upon ourselves; and nothing but selfishness prevents our tasting the cup of every man's happiness, and sharing equally with him in all his joys. If we supremely desire the happiness and glory of God, the fact that he is infinitely and immutably happy and glorious, and that he will glorify himself, and that "the whole earth shall be full of his glory," will constitute our supreme joy. It will be to us a never failing source of pure, and high, and holy blessedness. And when we look abroad upon men, and see all the wickedness of earth; when, through the page of inspiration, we survey as with a telescope the deep caverns of the pit; when we listen to its wailings, and behold the lurid flashes of its fires, and contemplate the gnawings of the deathless worm; in all this we see only the legitimate results of selfishness. Selfishness is the discord of the soul: it is the jarring, and dissonance, and grating of hell's eternal anguish. Benevolence, on the other hand, is the melody of the soul. In its exercise, all the mental powers are harmonized, and breathe the sweetness of heaven's charming symphonies. To be happy, then, you must be benevolent. Selfishness, you see, is neither reasonable nor profitable. Its very nature is at war with happiness. It renders you odious to God, the abhorrence of heaven, the contempt of hell. It buries your good name, your ultimate self-esteem, your present and future happiness, in one common grave, and that beyond the hope of resurrection, unless you turn, renounce your selfishness, and obey the law of God.

- 4. Consider the reasons why God should govern the universe.

But again, consider the reasons why God should govern the universe. Perhaps, in words or in theory, you have never denied his right to govern, yet in practice you have always denied it. Your having never obeyed, is the strongest possible declaration of your denial of his right to govern you. The language of your conduct has been, "Who is Jehovah, that I should obey him?" "I know not Jehovah, neither will I obey his voice." But have you duly considered his claims upon your obedience? Have you not only admitted the fact that he has a right to govern, but have you understood and thoroughly considered the

foundation of this right? If you have never attended to this, it is not wonderful that you have refused obedience. The foundation of God's right to the government of the universe is made up of the three following considerations:

First, his moral character. His benevolence is infinite. Were he a malevolent being, and were his laws like himself, as they would be of course, he could have no right to govern. Instead of being under an obligation to love and obey him, it would be our duty to hate and disobey him. But his benevolence renders him worthy of our love and obedience. But his benevolence alone cannot qualify him for, nor give him a right to, the government of the universe. However benevolent he may be, if his natural attributes are not what they should be, he cannot be qualified to be the Supreme Ruler of all worlds. But a glance at his natural attributes will show that he is no less worthy to govern, in respect to these, than in respect to his moral attributes.

And, first, he has infinite knowledge, so that his benevolence will always be wisely exercised.

2nd. He has infinite power. However benevolent he might be, if he lacked either knowledge to direct, or power to execute his benevolent desires, he would not be fit to govern.

Again. He is omnipresent; in every place, at every time; so that nothing that benevolence desires, wisdom directs, or power can achieve, can be wanting in his administration.

Again. He is immortal and unchangeable. Could he cease to exist, or were he subject to change, these would be fundamental defects in his nature as supreme Ruler of the universe.

But, again. Neither his moral nor natural attributes, when viewed separately or collectively, afford sufficient ground for his assuming the reins of government. For however good and great he may be, these constitute no sufficient reason for his taking upon himself the office of supreme magistrate, irrespective of the elective choice of other beings. But he is also the Creator, and holds by the highest possible tenure the entire universe as his own. Thus he is not only infinitely well fitted to govern, but by creation has the absolute and inalienable right to govern. He not only has this right, but it is his duty to govern. He can never yield this office, nor throw aside this responsibility.

- 5. Consider the reasonableness of God's requirements.

But again. Look at the reasonableness of his requirements. They are not arbitrary but such as it is his bounden duty to enforce. The laws of God have not their foundation in his arbitrary will, but in the nature, and relation, and fitness of things. To love God and our

neighbor, is not our duty simply because God requires it; but it is our duty antecedently to any expressed requirement. He requires it, because it is right in itself. He is not therefore at liberty to dispense with our obedience if he please. He cannot good-naturedly humor his creatures and let them have their own way - let them run into sin and rebellion, and then let them go unpunished. He is solemnly pledged and bound by the rules of his own government. If, therefore, you go on in sin, it is not at his option, when you come to the judgment, to punish you or not. The laws of his empire are fixed, eternal principles, which he can no more violate, without sin, than any of his creatures. Do not hope then, if you persevere in sin, to escape "the damnation of hell."

