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## Fire and Ice Sermon Series

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# The Chief Sinners Objects of the Choicest Mercy

by Stephen Charnock

Part I. The Chief of Sinners Saved

Part II. God's Regard for His Own Glory,  
Seen in the Saving of Sinners

Part III. The Fruits of Converting Grace  
in the Salvation of Sinners

*"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief."—1 Tim. 1:15*

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Part I.

The Chief of Sinners Saved

*Observation.* I. The salvation of sinners was the main design of Christ's coming into the world. II. God often makes the chiefest sinners objects of his choicest mercy.

To show that God does so, observe,

**I** God has formally made *invitations* to such. See what a black generation they were, Isa. 1, by the record of their sins. They were rebels, and rebels against him that had nursed them. "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me," ver. 2. And in this respect worse than the beasts they were masters of; the stupid ox and the dull ass outstripped them in intelligence. "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider," ver. 3. He calls upon heaven and earth to judge between them, ver. 2. He appeals to men and angels, as a jury, to give their verdict, whether these people had not been the most disingenuous and ungrateful people in the world. Or if by heavens and earth be meant magistrates and people, as in the prophetic style they are usually taken, God then appeals to themselves, to let their own natural consciences and the common intelligence their sins had left them, to judge between them. He comes to charge them, "laden with iniquity," ver. 4. They had such great weights lying upon them, that they were not able to stir; or laden with it, as some crabtree is with sour fruit. They had sprouted from a wicked stock; they had corrupted one another by their society and example, as rotten apples putrefy the sound ones that be near them.

They had been incorrigible under judgments; God had used the rod again and again; but seeing there was no reformation, he was even weary of whipping them any longer; "Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more," ver. 5. They were also so universally infected, that there was no sound part about them, but running sores all over; both head and heart were infected; corrupt

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notions in the one, and corrupt affections in the other. Or if you take it prophetically, head signifies the chief magistrate; heart, the judges; feet, the common people. The fire which had burnt their cities had not consumed their lusts, and dried up their sins; “Your country is desolate, your cities are burnt with fire, your land strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers,” ver. 7. And had it not been for a small remnant, they had been as bad as Sodom and Gomorrah, ver. 9. Their services were polluted, vain, and an abomination to him, ver. 13. They were a trouble to him, his soul hated them, he was tired with them, ver. 14, for they came with their bloody murderous hands into God’s presence.

Yet though he justly charged them with these horrid crimes, he gives them assurance of being received if they would return to him; “Come now, and let us reason together,” ver. 18. He would condescend to debate the case with them, when one would have thought he should have said, I’ll have nothing to do with such a crew as they; God loves to discourse with men about this argument of pardon; and he loves that men should hear him speak concerning it. He would dispute them out of their sins, into good and right apprehensions of his mercy. So, “Turn ye unto him from whom the children of Israel have deeply revolted,” Isa. 31:6. Revolted, there is their sin; deeply, there is the aggravation of it; and being also children of Israel, a people of much mercy and miracles, there is another aggravation; yet turn unto him against whom you have thus sinned. The great objection of a penitent is, I have sinned, and I know not whether God will receive me: consider, God knows your sin better than you do, yet he kindly calls to you, and promises you as good a reception as if you had never sinned.

So, “They say, if a man put away his wife, and she go from him and become another man’s, shall he return unto her again? Shall not that land be greatly polluted? But thou hast played the harlot with many lovers, yet return again to me, saith the Lord,” Jer. 3:1. Though you have been a common adulteress, and made all comers, every idol welcome, and been in league with many sins, yet upon your return I’ll claim you as my own; and these are God’s warrants for encouragement.

2. God has given examples of it in scripture. Adam the ringleader of all rebellions of mankind in the world, had the promise of the seed of the woman to break the serpent’s head made to him; and in the genealogy of Christ, is called the Son of God, Luke 3:38; not only in respect of creation, for so the devil is the son of God, but in a nearer relation. Yet all that deluge of wickedness which has overflowed the world since the fall, sprung out of his loins. Nay, Abraham, the father of the faithful, was probably an idolater in Ur of the Chaldees, and a

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worshipper of the sun and fire, as his fathers were, Jos. 24:2; yet God makes a particular covenant with this man, presents him with a richer act of grace than any in the world besides him had, namely that the Messiah, the great Redeemer of the world, should come from his seed; this man is set up as the pattern of faith to others, and his bosom seems to be a great receptacle of saints in glory, Luke 16:22, 23. Israel's sins were as a thick cloud, yet this powerful sun did melt them; "I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins," Isa. 44:22. A sullen gloomy morning often ends in a well complexioned noon. Manasseh is an eminent example of this doctrine. His story, 2 Chron. 33, represents him as a black devil, if all the aggravations of his sin be considered.

1. It was against *knowledge*. He had a pious education under a religious father; an education usually leaves some tinctures and impressions of religion. No doubt but the instructions his father Hezekiah had taught him, and the exemplary holiness he had seen in him, were sometimes awakened in his memory, and recoiled upon his conscience.

2. His *place and station*, as a king; sins of kings are like their robes, more scarlet and crimson than the sins of a peasant. Their example usually infects their subjects. As they are not without their attendance in their progresses and recreations, so neither in their vices and virtues.

3. Restoration of *idolatry*. Had he found the worship of the host of heaven derived to him by succession from his father, and the idols set up to his hand, the continuance of them had less of sin, because more of temptation; but he built again those high places and altars to idols after they had been broken down, ver. 3, and dashed in pieces that reformation his father had completed.

4. Affronting God to *his very face*, He sets up his idols, as it were to insult God, and built altars in the house of the Lord, and in the two courts of his temple, whereof God had said he would have his name there for ever, ver. 4, 5. He brought in all the stars of heaven to be sharers in that worship which was only due to the God of heaven. What, could he find no other place for his idols, but in the very temple of God? Must God be cast out of his house, to make room for Baal?

6. *Murder*. Perhaps of his children, which he caused to pass through the fire, as an offering to his idol, ver. 6. It may be it was only for purification. But he had the guilt of much innocent blood upon him, the streams whereof ran down in every part of the city. "Moreover, Manasseh shed innocent blood very much, till he filled Jerusalem with blood from one end to the other," 2 Kings 21:16.

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6. Covenant with the *devil*. He used enchantments, and witchcraft, and dealt with a familiar spirit, ver. 6; yea, he had acquaintance with more devils than one, and dealt with familiar spirits and wizards, in the plural number.

7. His *other men's sins*. He did not only lead the people by his example, but compelled them by his commands. "So I made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to err, and to do worse than the heathen God had rooted out," 2 Chron. 33:9, to make room for them. Hereby he contracted the guilt of the whole nation upon himself.

8. *Obstinacy* against admonitions,. God spoke to him and his people, but they would not hearken, or alter their course, 2 Kings 21:10.

9. *Continuance* in it. He ascended the throne young, at twelve years old, ver. 1. It is uncertain how long he continued in this sin. Toraniellus thinks fifteen years. Bellarmine twenty-seven. Kimchi fifty years, reckoning but five years of his life after his restoration. What a world of sin, and aggravations of it, were there in this man! And yet God was intreated, ver. 19.

3. The *ancestry whereof Christ* came, seems to imply this; God might have kept the stock, whence Christ descended according to the flesh, pure and free from being tainted with any notorious crimes; but we find sins of a crimson dye even among them. There are no women reckoned up in Christ's geneology, but such as in scripture are noted for looseness, Mat. 1:3. Tamar who played the harlot with Judah her father-in-law, Gen. 38. Rahab, Mat. 1:5, the harlot Or Jericho. Ruth, ver. 5, a Gentile and Moabitess the root of whose generation was Lot's son, by incest with his own daughter. Bathsheba, ver. 6, David's adulteress. He chose these repenting sinners, out of whose loins Christ was to come, that the greatest sinners might not be afraid to come to him.

Was David, whose son our Saviour is called, much better? It is true he was a man after God's own heart, but yet very notorious for that act of murder and adultery, and with more aggravating circumstances than usually are met with in acts of the like nature, 2 Sam. 11. Uriah was a godly man, and had a sense of the condition of the church and nation whereof he was a member, ver. 11, and such a man's bed David is not only content to defile, but he pollutes his soul with drunkenness, ver. 13, lays snares for his life, not in a manly, but sly and treacherous manner; for while he does caress him, and show him a fair countenance in his palace, he draws up secret instructions to Joab so to order the business, that Uriah might be thrust into his grave, and makes him the courier to carry the commission for his own death, ver. 15, 16. After all this he has no remorse when he hears of the loss of so godly and valiant a man, but wipes his

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mouth, and sweeps all the dirt to the door of Providence, ver. 25. Now Christ's stock being thus tainted, was methinks an evidence that penitents, though before of the greatest pollutions, might be welcome to him. And that as he picked out such out of whose loins to proceed, so he would pick out such also in whose hearts to reside.

4. It was Christ's employment in the world to court and gain such kind of creatures. The first thing he did, while in the manger, was to snatch some of the devil's prophets out of his service, and take them into his own, Mat. 2:1, some of the Magi, who were astrologers and idolaters. When he fled from Herod's cruelty, he chose Egypt, the most idolatrous country in the world, for his sanctuary; a place where the people worshipped oxen, crocodiles, cats, garlic, *putida numina* [unclean spirits], all kind of riff-raff; to show that he often comes to sojourn in the blackest souls. The first people he took care to preach to were the seamen, who us usually are the rudest and most debauched sort of men, as gaining the vices as well as the commodities of those nations they traffic with, Mat. 4:13. The inhabitants of those sea coasts are said to sit in darkness, ver. 16; in darkness both of sin and ignorance, just as the Egyptians were not able to stir in that thick darkness which was sent as a plague upon them. And the country, by reason of the vices of the inhabitants, is called the region and shadow of death; a title properly belonging to hell itself. To call sinners to repentance was the errand of his coming. And he usually delighted to choose such that had not the least pretense to merit, Mark 2:17. Matthew, a publican, Zaccheus, an extortioner, examples of the majority of that generation of men and harlots, and very little company besides.

He chose his attendants out of the devil's rabble; and he was more Jesus, more a Saviour, among this sort of trash, than among all other sorts of people, for all his design was to get his people out of hell itself. What was that woman that he must needs go out of his way to convert? A harlot, John 4:18, an idolater, for the Samaritans had a mixed worship, a linsey-woolsey religion, and upon that account were hateful to the Jews. She continued in her adultery up to the very time Christ spoke to her, yet he makes her a monument of his grace; and not only so, but the first preacher of the gospel to her neighbours. "Is not this the Christ?" ver. 29, and an instrument to conduct them to him; "Come, see a man which told me all things," &c. Was any more defiled than Mary Magdalene? Seven devils would make her sooty to purpose, and so many did Christ cast out of her. "Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene," Mark 16:9, out of whom he cast seven devils. This lustful devil he turns into a weeping saint.

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What was that Canaanitish woman who had so powerful a faith infused? One sprung of a cursed stock, hateful to God, rooted out of the pleasant land, a dog, not a child: she comes a dog, but returns a child; Christ made this crab-apple in a wilderness to bring forth fruit, even the best that heaven could afford, viz. the fruit of faith; and larger and better bunches of it than that time sprouted out of any branches of the Jewish vine, so well planted, and so often watered by Christ himself. When he comes to act his last part in the world, he saves a thief who was next to the hell-gates, ready to be pushed in by the devil. Do you find examples among the Pharisees? No. Dunghill-sinners take heaven by violence, while the proud Pharisees lose it by their own righteousness. Scribes and theologians continue devils in the chair, while harlots come out saints from the brothels, and the thief goes onward a convert from the cross.

Since there was but one that in his own person he converted after he went to heaven, what was he? One that had “breathed out threatenings and slaughters against the church,” Acts 9:1. To do so was as common with him, and natural to him, as to inhale air, and breathe it out again: this man, galloping to hell as fast as his mad rage and passion could carry him, Jesus stops in his charge, ordains a preacher of a persecutor; gives him as large a commission as he had given any of his favourites; for he makes him the chiefest apostle of the Gentiles. What bogs and miry places did Christ drain and make fruitful gardens? What barren and thorny wildernesses did he change into pleasant paradises? He made subjects of vengeance objects of mercy: he told the woman of Samaria who lived in fornication, that he was the Messiah; “The woman saith to him, I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ.” “Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am he,” John 4:25, 26; which he never disclosed to the self-righteous Pharisees, nor, indeed, in so many words to his disciples, till Peter’s confession of him.

5. The commission Christ gave to his apostles was to this purpose. He bids them proclaim the promise free to all; “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature;” Mark 16:15. All the world, every creature. He put no difference between men in this respect, though you meet with them in the likeness of beasts, and devils never so wicked, never so abominable; as long as they are creatures, reach out the cup of salvation to them, if they will drink; open the treasures of grace to them, if they will receive them; agree with them for nothing but faith for justification, and profession of it for their salvation.

This *commission* is set out by the parable of a king commanding his servants to fetch the maimed, halt, and blind, with their wounds, sores, and infirmities about them, Luke 14:21, 23. “Bring in hither the poor, and the maimed,

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and the halt, and the blind.” Yea, and go out into the highways, and hedges, and those loathsome persons, those dregs of mankind, which you shall find swarming with vermin, and cleansing themselves under every hedge, bring them in; if they pretend their rags and nastiness as unsuitable to my rank and quality, compel them, force them against their own natural inclinations and doubts, that my house may be filled. God will have heaven filled with such, when self-righteous persons refuse him. When you come to heaven to sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, you will find some and a great many, that were once as filthy morally, as these hedge-birds were naturally, who had once as many lusts creeping about them as there were frogs in Egypt. Such a compulsion as this spoken of, there was in the primitive times by the power of the Spirit of grace. Two stage-players, that in their acting scoffed at the Christian religion, were converted, and proved martyrs; one under Dioclesian, the other under Julian.

6. The practice of the Spirit *after Christ’s ascension*, to lay hold of such persons.

1. Some out of the *worst families* in the world; one out of Herod’s, Acts 13:1. “Now there were in the church that was at Antioch, certain prophets, and teachers, as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the Tetrarch, and Saul.” Either Herod Antipas, who ridiculed Christ before Pilate; or Herod Agrippa, who put James to death; which of these Herods it was, it was not likely that in such a family he should imbibe any principles advantageous to the Christian religion. For being brought up with him, he was either his playfellow when young, or his confidant when grown up; yet out of this family of this wicked prince he calls out one, to make not only an object of his mercy, but an instrument of it to others, contrary to the force of education, which usually roots bad principles deep in the heart. It is likely to this intent the Holy Ghost takes particular notice of the place of Manaen’s education, when the families, where the rest named with him were bred up, are not mentioned.

Some rude and rough stones were taken out of Nero’s palace; some that were servants to the most abominable tyrant, and the greatest monster of mankind; one that set Rome on fire, and played on his harp while the flames were crackling about the city; ripped up his mother’s belly to see the place where he lay; would any of the civiller sort of mankind be attendants upon such a devil? Yet some of this monster’s servants became saints. Phil. 4:22. “All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Caesar’s household.” To hear of saints in Nero’s family, is as great a prodigy as to hear of saints in hell.

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God before had promised his grace to Egypt, the most idolatrous country; there God would have an altar erected: "In that day shall five cities in the land of Egypt speak the language of Canaan, and swear to the Lord of hosts; in that day shall there be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt," Isa. 19:18, 19, 20. And indeed the gospel was famous in Egypt, both at the Christian school at Alexandria, and for many famous lights.

2. Some of the *worst vices*. The Ephesians were as bad as any, such that Paul calls darkness itself; For "ye were sometimes darkness," Eph. 5:8. There was not only an eclipse, or a dark mask upon them, but they were changed into the very nature of night. Great idolaters; the temple of Diana, adored and resorted to by all Asia, and the whole world, was in that city, Acts 19:27. "That the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth." And they cry up this statue they pretended fell down from Jupiter, above Christ, who was preached by Paul. They were given to magic, and other diabolical arts; yet many of these were weaned from their idol and their magic. They who were of darkness were made light in the Lord, which is more than if you saw a black piece of pitch changed into a clear piece of crystal, or a stone ascend into the nature of a glittering star.

Take a view of another assembly at Corinth of as filthy persons as ever you heard of; "Such were some of you," 1 Cor. 6:11. After he had drawn out a catalogue of their sins against the light of nature, and made the enumeration so perfect, that very little can be added, he adds, *such were some of you*. Not all, but some. *But you are washed, &c.* Not *τοιοῦτοι*, such sinners; but *ταῦτα*, such sins. Persons not only committing some few acts of them, but so habituated in them, that they seemed metamorphosed into the very nature of these sins themselves; so that they were become the very dirt, mud, and rubbish of hell. Yet you see devils he really turned into angels of light. Well then, how many flinty rocks has God dissolved into a stream of tears? How many hard hearts has he made to bleed and melt? That which is now pure gold, had been earthy and polluted.

I shall only add this to the whole. Great sins are made preparations by God to some men's conversion, not in their own nature, that is impossible: but by the wise disposal of God, which Mr Burges illustrates thus: As a child whose coat is but a little dirty, has it not presently washed, but when he comes to fall over head and ears in the mire, it is taken off, and washed immediately; the child might have gone many a day with a little dirt, had not such an accident happened. Peter might have had his proud and vain-glorious humour still, had he not fallen so foully in the denial of his Master; but when he fell into the privy, it promoted his conversion: for so Christ calls it. "And when thou art converted, strengthen thy

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brethren,” Luke 17:32. It was conversion in a new edition; and you do not find him in the same boasting vanity again.

David’s falling into the sin of murder and adultery is the occasion of the ransacking hits soul, which you find him not so hot about another time: he digs all about to the very root. “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me,” Psalm 51:5. This sin had stirred and raked up all the mud in his heart, and made him see himself an abominable creature: therefore, he desires God to “hide his face from his sins,” ver. 9; he was so loathsome, he would not have any one look upon him (fling all this mud out of my soul), and prays more earnestly for a new heart and a right spirit. So when a wicked man falls into some grievous sin, which his conscience frowns upon him and lashes him for, he looks out for a shelter, which in all his peaceable wickedness he never did.

2. Why God *chooses the greatest sinners*, and lets his elect run on so far in sin before he turns them.

1. There is a *passive disposition* in the greatest sinners, more than in moral or superstitious men, to see their need: because they have not any self-righteousness to boast of. Man’s blameless outward carriage and freedom from the common sins of the times and places wherein they live, many times proves a snare of death to them, and makes them more cold and faint towards Christ: because they possess themselves with imaginations that Christ cannot but look upon them, though they never so much as set their faces toward him. And because they are not drenched in such villanies as others are, their consciences sit quiet under this moral carriage, and gall them not by any self-reflections. Therefore when the threatenings of the law are denounced against such and such sins, these men wipe their mouths, being untainted from those sins that are thus cursed, and vainly glory in their gay and gaudy plumes, and bless God with the Pharisee, that they are not sinners of such a scarlet dye, and that they do such and such duties, and so go on without seeing a necessity of the new birth. By this means the strength of sin is more compacted and condensed in them.

Superstitious and formal men are hardly seduced to their right wits: partly because of a defect in reason from whence, those extravagances arise, and partly because of these false habits and spirit of error possessing their faculties, they are incapable of more noble impressions. Besides, they are more tenacious of the opinions they have sucked in, which have got the empire and command over their souls; such misguided zeal fortifies men against proposals of grace, and fastens them in a more obstinate inflexibleness to any converting motions. This self-

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righteous temper is like an external heat got into the body, which produces a persistent fever, and is not easily perceived till it be incurable; and naturally it is a harder matter to part with self-righteousness than to part with gross sins; for that is more deeply rooted upon the stock of self-love, a principle which departs not from us without our very nature. It has more arguments to plead for it; it has a natural conscience, as a patron for it. Whereas a great sinner stands speechless at reproofs, an outward law-keeper has the strong reinforcement of natural conscience within his own breast. It was not the gross sins of the Jews against the light of nature, so much as the establishing the idol of their own righteousness, that was the block to hinder them from submitting to the righteousness of God, Rom. 10:8.

Christ came to his own, and his own received him not, John 1:11. Those that seem to have his particular stamp and mark upon them, that had their heads in heaven by some kind of resemblance to God in moral righteousness, being undefiled with the common pollutions of the world: these received him not, when publicans and harlots started ahead of them, and ran before them, to catch hold of the offers of grace. "Publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of heaven before you." Matt. 21:31. Just as travellers that have loitered away their time in an alehouse, being sensible how the darkness of the night creeps upon them, spur on, and outstrip those that were many miles on their way, and get to their stage before them. So these publicans and harlots which were at a great distance from heaven, arrived there before those who, like the young man, were not far off from it.

Great sinners are most easily convinced of the notorious wickedness of their lives; and reflecting upon themselves because of their horrid crimes against the light of nature, are more inclinable to endeavour an escape from the devil's slavery, and are frightened and shaken by their consciences into a compliance with the doctrine of redemption; whereas those that do by nature the things contained in the law, are so much a law to themselves, that it is difficult to persuade them of the necessity of conforming to another law, and to part with this self-law in regard to justification. As metals of the noblest substance are hardest to be polished; so men of the most noble, natural, and moral endowments are with more difficulty argued into a state of Christianity than those of more drossy modes of living. Cassianus speaks very peremptorily in this case; *frequenter vidimus de frigidis et carnalibus ad spiritualem venisse fervorem, de lepidis et animalibus nunquam*; that is, often have we seen the cold and carnal warmed into a spiritual fervour; the dainty and the brutish never.

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**2** The *insufficiency* of nature to such a work as conversion is, shows that men may not fall down and idolize their own wit and power. A change from acts of sin to moral duties may be done by a natural strength and the power of natural conscience: for the very same motives which led to sin, as education, interest, profit, may, upon a change of circumstances, guide men to an outward morality; but a change to the contrary grace is supernatural.

Two things are certain in nature. (1.) Natural inclinations never change, but by *some superior virtue*. A loadstone will not cease to draw iron, while that attractive quality remains in it. The wolf can never love the lamb, nor the lamb the wolf; nothing but must act suitably to its nature. Water cannot but moisten, fire cannot but burn. So likewise the corrupt nature of man being possessed with an invincible contrariety and enmity to God, will never suffer him to comply with God. And the inclinations of a sinner to sin being more strengthened by the frequency of sinful acts, have as great a power over him, and as natural to him, as any qualities are to natural agents: and being stronger than any sympathies in the world, cannot by a man's own power, or the power of any other nature equal to it, be turned into a contrary channel.

(2.) Nothing can act *beyond its own principle and nature*. Nothing in the world can raise itself to a higher rank of being than that which nature has placed it in; a spark cannot make itself a star, though it mount a little up to heaven; nor a plant endue itself with sense, nor a beast adorn itself with reason; nor a man make himself an angel. Thorns cannot bring forth grapes, nor thistles produce figs because such fruits are above the nature of those plants. So neither can our corrupt nature bring forth grace, which is a fruit above it. *Effectus non excedit virtutem suae causae* [the effect cannot exceed the power of its cause]: grace is more excellent than nature, therefore cannot be the fruit of nature. It is Christ's conclusion, "How can you, being evil, speak good things?" Matt. 12:33, 34. Not so much as the buds and blossoms of words, much less the fruit of actions. They can no more change their natures, than a viper can do away with his poison. Now though this I have said be true, yet there is nothing man does more affect in the world than a self-sufficiency, and an independence from any other power but his own. This attitude is as much riveted in his nature, as any other false principle whatsoever. For man does derive it from his first parents, as the prime legacy bequeathed to his nature: for it was the first thing uncovered in man at his fall; he would be as God, independent from him. Now God, to cross this principle, allows his elect, like Lazarus, to lie in the grave till they stink, that there may be no excuse to ascribe their resurrection to their own power. If a putrefied rotten carcass should be brought to life, it could never be thought that it inspired itself

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with that active principle. God lets men run on so far in sin, that they do unman themselves, that he may proclaim to all the world, that we are unable to do anything of ourselves towards our recovery, without a superior principle. The evidence of which will appear if we consider,

1. Man's *subjection* under sin. He is "sold under sin," Rom. 7:14, and brought "into captivity to the law of sin," ver. 23. "Law of sin:" that sin seems to have a legal authority over him; and man is not only a slave to one sin, but many, Tit. 3:3, "serving divers lusts." Now when a man is sold under the power of a thousand lusts, every one of which has an absolute tyranny over him, and rules him as a sovereign by a law; when a man is thus bound by a thousand laws, a thousand cords and fetters, and carried whither his lords please, against the dictates of his own conscience and force of natural light; can any man imagine that his own power can rescue him from the strength of these masters that claim such a right to him, and keep such a force upon him, and have so often baffled his own strength, when he attempted to turn against them?