But perhaps, like many others, you have made this excuse for your rebellion; that, upon the whole, God desires you to sin; that, as he is almighty, he could prevent sin if he pleased; and because he does not, you infer that he prefers the existence of sin to its non-existence; and the present amount of rebellion to holiness in its stead. To say nothing of his word and oath upon this subject, you have only to look into his law to see that he has done all that the nature of the case admitted, to prevent the existence of sin. The sanctions of his law are absolutely infinite; in them he has embodied and held forth the highest possible motives to obedience. His law is moral, and not physical; a government of motive, and not of force. It is vain to talk of his omnipotence preventing sin; if infinite motives will not prevent it, it cannot be prevented under a moral government, and to maintain the contrary is absurd, and a contradiction. To administer moral laws, is not the object of physical power. To maintain, therefore, that the physical omnipotence of God can prevent sin, is to talk nonsense. If to govern mind were the same as to govern matter - if to sway the intellectual could be accomplished by the same power that sways the physical universe, then, indeed, it would be just, from the physical omnipotence of God, and from the existence of sin, to infer that God prefers its existence to holiness in its stead. But as mind must be governed by moral power, as the power of motive is the only power that can be brought to bear upon mind to influence it, it is unjust, unphilosophical, illogical, and absurd, to infer from the existence of sin, and God's physical omnipotence, his preference of its existence.

If the motives to obedience are infinite, well might he challenge the universe, and inquire, "what more could I have done for my vineyard that I have not done?" And will you, in the face of all these moving considerations, continue your rebellion? and when required to turn, will you profanely reply: If God be Almighty, why does he not turn me? O, sinner, why provoke your Maker? "Your judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and your damnation slumbereth not."

- 6. Consider the atonement.

But, again. When the law was broken, and all mankind exposed to its fearful penalty, behold at once the justice to the universe, and mercy to sinners displayed in the atonement. To make an universal offer of pardon, without regard to public justice, were virtually to repeal his law; but a due regard to the public interest forbade the lawgiver to forgive and set aside the execution, without some expedient to secure a veneration [love] for and obedience to the precept [law]. So great, therefore, was his compassion for man,

and his regard to law, that to gratify his desire to pardon, he was willing to suffer in the person of his Son, a substitute for its penalty. This was the most stupendous exhibition of self-denial that ever was made in the universe. The Father giving his only begotten and well beloved Son; the Son veiling the glories of his uncreated Godhead, and becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, that we might never die.

Now, if you are an impenitent sinner, you have never, in a single instance, obeyed your Maker. Every breath that you have breathed, every pulse you have told [of your heart], has but added to the number of your crimes. When God has fanned your heaving lungs, you have breathed out your poisonous breath in rebellion against the eternal God; and how ought God to feel towards you? You have set your unsanctified feet upon the principles of eternal righteousness; you have lifted up your hands, filled with poisoned weapons, against the throne of the Almighty; you have set at nought the authority of God and the rights of man. You have spurned, as with your feet, every principle of right, of love, and of rational happiness. You are the enemy of God, the foe of man, a child of the devil, and in league with hell. Ought not God then to hate you with all his heart?

But in the midst of your rebellion, behold the long suffering of God. With what patience has he borne with all your aggravated wickedness! All this you have done, and he has kept silence. Dare you think that he will never reprove?

- 7. Consider the required conditions of repentance and faith.

But look for a moment at the conditions of the Gospel, Repentance and faith. To repent, is to hate and renounce your sin. This requirement is not arbitrary on the part of God. It would neither be just to the universe, nor beneficial to you, to exercise pardon until you comply with this requirement. Can a sovereign forgive his subjects while they remain in rebellion? Can God forgive you while you persevere in sin? No. This would be to give up his law, and, by a public act, to confess himself wrong and you right, to renounce the stand he has taken, to condemn himself and justify you. But this would be the publication of falsehood, it would be a proclamation that sin is right and holiness wrong. Not only so, but to forgive you, and leave you in your sin, would render your happiness impossible. You might as well proclaim a man in health who is dying with the plague.

Nor is faith an arbitrary appointment of God. God has no means of getting you to heaven unless you believe his word, and walk in the path he points out to you. If you will not believe what he tells you of heaven and hell, of the way to avoid the one and gain the other, your salvation is impossible in the nature of the case. You cannot find heaven at the end of the road that leads to hell, nor hell at the end of the road that leads to heaven, and nothing but faith in what he tells you, can influence you to take the path that leads to heaven. And now, sinner, what have you to say? Why the sentence of his law should not be executed upon you? You have never cared for God, and why should he be under obligation to care for you? You have never obeyed him, what good then do you deserve at his hand? You have always disobeyed him, and what evil do you not deserve? You have broken his law, despised his grace, and grieved his Spirit. "You have cast off fear and restrained prayer." The tendency of your selfish conduct has been to ruin the universe, to

dethrone God, to build up the throne and establish the dominion of Satan, to damn yourself and all mankind. This you cannot deny. Let conscience pass sentence upon you. Let it give forth its verdict. Do you not, even now, hear it in the deep recesses of your soul cry out, guilty, guilty, and worthy of eternal death?

- 8. The rightful conclusion to these considerations.

But, sinner, you have seen, in the progress of this discourse, the reasonableness of benevolence, and the hatefulness of selfishness. The right and the duty of God to govern you, and your obligations to obey. You have seen the reasonableness and utility of virtue; the unreasonableness, the guilt, and evil of sin. And now what say you? What is your present duty? Is it right? Is it reasonable? Is it expedient longer to pursue your selfish course? Is it not best, and right, and manly, and honorable, and time, to turn and obey your Maker? Look at the consequences of your present course, to yourself, your friends over whom you have influence, to the church, and to the world. Will you continue to cast firebrands, arrows, and death, - to throw all your influence, your time and talents, your body and soul, into the scale of selfishness! Shall all your influence continue to be upon the wrong side, to increase the wickedness and misery of earth, to gratify the devil and grieve the Son of God? Sinner, if you go to hell, you ought to be willing to go alone; company will not mitigate, but increase your pain. Ought you not then, instantly, to throw all your influence into the other scale; to exert yourself to roll back the tide of death, and save your fellow- men from hell? Do you see the reasonableness of this? What is your judgment in the case? Do not stop to look at your emotions, nor turn your eye in upon your present state of mind; but say, will you cease your rebellion, throw down your weapons, and enlist in the service of Jesus Christ? He has come to destroy the works of the devil, to demolish his empire, and re- establish the government of God in the hearts of men. Are you willing that he should govern the world? Is this your choice? If allowed to vote, would you elect him as supreme Governor of the world? Will you obey him yourself? But do you reply, "Oh! I am so great a sinner, I fear there is no mercy for me?" That is not the question. The question is not, whether he will pardon you, but whether you will obey him. If he saw it not wise to pardon you, if the circumstances of his government require your damnation, is it not on that account the less your duty to obey him. The question for you to settle is, whether you will obey him, and leave the question [matter] of your salvation for him to settle, in view of all the circumstances of the case. He is infinitely wise, and as benevolent as he is wise. You ought, therefore, cheerfully to submit your final destiny to him, to make your duty the object of your attention, and obedience your constant aim. The atonement is full and perfect. The presumption is, that nothing is in the way of your salvation but your impenitence and unbelief; and indeed you have the promise, that on condition of submission to his will, you shall have eternal life. Do you see what you ought to do, and are you willing to do it? "Choose this day whom you will serve." To choose God and his services - to prefer these to your own interest and to every thing else, is to change your heart. Have you done it? Do you still ask, how shall I do it? You might with much more propriety ask, when the meeting is dismissed, how shall I go home? To go home would require two things, first, to be willing; secondly, to put your body in motion. But here, no muscular power is needed. But one thing is requisite, that is a willing mind. Your consent is all that is needed. Be

willing to do your duty, [and do it,] and the work is done.

INFERENCES AND REMARKS.

1. From this subject you see why many complain that they cannot submit to God. They do not give their attention to the consideration necessary to lead them to submission. Many occupy their thoughts with their state of feeling, are looking steadily at the darkness of their own minds and the hardness of their own hearts. They are anxiously waiting for the existence of certain feelings in their minds, which they suppose must precede conversion. In this way they will not submit of course. Their mental eye is turned away from the reasons for submission. In this state of mind it is impossible that they should submit; it would be a counteraction of all the laws of mind. Others, instead of attending to the reasonableness and fitness of their Maker's claims, give their whole attention to their own danger, and try to submit while they are only influenced by fear. This is acting under the influence of self-love. It is not responding to the voice of conscience; it is not submission to the laws of right; and, actuated by such motives, the mind may struggle till the day of judgment, and still the considerations that must lead the soul to a right submission are not before the mind, and the soul will not submit. It is the rightness of the duty, and not the danger consequent upon the non-performance of it, that must influence the mind, if it would act virtuously. I have already said, that both hope and fear bear an important part in leading the mind to make the requisite investigation. But neither the one nor the other are the object of the mind's attention at the instant of submission. He, therefore, who does not understand the philosophy of this - who does not understand the use and power of attention, the use and power of conscience, and upon what to fix his mind to lead him to a right decision, will naturally complain that he does not know how to submit.