2. Man's *affection* to them. He does not only serve them, but he serves them, and every one of them, with delight and pleasure; Tit. 3:3. They were all pleasures, as well as lusts; friends as well as lords. Will any man leave his sensual delights and such sins that please and flatter his flesh? Will a man ever endeavour to run away from those lords which he serves with affection? having as much delight in being bound a slave to these lusts, as the devil has in binding him. Therefore when you see a man cast away his pleasures, deprive himself of those comfortable things to which his soul was once knit, and walk in paths contrary to corrupt nature, you may search for the cause anywhere, rather than in nature itself. No piece of dirty, muddy clay can form itself into a neat and handsome vessel; no plain piece of timber can fit itself for the building, much less a crooked one. Nor a man that is born blind, give himself sight.

God deals with men in this case as he did with Abraham. He would not give Isaac while Sarah's womb, in a natural probability, might have borne him; but when her womb was dead, and age had taken away all natural strength of conception, then God gives him; that it might appear that he was not a child of nature, but a child of promise. I have been the larger on these two heads (which I design rather as things premised than reasons) because these two principles of civil righteousness and self-sufficiency are the great impediments to conversion, and natural to most men.

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Part II.

God's Regard for His Own Glory, Seen in the Saving of Sinners

**1** The glory of his patience. We wonder, when we see a notorious sinner, how God can let his thunders still lie by him, and his sword rust in his sheath. And, indeed, when such are converted, they wonder themselves that God did not draw his sword out, and pierce their bowels, or shoot one of his arrows into their hearts all this while. But God, by such a forbearance; shews himself to be God indeed, and something in this act infinitely above such a weak creature as man is: 'I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim; for I am God, and not man,' Hosea 11:9. When God had reckoned up their sins before, and they might have expected the sentence after the reading the charge, God tells them, he would not destroy them, he would not execute them, because he was God. If he were not a God, he could not keep himself from pouring out a just vengeance upon them. If a man did inherit all the meekness of all the angels and all the men that ever were in the world, he could not be able to bear with patience the extravagances and injuries done in the world the space of one day; for none but a God, *i.e.* one infinitely longsuffering, can bear with them.

Not a sin passed in the world before the coming of Christ in the flesh, but was a commendatory letter of God's forbearance, 'To declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God,' Rom. 3:25. And not a sin passed before the coming of Christ into the soul, but gives the same testimony, and bears the same record. And the greater number of sins, and great sins are passed, the more trophies there are erected to God's longsuffering; the reason why the grace of the gospel appeared so late in the world, was to testify God's patience. Our apostle takes notice of this long-suffering towards himself in bearing with such a persecutor. 'Howbeit, for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him,' 1 Tim. 1:16. This was Christ's end in letting him run so far, that he might shew forth not a few mites, grains, or ounces of patience, but all longsuffering, longsuffering without measure, or weight, by wholesale; and this as a pattern to all ages of the world; υποτυπωσιν for a type: a

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type is but a shadow in respect of the substance. To shew, that all the ages of the world should not waste that patience, whereof he had then manifested but a pattern.

A pattern, we know, is less than the whole piece of cloth from whence it is cut; and as an essay is but a short taste of a man's skill, and doth not discover all his art, as the first miracle Christ wrought, of turning water into wine, as a sample of what power he had, was less than those miracles which succeeded; and the first miracle God wrought in Egypt, in turning Aaron's rod into a serpent, was but a sample of his power which would produce greater wonders; so this patience to Paul was but a little essay of his meekness, a little patience cut off from the whole piece, which should always be dealing out to some sinners or other, and would never be cut wholly out till the world had left being. This sample or pattern was but of the extent of a few years; for Paul was but young, the Scripture terms him a young man, Acts 7:58, about thirty-six years of age, yet he calls it all longsuffering. Ah, Paul! Some since have experienced more of this patience; in some it has reached not only to thirty, but forty, fifty, or sixty years.

2. Grace. It is partly for the admiration of this grace that God intends the day of judgment. It is a strange place: 'When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe in that day,' 2 Thess. 1:10. What, has not Christ glory enough in heaven with his Father? Will he come on purpose to seek glory from such worthless creatures as his saints are? What is that which glorifies Christ in them? It is the gracious work he has wrought in them. For the word is, ενδοξασθηvαι εν αγιοις, to be inglorified in his saints, *i.e.* by something within them; for which they glorify Christ *actively* and *objectively*. As the creatures glorify the wisdom and power of God, by affording matter to men to do so, so does the work of God in saints afford matter of praise to angels, and admiration to devils. The apostle useth two words: *glorified*, that is, the work of angels and saints, who shall sing out his praises for it, as a prince, after a great conquest, receives the congratulations of all his nobility; admired, that the very devil and damned shall do; for, though their malice and condition will not suffer them to praise him, yet, his inexpressible love in making such black insides so beautiful, shall astonish them.

In this sense those things under the earth shall bow down to that name of Jesus, a Saviour; a name which God gave him at first: 'Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,' Philip. 2:9. And upon his exaltation did confirm, Heb. 5:9, when he was made perfect, *i.e.* exalted, he became the author of eternal salvation, and had the power of saving, as well as the name conferred

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upon him. They shall confess that he is Lord, Philip. 2:11, *i.e.* that he acted like a Lord, when he prevailed over all the opposition which those great sinners made against him. The whole trial of the saints, and the sentence of their blessedness, shall be finished before that of the damned, Mat. 25:85, 44. That the whole scene of his love, and the wonders of the work of faith being laid open, might strike them with a vast amazement. And that this is the design of Christ, to be thus glorified in his grace and power, appears by the apostle's prayer, ver. 11, 12, that the Thessalonians might be in the number of those Christ should be thus glorified in. Therefore he prays, that God would 'fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness,' *i.e.* that grace he so pleased and delighted to manifest, and carry on the work of faith with power; 'that the name of Christ might be glorified in them,' as well as in the rest of his saints. Ordinary conversion is an act of grace; Barnabas so interprets it, Acts 11:21, 23, when a great number believed; what abundance of grace then is expended in converting a company of extraordinary sinners!

It is the glory of a man to pass by an offence, Prov. 19:11, *i.e.* it is a manifestation of a property which is an honour to him to be known to have. If it be thus an honour to pass by an offence simply, then the greater the offence is, and the more the offences are which he passeth by, the greater must the glory needs be, because it is a manifestation of such a quality in greater strength and vigour. So it must argue a more exceeding grace in God to remit many and great sins in man, than to forgive only some few and lesser offences.

(1.) Fulness of his grace. He shews hereby that there is more grace in him than there can be sin in us or the whole world. He lets some sinners run mightily upon his score, to manifest that though they are beggared, yet his grace is not; that though they have spent all their stock upon their swinish lusts, yet they have not drained his treasures; no more than the sun is emptied of its strength by exhaling the ill vapours of so many dunghills. This was his design in giving the moral law, *finis operis*; that is, the event of the law was to increase the sin; but *finis operantis*, was thereby to glorify his grace; 'Moreover, the law entered, that the offence might abound; but where sin abounded, grace did much more abound,' Rom. 5:20. When the law of nature was out of print, and so blurred that it could scarce be read, God brings the moral law (the counterpart of the law of nature) in a new edition into the world; and thereby sin hath new aggravations, as being rebellion against a clearer light, a swelling and breaking over this mighty bank of the law laid in its way. But this was serviceable to the fulness of his grace, which had more abundant matter hereby to work upon, and a larger field to sow its inexhaustible seed in, *υπερπερισσευσεν*, it did superabound. That grace should rise in its tide higher than sin, and bear it down before it, just as the rolling tide of

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the sea riseth higher than the streams of the river, and beats them back with all their mud and filth. It was mercy in God to create us; it is abundant mercy to make any new creatures, after they had forfeited their happiness, 1 Pet. 1:3, which, according to his abundant mercy, *κατα το πολυ*, according to his much mercy. But it was *υπερπλεοναζουσα χαρις*, overflowing, exceeding abundant, more than full grace, to make such deformed creatures new creatures, ver. 14 of this chapter.

(2.) Freeness of grace. None can entertain an imagination that Christ should be a debtor to sin, unless in vengeance, much less a debtor to the worst of sinners. But if Christ should only take persons of moral and natural excellencies, men might suspect that Christ were some way or other engaged to them, and that the gift of salvation were limited to the endowments of nature, and the good exercise and use of a man's own will. But when he puts no difference between persons of the least and those of the greatest demerit, but affecting the foulest monsters of sin, as well as the fairest of nature's children, he builds triumphal arches to his grace upon this rubbish, and makes men and angels admiringly gaze upon these infinitely free compassions, when he takes souls full of disease and misery into his arms. For it is manifest hereby that the God and Lord of nature is no more bound to his servant (as touching the gift of salvation), when she carries it the most smoothly with him, than when she rebels against him with the highest hand; and that Christ is at perfect liberty from any conditions but that of his own, viz. faith; and that he can and will embrace the dirt and mud, as well as the beauty and varnish of nature, if they believe with the like precious faith.

Therefore it is frequently God's method in Scripture, just before the offer of pardon, to sum up the sinner's debts, with their aggravations; to convince them of their insolvency to satisfy so large a score, and also to manifest the freeness and vastness of his grace: 'But thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob, but thou hast been weary of me, O Israel; thou hast not brought me the small cattle of thy burnt-offering, &c., but thou hast made me to serve with thy sins, thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities,' Isa. 43:22-24. When he had told them how dirtily they had dealt with him, and would have made him a very slave to their corrupt humours; at the conclusion, when they, nor no creature else, but would have expected fire-balls of wrath to be flung in their faces; and that God should have dipped his pen in gall, and have writ their *mittimus* to hell, he dips it in honey, and crosses the debt; 'I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins,' ver. 25. Could there be anything of merit here, when the criminal, instead of favour, could expect nothing but severity, there being nothing but demerit in him?

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It is so free, that the mercy we abuse, the name we have profaned, the name of which we have deserved wrath, opens its mouth with pleas for us; 'But I had pity for mine holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the heathen whither they went,' Ezek. 36:21. Not for their sakes. It should be wholly free; for he repeats their profaning of his name four times. This name he would sanctify, *i.e.* glorify. How? In cleansing them from their filthiness, ver. 25. His name, while it pleads for them, mentions their demerits, that grace might appear to be grace indeed, and triumph in its own freeness. Our sins against him cannot deserve more than our sufferings for him, and even they are not worthy of the glory which shall be revealed, Rom. 8:18.

(3.) Extent of his grace. The mercy of God is called his riches, and exceeding riches of grace. Now as there is no end of his holiness, which is his honour, neither any limits set to his power, so there is no end of his grace, which is his wealth; no end of his mines; therefore the foulest and greatest sinners are the fittest for Christ to manifest the abundant riches of his graces upon; for it must needs argue a more vast estate to remit great debts, and many thousands of talents, than to forgive some fewer shillings or pence, than to pardon some smaller sins in men of a more unstained conversation. If it were not for turning and pardoning mountainous sinners, we should not know so much of God's estate; we should not know how rich he were, or what he were worth. He pardons iniquities for his name's sake; and who can spell all the letters of his name, and turn over all the leaves in the book of mercy? Who shall say to his grace, as he does to the sea, Hitherto shalt thou go, and no further?

As the heavens are of a vast extension, which, like a great circle, encompass the earth, which lies in the middle like a little atom, in comparison of that vast body of air and ether, so are our sins to the extent of God's mercy; 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts,' Isa. 55:9. Men's sins are innumerable, yet they are but ciphers to the vast sums of grace which are every day expended; because they are finite, but mercy is infinite; so that all sins in the world put together cannot be of so large an extent as mercy; because being every one of them finite, if all laid together, cannot amount to infinite.