2. You see the way in which the Spirit of God operates in the conversion of men; it is through the medium of attention and conscience; he gets and keeps the attention of the mind, and, through the influence of hope, and, fear, and conscience, conducts the sinner along the path of truth, till he has given conscience the requisite information to exert its utmost power; that when it gives forth its verdict, the will may respond. - Amen.

3. This is the experience of every Christian. He knows that in this way the Spirit of God exerted its influence to change his heart. His errors and refuges of lies were swept away. He can tell you that his attention was arrested and fixed, that his conscience was enlightened, and the subject pressed upon his mind until he was induced to yield.

4. You see how unphilosophical it is, while pressing the sinner to submission, to divert his mind and turn his attention to the subject of the Spirit's influence. While his attention is directed to that subject, his submission is impossible. He can only submit when his entire attention is directed to the reasons for submission. Every diversion of his attention is but multiplying obstacles in his way. Hence we never find the inspired writers, when calling upon sinners to repent, directing their attention to the subject of divine influence. Begin with Joshua - when he assembled the people of Israel and laid their duty before them, and said, "choose you this day whom ye will serve," he did not unphilosophically remind them at the same time of their dependence upon the Spirit of God; but held the single point upon which they were to choose before them, till their choice was made. So on the day of Pentecost, and in the case of the jailer, and indeed in every other case where prophets, and Christ, find the apostles called men to immediate repentance, we find them keeping close to their text, and not going

off to drag in the subject of divine influence to divert the attention and confound their hearers.

5. You see the importance of understanding the philosophy of conversion, and why it is that so many sermons are lost, and worse than lost, upon the souls of men. First, the sinner's attention is not secured; and, secondly, if it is secured, it is often directed to irrelevant matters, and the subject embarrassed with extraneous considerations that have nothing to do with the sinner's immediate duty. Often the subject is not cleared up to his mind; or if he understands it, he does not see its personal application to himself; or if he sees this, he is not made to feel the pressure of present obligation, and not infrequently - 'O tell it not in Gath, ' the impression is distinctly left upon his mind that he is unable to do his duty. The preaching that leaves this last impression is infinitely worse than none.

6. From this subject you can see that there are two classes of evidence of a change of heart; one is, those vivid emotions of love to God, repentance for sin, and faith in Christ, that often follow the change of choice. These constitute happiness, they are most sought, and usually the most depended upon, but not deservedly the most satisfactory. Highly wrought emotions are liable to deceive, for, as they cannot be the subject of a present distinct examination without ceasing to exist, they are the least to be depended on as an evidence of a title to the inheritance of the saints in light. The other kind of evidence is an habitual disposition to obey the requirements of God; that abiding preference of God's glory, over every thing else, that gives a right direction to all our conduct.

7. You see, from this subject, the philosophy of self- examination. Many persons will set apart days of fasting and prayer, and spend the day in trying to examine their present mental state, in trying to catch a glimpse of their present emotions. In this way they are sure to quench whatever of right feeling they have. Their past thoughts and feelings, their past actions and motives, may be the subject of present examination and attention; but whenever they make their present emotions or state of feeling the subject of attention, they cease to feel. If, then, you would try your hearts in regard to any object, bring that object before your mind, consider it intensely, and if there be any moral affinity between your state of mind and this object of attention, while you are musing the fire of emotion will burn.

8. From this subject you perceive the error of those persons who suppose themselves to have much more religion than others, merely because they have more emotion. Multitudes of minds seem not to be influenced by principle, but are carried hither and thither by every gust of feeling, by whatever consideration these feelings may be produced; and while they tell of their raptures, their love and joys, they have so little regard to principle as to be guilty of Christ- dishonoring conduct. Others, who much less frequently evince deep emotion, are influenced by a sacred regard to right. They have much more of the consistency of the Christian character, but perhaps complain of the absence of religious joy.

9. From what has been said, it is manifest, that where sinners continue to neglect the means of grace, their case is hopeless. Many seem to think, that if they are to be saved, they shall be saved, and if they are to be lost, they shall be lost; and look upon religion as some mysterious thing, for the implantation of which, in their minds, they must wait the pleasure of a sovereign God. They pay attention to every other subject, and occupy their thoughts with every thing that is calculated to banish religion from their minds, and still hope to be converted. This is as irrational as if a man, desiring to obtain the perfection of Christian sobriety, should continue to riot and drink, and stupefy his powers, and expect

that, in some mysterious way, he should by and by become a sober man.

10. From this subject you see the importance of giving a convicted sinner right instruction. Great care should be taken not to divert his mind from fundamental truths. His attention should be abstracted, if possible, from every thing irrelevant, from every thing that regards merely the circumstantial of religion, and brought to bear intensely upon the main question, that of unconditional submission to God.

11. You see the necessity of addressing the feelings, or hopes and fears of men, as a means of awakening them, and securing their attention. Very exciting means are often indispensable, to awaken and secure sufficient attention to lead the way to conversion. When there are so many exciting topics almost continually before the mind, so many Lo! heres, and Lo! theres, to call and fix the sinner's thoughts to worldly objects, we must, of necessity, ply him with the most moving considerations, and that in the most affectionate and earnest manner, or we shall fail to interest his thoughts, and get the subject upon his mind for consideration. One important design of his constitutional susceptibilities is, to afford a medium of access to the attention, and through the attention to the conscience. Many persons seem averse to addressing the feelings of men on the subject of religion, they fear to excite animal feeling, and consequently they in general excite no feeling at all. The reason is obviously this; they overlook some of the most striking peculiarities of the mental constitution. They strive to arouse the conscience, but fail for want of attention. The attention will not ordinarily be secured but by addressing the hopes and fears of men.

12. We should carefully distinguish between a convicted and an awakened sinner. When the sinner is once thoroughly awakened, there is then no need of creating further alarm; and indeed in this situation all appeals merely to hope and fear are rather an embarrassment and a hinderance to the progress of the work. When his attention is thoroughly secured, the favorable moment should be seized upon fully to enlighten his mind, and lead him to a right understanding of his responsibilities and the claims of his Maker. If there is any flagging of the attention, such appeals should instantly be made to the feelings as to arouse and fix the thoughts; and an anxious watchfulness should be constantly kept up to preserve attention, and enlighten the mind as fast as possible. In this way you will most effectually aid the operations of the Holy Spirit, push matters to an issue, and secure the conversion of the sinner to God.

Neglecting to distinguish between awakening and conviction has been the cause of many sad failures in securing sound conversions. Often, when sinners have been merely awakened, they have been treated as if they were convicted: their spiritual guides have neglected to seize the opportunity to force home conviction upon them; they have called on them to submit, before they duly understood the reasons for submission, or the nature of the duty. But, as might be expected, instead of truly performing it, they have imagined themselves willing to do so, till their awakenings have subsided, and the chill apathy of death has settled down upon them.

13. You see that preaching terror alone is not calculated to effect the conversion of sinners. It is useful to awaken, but, unless accompanied with those instructions that enlighten, will seldom result in any good.

14. You see why those that preach alone to the hopes of men, seldom, if ever, effect their conversion. Some go to one extreme and some to the other. Some appeal to fear, and others again to hope, while they seldom reason with the sinner of temperance, of righteousness, or of a judgment to come. They often excite much feeling and many tears; but, after all, such appeals, unaccompanied with that discriminating instruction which the sinner needs, in regard to his duty and the claims of his Maker, will seldom result in a sound conversion.

15. You see the philosophy of special efforts to promote revivals of religion. Why it is that protracted meetings, and other measures which are new, are calculated to promote the conversion of sinners. Their novelty excites and fixes attention. Their being continued from day to day, serves to enlighten the mind, and has a philosophical tendency to issue in conversion.

Lastly. I remark, that from this subject it will be seen that a death-bed is but a poor place for repentance. Many are expecting, that if they neglect repentance until they come upon a bed of death, that then they shall repent and give their hearts to God. But alas! how vain the hope! In the languor and exhaustion, the pain and distraction, the trembling and the anxiety of a death-bed, what opportunity or power is there for that fixedness and intensity of attention that are requisite to break the power of selfishness and change the entire current of the soul? To think, is labor; to think intensely, is exhausting labor, even to a man in health. But, oh! upon a bed of death, to have the intricate accounts of life to look over, the subject of the soul's character and destiny to ponder and understand; to hold the agonized mind in warm and distressing contact with the great truths of revelation, until the heart is melted and broken, rest assured, is ordinarily, if not always, too great an effort for a dying man. Be it known to all men, that, as a general truth, to which there are but few exceptions, men die as they live, and no dependence can be placed upon those waverings, and flickerings, and gleamings forth of the struggling mind, while the body, all weakness and pain, is breaking down to usher it into the presence of its Maker. Now is your time, in the wakefulness and strength of your powers, while the command to make to you a new heart and a new spirit, and the reasons for the performance of this duty lie fully before you; while the gate of heaven stands open, and mercy, with bleeding hands, beckons you to come; while the pearl of great price is tendered to your acceptance, seize the present moment, and lay hold upon eternal life.