The gospel is entitled 'good-will to men;' to all sorts of men, with iniquities, transgressions, and sins of all sorts and sizes. God hath stores of mercy lying by him. His exchequer is never empty 'Keeps mercy for thousands,' Exod. 34:7, in a readiness to deal it upon thousand millions of sins as well as millions of persons. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all that were before, have not wasted it; and if God were to proclaim his name again, it is the same still, for his name as

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well as his essence is unchangeable. His grace is no more tied to one sin than it is to one person; he has mercy on whom he will, and his grace can pardon what sins he will; therefore he tells them, Isa. 55:7, that he would multiply pardons. He will have mercy to suit every sin of thine, and a salve for every sore. Though thy sin has its heights and depths, yet he will heap mercy upon mercy, till he makes it to overtop thy sin. He will be as good at his merciful arithmetic as thou hast been at thy sinful, if thou dost sincerely repent and reform. Though thou multiply thy sins by thousands, where repentance goes before, remission of sin follows without limitation. When Christ gives the one, he is sure to second it with the other. Though aggravating circumstances be never so many, yet he will multiply his mercies as fast as thou canst the sins thou hast committed.

He hath a cleansing virtue and a pardoning grace for all iniquities and transgressions; 'And I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against me: and I will pardon all their iniquities, whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against me,' Jer. 33:8. It is three times repeated, to shew that his mercy should be as large as their sin, though there was not a more sinful nation upon the earth than they were. His justifying and sanctifying grace should have as vast an extension, for he would both pardon and cleanse them. Why? Ver. 9, that it might be a name of joy and praise, and an honour to him before all the nations of the earth.

It is so great, that self-righteous persons murmur at it, that such swines should be preferred before them; as the eldest son was angry that his father should lavish out his kindness upon the prodigal more than upon himself, Luke 15:28.

(4.) Compassion of his grace. The formal nature of mercy is tenderness, and the natural effect of it is relief. The more miserable the object, the more compassionate human mercy is, and the more forward to assist. Now that mercy which in man is a quality, in God is a nature. How would the infinite tenderness of his nature be discovered, if there were no objects to draw it forth? It would not be known to be mercy, unless it were shed abroad; nor to be tender mercy, unless it relieved great and oppressing miseries; for mercy is a quality in man that cannot keep at home, and be stowed under a lock and key in a man's own breast; much less in God, in whom it is a nature. Now the greater the disease, the greater is that compassion discovered to be wherewith God is so fully stored.

As his end in letting the devil pour out so many afflictions upon Job was to shew his pity and tender mercy in relieving him. You have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord, that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy, James 5:11; so, in permitting the devil to draw his elect to so many

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sins, it is the same end he drives at. And he is more pitiful to help men under sin than under affliction, because the guilt of one sin is a greater misery than the burden of a thousand crosses. If forgiveness be a part of tenderness in man, it is also so in God, who is set, Eph. 4:32, as a pattern of the compassion we are to shew to others: 'And be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.' The lower a man is brought, the more tender is that mercy that relieves him: 'Let thy tender mercies speedily prevent us; for we are brought very low,' Psa. 79:8. To visit them that sit in darkness and the shadow of death, and to pardon their sins, is called mercy, with this epithet of tender; 'Through the tender mercy of our God, whereby the day-spring from on high hath visited us,' Luke 1:77-79. And so it is indeed when he visits the most forlorn sinners.

(5.) Sincerity and pleasure of his grace. Ordinary pardon proceeds from his delight in mercy; 'Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage. He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy,' Micah 7:18. Therefore the more of his grace he lays out upon any one, the more excess of delight he hath in it, because it is a larger effect of that grace. If he were not sincere in it, he would never mention men's sins, which would scare them from him rather than allure them to him. If he were not sincere, he would never change the heart of an enemy, and shew kindness to him in the very act of enmity; for the first act of grace upon us is quite against our wills. And man is so far from being active in it, that he is contrary to it. *In primo actionis*, it is thus with a man, though not *in primo actu*; for in the first act of conversion man is willing, though not in the first moment of that act. But for God to bestow his grace upon us against our wills, and when he can expect no suitable recompence from us, evidences the purity of his affection; that when he endured so many contradictions of sinners against himself day by day, yet he is resolved to have them, and does seize upon them, though they struggle and fly in his face, and provoke him to fling them off.

It is so much his delight, that it is called by the very name of his glory: 'The glory of the Lord shall follow thee,' Isa. 58:8; *i.e.* the mercy of the Lord shall follow them at the very heels. And when they call, it should answer them; and when they cry, he would, like a watchful guardian servant, cry out, Here I am. So that he never lets a great sinner, when changed into a penitent, wait long for mercy, though he sometimes lets them wait long for a sense of it. This mercy is never so delightful to him as when it is most glorious, and it is most glorious when it takes hold of the worst sinners. For such black spots which mercy wears upon its face, makes it appear more beautiful.

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Christ does not care for staying where he has not opportunities to do great cures, suitable to the vastness of his power, Mark 6:5. When he was in his own country, he could do no great work there, but only laid his hands upon a few sick people. He had not a suitable employment for that glorious power of working miracles. So when men come to Christ with lighter guilt, he has but an under opportunity given him, and with a kind of disadvantage, to manifest the greatness of his charity. Though he has so much grace and mercy, yet he cannot shew more than the nature and exigence of the opportunity will bear; and so his pleasure doth not swell so high as otherwise it would do, for little sins, and few sins, are not so fit an object for a grace that would ride in triumph. Free grace is God's darling, which he loves to advance; and it is never more advanced, than when it beautifies the most misshapen souls.

3. Power. The Scripture makes conversion a most wonderful work, and resembles it to creation, and the resurrection of Christ from the dead, &c.

(1.) Creation. Conversion, simply considered, is concluded by divines to be a greater work than creation; for God puts forth more power morally in conversion than he did physically in creation. The world was created by a word; but many words, and many acts, concur to conversion. The heavens are called the works of God's fingers, Ps. 8:8; but the gospel, in the effects of it, is called the arm of the Lord, Isa. 53:1. Men put not their arm to a thing but when the work requires more strength than the fingers possess. It is 'the power of God to salvation;' and the faith it works is begun and fulfilled with power, 2 Thess. 1:11. God created the world of nothing; *nothing* could not objectively contribute to his design, as matter does to a workman's intent; yet neither doth it oppose him, because it is nothing. As soon as God spake the word, this nothing brings forth sun, moon, stars, earth, trees, flowers, all the garnish of nature out of its barren womb. But sin is actively disobedient, disputes his commands, slights his power, fortifies itself against his entrance upon the heart, gives not up an inch of ground without a contest. There is not only a passive indisposition, but an active opposition. His creating power drew the world out of nothing, but his converting power frames the new creature out of something worse than nothing.

Naturally there is nothing but darkness and confusion in the soul. We have not the least spark of divine light, no more than the chaos had, when God, who commanded light to shine out of that darkness, 2 Cor. 4:6, shined in our hearts. To bring a principle of light into the heart, and to set it up in spite of all the opposition that the devil and a man's own corruption makes, is greater than creation. As the power of the sun is more seen in scattering the thickest mists that triumph over the earth, and mask the face of the heavens, than in melting the

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small clouds compacted of a few vapours, so it must needs argue a greater strength to root out those great sins that were twisted and inlaid with our very nature, and become as dear to us as our right eye and right hand, than a few sins that have taken no deep root. Every man naturally is possessed with a hatred of God, and doth oppose everything which would restore God to his right; and being, since the fall filled with a desire of independency, which is daily strengthened with new recruits, and loath to surrender himself to the power and direction of another, it is a more difficult thing to tame this unruly disposition in man's heart, I say more difficult, than to annihilate him, and new create him again; as it is more easy oftentimes for an artificer to make a new piece of work, than to repair and patch up an old one that is out of frame.

(2.) Resurrection. Conversion simply is so called: 'Quickened us when we were dead,' Eph. 2:5. And the power that effects it is the same power that raised Christ from the dead; which was a mighty power, that could remove the stone from the grave, when Christ lay with all the sins of the world upon him, Eph. 1:19, 20; so the greater the stone is upon them, the greater is God's power to remove it. For if it be the power of God simply to regenerate nature, and put a new law into the heart, and to qualify the will with a new bias to comply with this law, and to make them that could not endure any thoughts of grace not to endure any thoughts of sin, it is a greater power sure to raise a man from that death wherein he has lain thirty or forty years rotten and putrefied in the grave; for if conversion in its own nature be creation and resurrection, this must needs be creation and resurrection with an emphasis.

The more malignant any distemper is, and the more fixed in the vital parts, and complicated with other diseases, the greater is the power in curing it; for a disease is more easily checked at the first invasion, than when it has infected the whole mass of blood, and become chronic; so it is more to pull up a sin, or many sins, that have spread their roots deep, and stood against the shock of many blustering winds of threatenings, than that which is but a twig, and newly planted.

(3.) Traction or drawing. Drawing implies a strength. If conversion be a traction, then more strength is required to draw one that is bound to a post by great cables, than one that is only tied by a few pack-threads; one that has millions of weights upon him, than one that hath but a few pounds.

(4.) It is the only miracle Christ hath left standing in the world, and declares him more to be Christ than anything. When John sent to know what he was, Luke 7:20, he returns no other account but a list of his miracles; and that which brings up the rear as the greatest is, the poor *ευαγγελιζονται*, are

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evangelised. It is not to be taken actively, of the preaching of the gospel; but passively, they were wrought upon by the gospel, and became an evangelised people, transformed into the mould of it; for else it would bear no analogy to the other miracles. The deaf heard, and the dead were raised; they had not only exhortations to hear, but the effects were wrought upon them. So these words import not only the preaching of the gospel to them, but the powerful operation of the gospel in them. It is not so great a work to raise many thousands killed in a battle, as to evangelise one dead soul. It is a miracle of power to transform a ravenous wolf into a gentle lamb, a furious lion into a meek dove, a nasty sink into a clear fountain, a stinking weed into a fragrant rose, a toad or viper into a man endued with rational faculties and moral endowments; and so to transform a filthy swine into a king and priest unto God. In conquests of this nature does divine power appear glorious. It is some strength to polish a rough stone taken out of the quarry, and hew it into the statue of a great prince; but more to make this statue a living man. Worse stones than these doth God make children, not only to Abraham, but to himself, even the Gentiles, who were accounted stones by the Jews; and are called stones in Scripture for the worshipping idols.

What power must that be which can stop the tide of the sea, and make it suddenly recoil back! What vast power must that be that can change a black cloud into a glorious sun? This and more doth God do in conversion. He doth not only take smooth pieces of the softest matter, but the ruggedest timber full of knots, to plane and shew both his strength and art upon.

4. Wisdom. The work of grace being a new creation, is not only an act of God's power, but of his wisdom, as the natural creation was. As he did in contriving the platform of grace, and bringing Christ upon the stage, so also in particular distributions of it, he acts according to counsel, and that infinite too, even the counsel of his own will, Eph. 1:11. The apostle having discoursed before, ver. 9, of God's making known the mystery of his will in and through Christ, and, ver. 11, of the dispensation of this grace, in bestowing an inheritance, 'being predestinated according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his own will,' he doth not say God predestinated us according to the counsel of his own will, but refers it to all he had said before, viz., of his making known the mystery of Christ, and their obtaining an inheritance. And ver. 8, speaking before of the pardon of sin in the blood of Christ, according to the riches of God's grace, wherein, saith he, 'he hath abounded towards us in all wisdom.' As there was abundance of grace set apart to be dealt out, so there was abundance of wisdom, even all God's wisdom, employed in the distribution of it. The restoring of God's image requires at least as much wisdom as the first

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creating of it. And the application of redemption, and bestowing of pardoning and converting grace, is as much an act of God's prudence as the contrivance of it was of his counsel.

Grace, or a gracious man in respect of his grace, is called God's workmanship, Eph. 2:10, —ποίημα, not εργον work of his art as well as strength, and operation of his mind as well as his hand; his poem, not barely a work of omnipotency, but an intellectual spark. A new creature is a curious piece of divine art, fashioned by God's wisdom to set forth the praise of the framer, as a poem is, by a man's reason and fancy, to publish the wit and parts of the composer. It is a great skill of an artificer, with a mixture of a few sands and ashes, by his breath to blow up such a clear and diaphanous body as glass, and frame several vessels of it for several uses. It is not barely his breath that does it, for other men have breath as well as he; but it is breath managed by art. And is it not a marvellous skill in God to make a miry soul so pure and chrySTALLINE on a sudden, to endue an irrational creature with a divine nature, and by a powerful word to frame so beautiful a model as a new creature is!

The more intricate and knotty any business is, the more eminent is a man's ability in effecting it. The more desperate the wound is, the more honourable is the surgeon's ability in the cure. Christ's healing a soul that is come to the last gasp, and given over by all for lost, shews more of art than setting right an ordinary sinner. Our apostle takes notice of the wisdom of God in his own conversion here; for when he relates the history of it, he breaks out into an *Hallelujah*, and sends up a volley of praises to God for the grace he hath obtained. And in that doxology he puts an emphasis on the wisdom of God: 'Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever,' ver. 17. Only wise God; only, which he does not add to any other attribute he there gives him.

This wisdom appears, (1.) In the subjects he chooseth. We will go no further than the example in our text. Our apostle seems to be a man full of heat and zeal. And the church had already felt the smart of his activity, insomuch that they were afraid to come at him after his change, or to admit him into their company, imagining that his fury was not changed, but disguised, and he of an open persecutor turned trepanner, Acts 9:26. None can express better what a lion he was than he doth himself: 'Many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, persecuted them even unto strange cities,' Acts 26:10, 11. He seems also to have

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been a man of high and ambitious spirit. This persecuting probably was acted so vigorously by him to ingratiate himself with the chief priests, and as a means to step into preferment, for which he was endued with parts and learning, and would not want zeal and industry to attain it. He seems to be of a proud spirit, by the temptation which he had: 'Lest I should be exalted above measure,' 2 Cor. 12:7. He speaks it twice in that verse, intimating that his natural disposition led him to be lifted up with any excellency he had; and usually God doth direct his battery to beat down that which is the sin of our constitution.

He was a man of a very honest mind, and was forward in following every point his conscience directed him to; for what he did against Christ, he did according to the dictates of his conscience, as then informed: 'I verily thought with myself,' Acts 26:9, *i.e.* in my conscience, 'that I ought,' not that I might, but that it was his duty. His error commanded with the same, power that truth does where it reigns. Now it discovers the wisdom of God to lay hold of this man thus tempered, who had honesty to obey the dictates of a rightly-informed conscience, as well as those of an erroneous one; zeal to execute them, and height of spirit to preserve his activity from being blunted by any opposition, and parts and prudence for the management of all these. I say, to turn these affections and excellencies to run in a heavenly channel, and to guide this natural passion and heat for the service and advancement of that interest which before he endeavoured to destroy, and for the propagation of that gospel which before he persecuted, is an effect of a wonderful wisdom; as it is a rider's skill to order the mettle of a headstrong horse for his own use to carry him on big journey.

(2.) This wisdom appears in the time. As man's wisdom consists as well in timing his actions as contriving the models of them, so doth God's. He lays hold of the fittest opportunities to bring his wonderful providences upon the stage. He hath his set time to deliver his church from her enemies, Ps. 102:13; and he hath his set time also to deliver every particular soul, that he intends to make a member of his church from the devil. He waits the fittest season to manifest his grace: 'Therefore will the Lord wait, that he may be gracious unto you,' Isa. 30:18. Why? 'For the Lord is a God of judgment,' *i.e.* a God of wisdom; therefore will time things to the best advantage, both of his glory and the sinner's good. His timing of his grace was excellent in the conversion of Paul.

[a.] In respect of himself. There could not be a fitter time to glorify his grace than when Paul was almost got to the length of his chain; almost to the sin against the Holy Ghost. For if he had had but a little more light, and done that out of malice which he did out of ignorance, he had been lost for ever. He obtained mercy. Why? Because he did it ignorantly, ver. 13. As I said before, he followed

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the dictates of his conscience; for if he had had knowledge suitable to his fury, it had been the unpardonable sin. Christ suffered him to run to the brink of hell before he laid hold upon him.

[b.] In respect of others. He is converted at such a time when he went as full of madness as a toad of poison, to spit it out against the poor Christians at Damascus, armed with all the power and credential letters the high priest could give him, who without question promised himself much from his industry; and when he was almost at his journey's end, ready to execute his commission, And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus,' Acts 9:3, about half a mile from the city, as Gulielmus Tyrius thinks, at this very time Christ grapples with him, and overcomes all his mad principles, secures Paul from hell, and his disciples from their fears of him. Behold the nature of this lion changed, just as he was going to fasten upon his prey. Christ might have converted Paul sooner, either when Paul had heard of some of his miracles, for perhaps Paul was resident at Jerusalem at the time of Christ's preaching in Judea, for he was brought up in Jerusalem at the feet of Gamaliel, Acts 13:3, who was one of the council, Acts 5:24. He might have converted him when he heard Stephen make that elegant and convincing oration in his own defence, Acts 7; or when he saw Stephen's constancy, patience, and charity in his suffering, which might somewhat have startled a moral man as Paul was, and made him look about him.

But Christ omits the doing of it at all these opportunities, and suffers him to kick against the pricks of miracles, admonitions, and arguments of Stephen and others, yet hath his eye upon him all along in a special manner, Acts 7:58. He is there named when none else are: 'And the witnesses laid their clothes at a young man's feet, named Saul.' And 'Saul was consenting to his death,' Acts 8:1. Was there none else that had a hand in it? The Spirit of God takes special notice of Saul here. He runs in God's mind, yet God would not stop his fury: 'As for Saul, he made havoc of the church,' Acts 8:3. Did nobody else shew as much zeal and cruelty as Saul? Sure he must have some instrument with him. Yet we hear none named but Saul: and 'Saul yet breathing,' &c., Acts 9:1; yet, as much as to say, he shall not do so long. I shall have a fit time to meet with him presently.

And was it not a fit time, when the devil hoped to rout the Christians by him, when the high priests assured themselves success from this man's passionate zeal, when the church travailed with throws of fear of him? But Christ sent the devil sneaking away for the loss of such an active instrument, frustrates all the expectations of the high priests, and calms all the stormy fears of his disciples; for Christ sets him first a preaching at Damascus in the very synagogues which were to assist him in his cruel design: 'And straightway he preached Christ in the

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synagogues, that he is the Son of God, and increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ,' Acts 9:20-22.

Did not Christ shew himself to be a God of judgment here? He sat watching in heaven for this season to turn Paul with the greatest advantage. His wisdom answers many ends at once, and killed so many birds with one stone. He struck dead at one blow Paul's sin, his people's fears, the high priests' expectations, and the devil's hopes. He triumphs over his enemies, secures his friends, saves Paul's soul, and promotes his interest by him he disappoints the devil of his expectations, and hell of her longing.

(3.) This wisdom appears to keep up the credit of Christ's death. The great excellence of Christ's sacrifice, wherein it transcends the sacrifices under the law, is because it perfectly makes an atonement for all sins; it first satisfies God, and then calms the conscience, which they could not do, Heb. 10:1, 2, for there was a conscience of sin after their sacrifices. The tenor of the covenant of grace which God makes with his people, is upon the account of this sacrifice, 'This is the covenant I will make with them. And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more,' Heb. 10:16, 17. 'Now, where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin,' ver. 18. This covenant extends not only to little sins, for there is no limitation; great sins are included; therefore Christ satisfied for great sins, or else, if ever they be pardoned, there must be another sacrifice, either of himself or some other, which the apostle, upon the account of this covenant, asserts there need not be, because this sacrifice was complete, otherwise there would be a remembrance of sin; as the covenant implied the completeness of Christ's satisfaction, so the continual fulfilling or application of the tenor of the covenant implies the perpetual favour and force of this sacrifice.

And, indeed, when God delivered him up, he intended it for the greatest sins: 'He was delivered for our offences,' Rom. 4:25, which signifies not stumbling, but falling. Not a light, but a great transgression. Now, if Christ's death be not satisfactory for great debts, Christ must be too weak to perform what God intended by him, and so infinite wisdom was frustrate of its intention, which cannot, nor ought not, to be imagined. Now, therefore, God takes the greatest sinners, to shew,

[a.] First, the value of this sacrifice. If God should only entertain men of a lighter guilt, Christ's death would be suspected to be too low a ransom for monstrous enormities; and that his treasure was sufficient for the satisfaction of smaller debts, but a penury of merit to discharge talents; which had not been a

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design suitable to the grandeur of Christ, or the infiniteness of that mercy God proclaims in his word. But now the conversion of giant-like sinners does credit to the atonement which Christ made, and is a great renewed approbation of the infinite value of it, and its equivalency to God's demands; for it bears some analogy to the resurrection of Christ, which was God's general acquittance to Christ, to evidence the sufficiency of his payment. And the justification of every sinner is a branch of that acquittance given to Christ at his resurrection; 'Raised again for our justification,' Rom. 4:25; and a particular acquittance to Christ for that particular soul he had the charge of from his Father.

All that power that works in the first creation of grace, or the progress of regeneration, bears some proportion to the acquitting and approving power manifested in Christ's resurrection: 'And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead,' Eph. 1:19, 20. In ver. 17, 18, the apostle prays for the carrying on the work of grace and regeneration begun in them, that they might more clearly understand that power which wrought in Christ, viz., that approving power of what Christ has done, which he exerts daily in conversion, and in the effects of it. For by raising any soul from a death in sin, God doth evidence the particular value of Christ's blood for that soul, as he did, in raising Christ, evidence the general fulness of that satisfaction. And this he will do even to the end of the world; raised us up together with Christ; 'kindness through Christ Jesus,' Eph. 2:6, 7. All his grace in all ages, even to the end of the world, shall run through this channel, to put credit and honour upon Christ. Now the greater the sin is that is pardoned, and the greater the sinner is that is converted, the more it shews the sufficiency of the price Christ paid.

[b.] The virtue of this sacrifice. He is a 'priest for ever,' Heb. 7:17 and therefore the virtue as well as the value of his sacrifice remains for ever he hath 'obtained an eternal redemption,' Heb. 9:12, *i.e.* a redemption of an eternal efficacy. As long as men receive any venom from the fiery serpent, they may be healed by the antitype of the brazen one, though it were so many years since he was lifted up. And those who were stung all over, as well as those who are bitten but in one part, may, by a believing looking upon him, draw virtue from him as diffusive as their sin.

Now the new conversion of men of extraordinary guilt proclaims to the world, that the fountain of his blood is inexhaustible; that the virtue of it is not spent and drained, though so much hath been drawn out of it for these five thousand years and upwards, for the cleansing of sins past before his coming, and

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sins since his death. This evidences that his priesthood now is of as much efficacy as his sufferings on earth were valuable; and that his merit is as much in virtue above our iniquity, as his person is in excellency above our nothingness. He can wash the tawny American, as well as the moral heathen; and make the black Ethiopian as white as the most virtuous philosopher. God fastens upon the worst of men sometimes, to adorn the cross of Christ; and maketh them eminent testimonies of the power of Christ's death: 'He made his grave with the wicked,' Isa. 53:9. God shall make man, wallowing in sinful pleasures, tied to the blandishments and profits of the world, to come to Christ, and comply with him, to be standing testimonies in all ages of the virtue of his sufferings.

(4.) For the fruitfulness of this grace in the converts themselves. The most rugged souls prove most eminent in grace upon their conversion, as the most orient diamonds in India, which are naturally more rough, are most bright and sparkling when cut and smoothed. Men usually sprout up in stature after shattering agues.

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Part III.

The Fruits of Converting Grace in the Salvation of Sinners

**1** A sense of the sovereignty of grace in conversion, will first increase thankfulness. Converts only are fit to shew forth the praises of Christ: 'That you should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light,' 1 Peter 2:9; ἀρετας, the virtues of Christ. The end why God sets men at liberty from prisons and dungeons, and from fear of death and condemnation for great sins, is, that they may be fitted, and gain a commodious standing, to publish to the world the virtues of him; *i.e.* the mercy, meekness, patience, bounty, truth, and other royal perfections of Christ.

Men at their first conversion receive the grace of God with astonishment; for it is θαυμαστον φως, 1 Peter 2:9, most amazing at the first appearance of it; as the northern nations, that want the sun for some months in the winter, are ready to deify it when it appears in their horizon; for the thickness of the foregoing darkness makes the lustre of the sun more admirable. But suppose a man had been all his lifetime like a mole under ground, and had never seen so much as the light of a candle, and had a view of that weak light at a distance, how would he admire it, when he compares it with his former darkness? But if he should be brought further, to behold the moon with its train of stars, his amazement would increase with the light. But let this person behold the sun, be touched with its warm beams, and enjoy the pleasure of seeing those rarities which the sun discovers, he will bless himself, adore it, and embrace that person that led him to enjoy such a benefit. And the blackness of that darkness he sat in before, will endear the present splendour to him, swell up such a spring-tide of astonishment, as that there shall be no more spirit in him. God lets men sit long in the shadow of death, and run to the utmost of sin, before he stops them, that their danger may enhance their deliverance.

We admire more when we are pulled out of danger, than when we are prevented from running into it. A malefactor will be more thankful for a pardon,

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when it comes just as he is going to be turned off. If there be degrees of harmony in heaven, without question the convert thief on the cross warbles out louder notes than others, because he had little time to do it on earth; and his engagements are the greater, because Christ took him in his arms when he was hanging over hell.

When Paul writ this epistle to Timothy, he was about fifty-five years of age; and yet those twenty years run out since his conversion had not stilled his admiration nor damped his thankfulness for converting grace. Take a prospect of it in this chapter: 'And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious,' ver. 12, 13. I thank Christ Jesus our Lord. He seems to set his sin and God's mercy in opposition. I was injurious, but I obtained mercy. I was a blasphemer, but I obtained, &c. I—mercy. Who would imagine but that of all persons he should have passed by me, while he had taken this or that polished pharisee, this or that doctor of morality? But that he should overlook them, and set his eye upon me, so injurious, such a blasphemer, such a persecutor! A great sinner, when he reflects upon his sin, wonders that butt was not made at him. You find that no apostle gives such epithets to the grace of God as our apostle does; none so seraphical in his admiring expressions. Riches of grace, exceeding riches of grace, abundant grace, riches of glory, unsearchable riches of grace. He never speaks of grace without an emphasis. Single grace and single mercy would not serve his turn.

2. Love and affection. Mary Magdalene, out of whom Christ had cast seven devils, was most early in her affection to bestow her provision of spices upon the dead body of her Saviour. The fire of grace cannot be stifled, but will break out in glory to God. This is such a grace that man in innocency could not have exercised in such a height; because now the sinner is not only in his own sight unworthy of pardon, but worthy of the greatest hatred and punishment. You scarce find yourselves possessed with greater affection to any, than those who have been instruments to free you from your sinful fetters. How often do you bless them, could pull out your eyes for them, and think all ways too little to manifest the sense of your obligations to them! And does the instrument carry away all? Surely God has the greatest sacrifice of affection when the convert considers that his powerful grace was the principal agent to draw him out of this spiritual mire. As when a present is sent to you, you shew a courtesy to the servant; but the chief part of your kindness is devoted to the master that sent him. What flames of love, raptures of joy, transports of affection and boilings of courage for God in a young convert! The soul is most courageous for God at first conversion; because it is then most stored with comforts, and is so struck into amazement at the marvellous

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light which darts upon him, that he is ambitious to be a martyr for God presently: 'After that you were illuminated, you endured a great fight of afflictions,' Heb. 10:32. Grace is not only attended with afflictions, but bestows a courage upon a convert to endure them. The soul then thinks it is able to undergo anything for God, who hath bestowed so much grace upon it.

A Christian hath the greatest love to Christ at the first turning to him; for since the horror of all his sins, and the natural ugliness and deformity of that which he has served so long, comes with a full sense upon him, and since the admirable excellency of Christ shines upon him, which is a sight he was never acquainted with before, the greatness of the danger he was in, and the incomparable love which beams upon him from his believing a Saviour, fills his affection with full sails. Thus do men who have been tossed in a dangerous tempest, afflicted with the darkness of the night, as well as their danger, rejoice and welcome the rising sun in the morning, which dispels their tumultuous fears, as well as those gloomy shadows.

God permits a man's sin to abound, that his love after pardon may abound too: 'Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much,' Luke 7:47; *οτι, therefore*, it is the consequent, not the cause of remission. And this interpretation agrees best with the following words, 'To whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.' It is more consonant to reason, that where there are greater mercies, there should be greater returns of affection. Remission of sins is the greatest evidence of God's love, and therefore should be the greatest incentive of ours. And indeed Christ never appears to a penitent with a more comely air in his countenance than upon the removal of great judgments or the pardon of great sins: 'In that day shall the branch of the Lord be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel,' Isa. 4:2. In that day! In what day? After great judgments, ver. 1; and in the foregoing chapter, in purging away great filth, ver. 4. The branch Jesus appears most lovely when he comes laden with the fruit of grace, with the sanctifying juice of his blood, as a ripe bunch of grapes looks pleasantly in a thirsty traveller's eye. This convert Paul was more affectionate to Christ than any of the other apostles; for when he could not look upon him, he is enamoured on his very name, and delights to express it no less than five hundred times, as I remember some have numbered it in his epistles; more, proportionably, than Peter, James, and John did in what they writ.

3. Service and obedience. Such will endeavour to redeem the time, because their former days have been so evil, and recover those advantages of service which they lost by a course of sin. They will labour that the largeness of their sin way be answered by an extension of their zeal. Such will be almost as

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much ashamed to do but common service as they are now ashamed of their scarlet sins. As men, the further they go backward, the greater leap they usually take forward. Grace instructs a man in holiness out of gratitude. The grace of God 'teacheth us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, that we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world,' Titus 2:12. Grace teaches us. The greater the grace, the more pressing is the instruction: as it increases gratitude, it increases service.

That Peter, who had been so criminal in denying his Master, and adding perjury to his perfidiousness, was as active in service as he had been in apostasy. He laid the first stone of the Christian church among the Jews after Christ's ascension; he preached the first sermon to them, and charged them home with his Master's murder, Acts 2. He was also the spokesman in all business described in the first six chapters of the Acts. He laid also the first foundation of the Gentile church; for God in a vision revealed to him the calling of the Gentiles, passing by all the other apostles, to whom it was not known but by Peter's relation: 'Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe,' Acts 15:7. A good while ago, which good while ago refers to the time, Mat. 16:18, wherein Christ said, 'Upon this rock will I build my church.' He was chosen by God to this purpose, *i.e.* separated from the rest of the apostles, and adorned with this prerogative. Great sins did not make Christ change his resolution.

Never an apostle that had been bred up under Christ's wing that was so active an instrument as this Paul, who had been so bitter an enemy. He 'laboured more abundantly than all,' 1 Cor. 15:10. In matters of obedience he would not ask counsel of flesh and blood: 'Immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood,' Gal. 1:16. He was quick in his obedience. He had endeavoured to weaken Christ's kingdom; he now endeavours to list men in his service. He had breathed out threatenings; he now breathes out affections. He could even spend and be spent for the interests of his Saviour. And usually we find converted souls most active in the exercise of that grace which is most contrary to that which was their darling sin.

4. Humility and self-emptiness. Christ 'chose the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty,' 1 Cor. 1:26, 27, that nothing should be attributed to their worth and dignity, but to his grace and mercy. Were the gospel discovered only to the wise, they would look upon it rather as a discovery made by the optics of their own reason. And if God did bestow his grace only upon men of unspotted conversations, they would rather think it a debt God stood obliged to pay them

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than a free act of grace. As God reveals knowledge to the simplest, Mat. 11:25, so he does manifest grace to the sinfullest; and as Christ blessed his Father for that, so no doubt but he doth return the same thanks for this. Such great sinners receive all from God, and so have more reason to hang down their heads; others may sometimes cast many a loving look to their own righteousness, and, like Nebuchadnezzar, glory, This is the Babylon which I have built; and boast of their good acts, and freedom from the common pollutions of the world.

But such who were fallen over head and ears in the mire, and were dirty all over, have no cause to boast; for God did not *find* them, but *made* them worthy. They brought nothing but dirt and rags, that were not worthy the washing only God would pick glory out of their worthlessness to his own grace. Such are sensible that God was not their debtor, but they his, and that there was nothing in them to oblige God to bestow the least mite of mercy on them.

Therefore we find not one of these mountainous sinners in Scripture ascribing their conversion to their own strength or merit. As no apostle was so God-magnifying, so none was so self-vilifying as Paul. Though he was the greatest apostle, yet he accounts himself less than the least of all saints: Eph. 3:8, 'Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints.' Surely he might have put himself equal to the least; it would have been great humility to do so; but he is more humble than so; even less than the least; less even than him who was only fit to be a door-keeper in the house of God. And he esteems himself not only unworthy of the office of an apostle, but of the very name; 'not worthy,' 1 Cor. 15:9, not only to be, but 'to be called an apostle.' And why? Because of his former sin; 'because I persecuted the church of God.' The remembrance of his great sin before his conversion kept him humble. And in ver. 10, when he had a little boasted of his abundant labour, he checks himself presently; 'Yet not I, but the grace of God.' He attributes his very being as a Christian, as well as his actions, to the same cause, viz. the grace of God; By grace I am what I am.' So, Gal. 1:16, how doth Paul attribute to grace 'pleased by his grace to reveal;' revelation, not acquisition.

5. Bewailing of sin, and self-abhorrence for it. When men are first translated out of darkness into the kingdom of Christ, and begin to know Christ truly, the ways of their former ignorance are very bitter and uncouth things unto them. The very disproportion and unsuitableness of them to the sweetness of that grace which now they taste from the hand of Jesus is an offence to them, and hateful to their thoughts. Therefore the more sin a man hath run into before his return to God, the more he sees the vileness of his own nature, and consequently the more he abhors himself: 'Then shall you remember your iniquities, and shall

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loathe yourselves,' Ezek. 36:31. When? Ver. 29, when God had accomplished the promise of saving them from all their uncleanness. They shall remember with abhorrence what was their own sin, and shall enjoy what is purely God's. The time of pardoning great sins is the time of great self-loathing; such prove the holiest persons, because they have had more experience of the evil of sin.

Such are ashamed of their sins, not only at the instant of their conversion, but afterwards, every time they remember them: 'What fruit had you then in those things whereof you are now ashamed?' Rom. 6:21. Now, at that time when Paul writ to them, the very shame of their sins stuck upon them, though they had been converted before. The more they grew in the experimental knowledge of God and his goodness, the more a holy shame for sins committed in their natural condition was stirred in their consciences, and they could not but blush every time they considered how dirty they had been towards God. Now the greater the shame, the greater the hatred of the occasion of that shame, and the more exact the watchfulness against it; as a man that hath fallen into some slough by some stumble or oversight, when he travels that way again, he cannot but remember what a pickle he was in, and will be watchful lest he meet with the same mishap. Whose heart was more melted by mercy than Mary Magdalene's? All the pharisees that Christ converted never rained such showers of tears. How she used all her instruments of sin to be servants to her repentance! Her eyes, which had inflamed so many hearts, been snares to catch men, she makes the conduits to convey her penitential tears to her Saviour's feet. Her hair, which had engrossed so much time in the curiosity of dresses, she uses as a towel to wipe them. The ointment she had used for the tricking up herself, to gratify the senses of her lovers, she pours out to embalm her Lord. Her lusts should have no more of her choicest things, but her Saviour should have all. She would keep them not so much for her own use, as his.

6. Faith and dependence. (1.) At present, in the instant of the first act of faith. Great sins make us appear in the court of justification, *sub forma impii*, with a naked faith, when we have nothing to merit it, but much to deserve the contrary: 'Believes on him that justifies the ungodly,' Rom. 4:5. The more ungodly, the more elevated is that faith which lays hold on God. Thomas's unbelief was very black, for he had refused to give credit to all the testimonies of the disciples concerning Christ's resurrection; but when he was sensible of his crime, and so kindly dealt with by his Saviour, he puts forth a stronger act of faith than any of the rest: 'My Lord, and my God,' John 20:28. His faith was not satisfied with a single *my*; he gives him more honourable titles, and his heart grasps him more closely and affectionately than any of the rest.

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The man that was born blind, and cured by Christ, owns him, acts some faith before the pharisees: 'If this man were not of God, he could do nothing,' John 9:33; and he said, 'I believe,' ver. 89, and he worshipped him. But when Christ comes to talk with him particularly, vers. 36-38, he believes. When Christ comes to talk with a great sinner, one that hath had diseases naturally incurable, he exerts a stronger faith than others. It is then, *Lord, I believe*, and it is a faith accompanied with an adoration.

(2.) In following occasions. Pardoning such great sins, and converting such great sinners, is the best credential letter Christ brings with him from heaven. Men naturally would scarce believe for his own sake, but for his work's sake they would, because they are more led by sense than faith. This Christ knew, when he bids his disciples believe him for the work's sake that he was sent by God, and that they are unanimous in this work of grace, as well as in other works: 'Believe me, that I am in the Father, and the Father in me, or else believe me for the very work's sake,' John 14:11. Therefore those that have been partakers of this converting grace, if they stagger and doubt afterwards, they give the greatest affront to Christ.

For their unbelief is not only against his person, but against its work too. That he has far more reason to say to such than he did to his disciples, 'How long shall I be with you,' &c., Mat. 17:17: what should I stay to do such great works as these, and cannot be believed? Such great sins pardoned and escaped, make men take faster hold of Christ afterward. As a man that hath lately got out of a deep lake, wherein there were many serpents, crocodiles, and venomous creatures, which he has escaped, and has no sanctuary to protect him from their fury but by hanging upon a small bough; when he looks down upon them, and sees them gaping for him, and ready to devour him, if he were within their reach, he would summon up all his strength to hold fast that branch. In such a day will the branch of the Lord also be beautiful and glorious.

Certainly when the soul went out to Christ in so desperate a condition, with the load of guilt and discouragement upon it, and resolved to venture upon him, come what would of it, and found success; as it was the boldest adventure, which the Scripture frequently calls boldness, so it is the greatest encouragement to come to Christ upon any occasion whatsoever hereafter. This first act of faith is of so noble and generous a quality, that it is set as the copy of all following acts of faith. Beginning of your confidence,' Heb. 3:14, ἀρχήν, the primary act of faith, which was the principal act of confidence. Though there was a greater strength in the habit of faith after conversion, yet the first exercise of it upon Christ is the boldest and most vigorous, because it was for the saving the life when the soul

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saw no recovery any way but in Christ, and the most noble when it was under the discouragements of such mountains of guilt.

It also gave Christ the greatest honour, for it was an act of greater confidence in him than any succeeding act could be. Now if thou didst put forth such a high and daring act of faith when all thy sins hung about thee, and thou hadst neither a Hur nor Aaron to hold up thy hands, with much more confidence mayest thou come now, since thou hast tried how successful thy first faith has been. So when temptations assault thee, and the devil with all his black legions besets thee round, thou art not in a worse condition than at the first, when all thy sins did not only besiege thee, but possess thee. Well may such a soul say, If I acted faith when the devil had all the strongholds in me at the worst, now it is but a start out, and exercise the power of that first faith.

(3.) In case of corruptions likewise and unmastered sins. I have great corruptions, but the power which raised Christ raised me, when I had greater stones upon me wherewith I had even wearied God himself; and now when I have fewer, though they are too great still, shall I despair of that power which wrought greater miracles for me, and threw away my gravestones when I was not able to stir myself?

(4.) So in the case of desertion. I will venture to go to God, let him frown and strike; for I am sure I did once go to him when I was his absolute sworn enemy, and he had not a greater hater of him in the world than I was, and he did receive me. I am not worse now than I was at that time, for I love him, and would do all that I can to please him; therefore I will press into his presence now, and try the success of my first faith. Such men's faith is usually a more generous faith, because they have less of the principle of reason to support it. It is like that of Abraham's, a believing in hope against hope, Rom. 4:18. A faith, against mighty and mountainous opposition of high and mighty sins, that might scare a man from such acts of faith, and establish a diffidence of the promises of God in the soul. God receives no more glory from the faith of any than from those of the greatest sinners through their repentance.

7. Fear and reverence. Such will never despise the riches of that goodness and patience which has been given out to him, Rom. 2:4, because it has led him to repentance; and he will not provoke that goodness, which is conducting him to the enjoyment of all the fruits of repentance, to throw him off: 'There is forgiveness with thee,' saith David, 'that thou mayest be feared,' or worshipped, Ps. 130:4. If God should set a mark of death upon every iniquity, who could stand in his presence, or have any hope to be heard? but because he is a God of forgiveness,

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therefore he is revered; therefore the more forgiveness he doth expend upon any, the more he is revered. After a man's return to God, his fear of God is increased upon a more ingenuous account, for he fears God and his goodness, Hosea 3:5, whereas before he feared God and his power, God and his justice. And the Jews, of whom he there speaks, shall fear or reverence that goodness the more, because the sin he has pardoned was so great, as the crucifying the Son of God which, according to their fathers' wish, lay upon the heads of all their posterity.

God's goodness once tasted will make ingenuity afraid to offend him. Self-interest also will make them afraid to provoke that mercy that formally relieved them, to cashier them out of his favour. When the man was in the deep dungeon, where the fetters of sin entered into his very soul, and bound up under the terrors of the law, when mercy stepped in and delivered him, and poured oil into his wounds, he will be afraid to provoke that mercy to leave him in the same condition in which it found him, and from whence it drew him. He will be loath to be numbered amongst the crew of transgressors and bank of galley-slaves from whence he has been redeemed. He that hath tasted the bitterness of sin will fear to commit it; and he that hath felt the sweetness of mercy will fear to offend it.

I might add, for others' sakes, to engage them to come to Christ. Every conversion of a great sinner is a new copy of God's love; it is a repeated proclamation of the transcendency of his grace: 'Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ,' Eph. 2:5, 6. God hath quickened those rank sinners that were as black as darkness itself, and hath raised them to a condition of light. Why? Not only for themselves, but that in the acts to come he might shew forth transcendent riches of his grace, ver. 7. It was a picture God drew of his own heart, and exposed to the view of the world, that they might know, by the gracious reception and high advancement of those sinners, how liberal he is, and would always be, in the distribution of his grace, that penitent sinners of as great stains might be encouraged in all ages to rely upon him. This was his design in Paul's conversion, in this chapter: 'Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting,' ver 16; a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him. He sets up this apostle as a white flag to invite rebels to treat with him, and return to their loyalty. As every great judgment upon a grand sinner is as the hanging a man in chains, to deter others from the like practice, so every conversion is not only an act of God's mercy to the convert, but an invitation to the spectators.

This is the argument David useth to persuade God to pour into him the joy of his salvation: 'Then will I teach transgressors thy ways,' &c., Ps. 51:12, 13. I

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will make all Jerusalem ring of it, and sinners, seeing the multitude and long train of thy tender mercies, shall fly into thy arms to be partakers of the same grace. For every great conversion is as a sea-mark to guide others into a safe harbour. And indeed, this he tells God when he had received pardon, that this would be the issue of God's pardon to David, Ps. 52:5, 6, which is thought to be penned upon the same occasion. Ps. 51, when, ver. 5, he had been forgiven, he tells God what the effect upon others would be: 'For this shall every one that is godly,' &c., ver. 6, judging it the fittest time to come when God is dealing out his mercy. Such effects we find when Christ was upon the earth; when Christ called Matthew, Mark 2:14, the next news we bear, ver. 15, is, that many publicans and sinners sat down with him, and followed him. Many of the same tribe were encouraged by this kindness to one of their fellows to attend upon him.

As when a physician comes into an house where many are sick, and cures one that is desperate, it is an encouragement to the rest to rely upon his skill.

When Christ gives an experiment of his art on any sinner near thee, it is a call from heaven as well to excite thy emulation to come to him, as thy astonishment at it; as the conversion of the Gentiles was to provoke the Jews to jealousy: 'Salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke,' &c., Rom. 11:11. Indeed, such conversions may more rationally move men, than any miracle can objectively move the sense, to see such a remarkable change wrought in the soul of a devil, in a diabolical nature. If men believe not in Christ after the sight of such standing miracles, it is an aggravation of their impenitence, as much as any miracle Christ wrought upon the earth was of the Jews' obstinacy, and does put as black a dye upon it: 'Ye, when you had seen it, repented not afterward, that you might believe him,' Mat. 21:32. Not any great sinner that thou hast seen take heaven by violence, but is writ down by God as a mark against all thy unbelief. And how many hundred marks may Christ bring against thee, upon the account of others converted round about thee. The mark set upon Paul may refer to this, Acts 9:1; because in the foregoing chapter Luke had related the successful progress of the gospel in Samaria and Jerusalem, which was an evidence of the power of this new doctrine; yet Paul proceeded in his persecuting fury, against such clear testimonies.

Had you been in the times of Christ, and seen those miracles he wrought among the Jews, you would all think you should never have been so stupid as they were, but would presently have believed in him upon a sight of those wonders. Let me tell you, the success of Christ's grace upon the souls of men, whereof you have seen many evidences, is a greater miracle, by Christ's own confession, than usually he wrought; for he tells the apostles they should work greater works, John

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14:12, which he means of their success in converting work. And so thy impenitency has as great aggravations as the Jewish perversity. Let every such conversion of a great sinner be a ground of hope to thee, and a spur in thy side.

Further, such conversions evidence that God's commands are practicable, that his yoke is not burdensome. Men naturally think God a hard master, that his commands are impossible to be performed; but when they see men that had lain soaking in sin many years to have a fresh and fair verdure by grace, to run with delight in the ways of God's commands; when they see men that had the greatest prejudices against the ways of God thoroughly turned, they may think with themselves, Why may not I observe those commands? Is it more impossible for me than such a one? It is natural to men not to believe unless they see miracles: 'Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe,' John 4:48. Therefore all the standing miracles God hath left in the world are the extraordinary conversions of men, and the worst of men, that men may thereby be convinced of the power of the gospel and the strength of his grace, by seeing the admirable effects of it upon others; for many times conversion begins in admiration.

The use of this subject is,

1. First, Instruction. The doctrine manifests the power of the gospel. Nothing shews more the heavenly authority of the Christian religion, and the divine efficacy of the word, than the sudden conversions of notorious sinners; that a man should enter into a church a tiger, and return a lamb. It is this little stone which is instrumental to lay lusts, more giant-like than Goliath, grovelling in the dust. That Paul, mad with rage against the Christians, should, after an arrest in his journey, embrace a religion he hated; a pharisee changed into a preacher; a persecutor commence a martyr; that one of eminent parts, in favour with the Sanhedrin, should fly from a preferment expected, and patronise a doctrine contemned in the world, and attended with poverty, misery, cruel scourgings, and death; whenever you see such effects, take them as credentials from heaven, to maintain the credit of the word, and to assert the authority of that conclusion Paul lays down, that it is 'the power of God unto salvation,' Rom. 1:16. God gains a reputation to the gospel and the power of Christianity, that can in a moment change persons from beasts to men, from serpents to saints.

2. The groundlessness of despair. Despair not of others, when thou dost reflect upon thy own crimes, and considerest that God never dealt with a baser heart in the world than thine was. Was not Paul as unlike to prove a convert as any relation of thine that wallows in his blood? Who would have thought that

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Onesimus should run from his master and be caught in Christ's arms? Neither despair of thyself. Shall any soul in anguish, and covered with penitential blushes, think itself cast out of the riches of God's affectionate grace? Shall any man so much blaspheme the merciful heart of Jesus Christ, as to fly to a knife, a halter, or a deep well for succour? Though thou wert in hell, David tells thee God is with thee, even there in his essential presence, yea, though thou wert hell itself; for where the devil dwells, that is hell; yet if the soul throbs, sighs, groans under it, his infinite grace will break down the door, and come in upon thee. And we know that neither she that had seven devils, nor he that had a legion, were strong enough to keep out Christ.

Secondly, The comfort of this subject. If God has made thee of a great sinner the object of his mercy, thou mayest be assured of continuance of his love. He pardoned thee when thou wert an enemy, will he leave thee now thou art his friend? He loved thee when thou hadst razed out in a great measure his image and picture which he had set in thy soul, will he hate thee now since he has restored that image, and drawn it with fresh colours? He justified thee when thou wert ungodly, and will he cast thee off since he hath been at such pains about thee, and written in thee a counterpart of his own divine nature in the work of grace? Were his compassions first moved when thou hadst no grace, and will they not sound louder since thou hast grace? Would the father embrace his son when his garments smelled of drag and swine, and will he cast him off after he hath put upon him a royal robe? Will Pharaoh's daughter pity Moses when he was in the ark, and will she scorn him when he is dressed?

2. Supplies of his grace. Thou hadst a rich present of his grace sent thee when thou couldst not pray for it, and will he not much more give thee whatsoever is needful when thou callest upon him? He was found of thee when thou didst not seek him, and will he hide himself from thee when thou art inquiring after him? A wise builder does not begin a work when he is not able to finish it. God considered, before he began with thee, what charge thou wouldst stand him in, both of merit in Christ and grace in thee; so that the grace he hath given thee is not only a mercy to thee, but an obligation on himself, since his credit is engaged to complete it. Thou hast more unanswerable arguments to plead before him than thou hadst, viz. his Son, his truth, his promise, his grace, his name, wherein thou hadst not the least interest. To what purpose has God called thee, and marked thee, if he doth not intend to supply thee with as much grace as shall bring thee to glory? To what purpose should a creditor forgive part of a debt, and lay the debtor in prison for the other part? Has God given thee Christ, and will he detain

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anything else? Supplies of wants, grants of anything thou desirest, are but as a few grains of pepper that the grocer puts in as an overplus to many pounds.

3. Strength against corruptions. Can molehills stand against him who has levelled mountains? Can a few clouds withstand the melting force of the sun, which has dissolved those black mists that overspread the face of the heavens? No more can the remainders of thy corruption bear head against his power, which has thrown down the great hills of the sins of thy natural condition, and has dissolved the thick fogs of thy unregeneracy. Thou canst neither doubt his strength nor his love; *amor gaudet in maximis* (love rejoices in the greatest things); he has done the greatest, and will he withdraw his hand from doing the least? When Moses slew the Egyptian, it is said that he 'supposed his brethren would have understood, that God intended by his hand to deliver them,' Acts 7:25. Moses was a type of Christ: has Christ overthrown a whole army of Egyptians, that did not only pursue thee, but keep thee in slavery? Has he overturned them all in the Red Sea? And wilt thou not take notice thereby, that he intends to be thy deliverer from the scattered troops of them?

Thirdly, Exhortation. 1. To those that God hath dealt so with.

1. Glorify God for his grace. Admiration is all the glory you can give to God for his grace, seeing you can add nothing to his essential glory. Christ will come at the last day to be admired; I pray send your admirations beforehand to attend him at his coming. Who made thee thus to differ from another? Was it not God? Let him, then, have the glory. If he made thee to differ from others in the enjoyment of his mercy, do thou also differ from others in the sounding of his praise. If thou hast an angel's state, it is fit thou shouldest have an angel's note. If David, when he considered the glorious heavens God had made for man, cried out so affectionately, 'What is man, that thou art mindful of him!' Ps. 8:4; surely when thou considerest that work of grace which God hath wrought in thee, thou mayest with astonishment cry out, Oh, what is man that thou art mindful of him! What is such a vile creature, that thou shouldest take him into thy bosom? For there is not a grace in thee but is more glorious than the sun with all its regiments of stars, and is more like to God than the great fountain of light with all its amazing splendour. It is something of that heaven which is more glorious than all the rest of the heavens, and is above the reach of the natural eye. Oh what is man, that thou art thus mindful of him, to make him, who is a hell by sin, to become heaven by grace! Pardon of but one act of sin, makes us for ever debtors to God; because one sin renders us obnoxious to eternal torments, and every sin includes a hatred of God. What, then, is it to remit such vast sums, if to pardon one be a miracle? To pardon many committed against a suffering Christ that hath invited

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us, and repeats his invitations, after they have been rejected, is a miracle of the greatest magnitude, something above a miracle!

How should you think Jacob's expression in temporal, mercies, a few sheep, too mean, 'I am less than the least of all thy mercies,' Gen. 32:10. Oh I am less, less, less than the least of all this mercy. A great sinner, when converted, should sing a note somewhat above David's 'What shall I render?' Ps. 116:12; and should say, I can render nothing, nothing; but I will render praise, blessing, amazement, astonishment; that is all I can render, and I cannot render enough of that. Had you chosen God first, it had been some ingenuity in God to answer that affection; but God chose you first, and that when there was nothing lovely in you, when he saw you the most deformed creatures in the world. There was no likeness between God and thee. *Similis simile amat* (like loves like), is a rule in nature; but in this case, *Deus optimus diligit hominem pessimum* (the highest God esteems the worst of men).

It is that which does amaze the disciples; they could not tell the reason why Christ should manifest himself to them, John 14:22. Perhaps thou art only snatched out of a family; the wrath of God may be fallen upon the rest, and thou only escaped. Has he not lopped down many cedars in morality, and chosen thee, a thorn, a shrub, to deck heaven with? Are not many damned that were not guilty of thy sins?

How wonderful is it that such a black firebrand should be made a statue fit for glory! He might have written thy name as easily in his black book as in his white. Is it not admirable mercy for a God provoked, to take pains with stiff-necked sinners, and to beat down mountains of high imaginations, to rear up a temple to himself? If mercy had knocked once or twice, and no more, thou hadst dropped into hell; but mercy would not leave knocking. Perhaps thy sins were so great, that if thou hadst gone but a little farther, thou hadst been irrecoverable; but God put a stop to the proud waves, saying, 'Hitherto shalt thou go, and no further.'

2. Often call to mind thy former sin. It hath been the custom of the saints of God formerly. When Matthew reckons up the twelve apostles, Mat. 10:3, whereof he was one, he remembers his former state, 'Matthew the publican;' but none of the other evangelists call him so in that enumeration.

(1.) It makes us more humble. Thoughts of pride cannot lodge in us, when the remembrance of our rags, bolts, and fetters is frequently renewed. What was there in thy former life, but misery, to move God to shew mercy to thee? Though Paul had a greater manifestation than any we read of, nay, than Christ himself had

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(for we do not read that Christ was rapt up into the third heavens), yet how frequently does he remember his sin of persecuting, to keep humiliation in exercise, and stop the growth of pride.

(2.) It will make us thankful. Sense of misery heightens our obligation to mercy. Men at sea are most thankful for deliverance when they consider the danger of the foregoing storm. A long night makes a clear morning more welcome.

(3.) It will make thee more active in the exercise of that grace which is contrary to thy former sin. Christ asked Peter thrice whether he loved him, John 21, to put him tacitly in mind of his late sin, and to have a threefold exercise of his love, proportionable to his threefold denial.

(4.) It will be a preservative against falling into the same sin again. Perhaps Christ might press that threefold demand of Peter's love, to renew his repentance for his apostasy, as the best antidote against the falling into the same sin; and therefore Peter was grieved when he asked him the third time; not so much, it may be, for the suspicion his Master had of his fidelity, as for the just cause of jealousy his fall had given him. And at this third question, calling to mind his denial, he renewed his grief for his late unworthy carriage. Look back, then, upon thy former sin, but let it be with anger and shame, to strengthen thy detestation, to strangle thy former delight in it, and to magnify the mercy of God, who has delivered thee from it. When the Corinthians were proud of their spiritual gifts, the apostle beats down their swelling plumes, by giving them a review of their accursed state 'Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols,' 1 Cor. 12:2. When a convert frequently considers what he was once in his unregenerate state, he would not for all the honours, profits, and pleasures of the world, return to that state again, so great a delight he takes in the work of the new creature.

The second branch of exhortation is to those that are in a doubting condition. The main objection such make is the greatness of sin. Oh, there was never such a great sinner in the world as I am! If you rake all hell over, you will not find such another. Sure God will never pardon me; my sins are too great to be forgiven. Such language as this does sometimes drop from men, which they are partly urged to by the devil, to disparage that royal prince Jesus, that came to destroy his works, and to keep up an enmity between God and man, in making the creature have jealous thoughts of the Creator; and partly from a man's own conscience, which, acting by those legal principles written in the heart by nature, which are directive, and upon non-observance condemning, but discover nothing

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of pardoning grace. This was the first act of in natural conscience in Adam after he had sinned; he had the least thoughts of forgiveness, for he studied nothing but how he might fly from the presence of God. Such speeches as these discredit thy Creator if they be persisted in; argue thee to be one of Cain's posterity, who indeed told God to his very face that his 'sin was greater than could be forgiven,' Gen. 4:18. I will a little argue with such.

(1.) But art thou indeed the greatest sinner? I can hardly believe it. Didst thou ever sin after the rate that Paul did? Or wert thou ever possessed with such a fury? Sure there have been some as great sinners as thou art, be thou as bad as bad can be. If thou were to look over the names of all those now in heaven, and ask them all what sins they were guilty of before God shewed mercy to them, I cannot think but thou wouldest find many that would mate thee, yea, and exceed thee too; and thou canst not charge thyself with any black circumstances, but thou wouldest meet with some or other that would cry out presently, Oh, I was in the like condition, and rather worse! What dost thou think of Christ's murderers, who resisted the eloquence of his sermons and the power of his miracles? And when his death had darkened the sun, shook the earth, clave the rocks, rent the veil of the temple in twain, not one heart among that murderous crew had any saving relentings that we read of. And yet were not some of these converted by Peter's sermon, and the pardon of them left upon record by the Spirit of God?

Have not some of God's greatest favourites been the greatest sinners? Did not Adam draw upon him the guilt of all his posterity, and may in some sense be charged with the sins of all those that came out of his loins, even all mankind? Yet to this very person was the first promise of the gospel made, and that before he pronounced any sentence against him for his sin, Gen. 3:15.

(2.) Suppose thou art the greatest, is thy staying from Christ the way to make all thy sins less? Art thou so rich as to pay this great debt out of thy own revenue? Or hast thou any hopes of another surety? Did any man or angel tell thee they could satisfy for thee? Can complaints of a great load, without endeavouring its removal, ease that back that bears it?

(3.) Are thy sins the greatest? Is not the staying from Christ a making them greater? Does not God command thee to come to Christ? And is not thy delay a greater act of disobedience than the complaint of thy sinfulness can be of humility? Hast thou not load enough already? but wilt thou add unbelief, which is as black as all thy other sins put together? Is not a refusal of his mercy provocative? Thou art mad if thou thinkest thy sin can decrease by trampling upon Christ's heart, and spurning at his compassion. Thou hast sinned against justice,

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against wisdom, against common providence. Is not this enough, but wilt thou rob him of an opportunity to shew the riches of his grace, by refusing the blood of his Son, which his wisdom contrived and his love offers? Who is it persuades thee thus to keep off from Christ? Does God? Shew me where is his hand for it? Shew me thy authority in God's warrant. But since thou canst not, I am sure it is thy own corrupt heart and the devil in league together. And mayest thou not say of him far better than Ahab did of Micaiah, 'Thou didst never prophesy good to me'? No, he never did, nor ever will. What, wilt thou more black thyself by following the devil's counsel than obeying God's command? If thy sin be great, let it multiply thy tears, but by no means stop thy progress to Christ.

(4.) Were thy sins less than they are, thou mightest not so easily believe in Christ, as now thou mayest. If thou wilt not believe while thy sins are great, and thy heart naughty, I dare assure thee, if thy heart were not naughty, and thy sins little, thou wouldst not believe; for thou wouldst be apt to believe in thy own heart, and trust in thy own righteousness, rather than believe in Christ. Great sins and a bad heart felt and bewailed, is rather an advantage; as hunger is an incentive to a man to seek for meat. If men had clean hearts, it is like they would dispose of them otherwise, and rather think Christ should come to them. Men's poverty should rather make them more importunate than more modest. To say, I will not come to Christ, because I have great sins, is as if one should say, I will never have anything to do with happiness if offered, because I have great misery; I will go to no chirurgeon, because my wound is so great; I will eat no bread, because I am so exceeding hungry and like to starve. This is ill logic; and so it is with thee to argue, Because I am unclean, therefore I will not go to the fountain to be washed; or to think to be sanctified before believing. Now since thou hast, as thou confessest, no righteousness to trust in, methinks thou shouldst be the more easily persuaded to cast thyself upon Christ, since there is no other way but that.

If, therefore, thou art afraid of drowning under these mighty floods which roll upon thee, methinks thou shouldst do as men ready to perish in the waters, catch hold of that which is next them, though it be the dearest friend they have; and there is none nearer to thee than Christ, nor any such a friend; catch hold therefore of him.

(5.) The greatness of thy sin is a ground for a plea. Turn thy sins into arguments, as David doth, 'for it is great,' Ps. 25:11; some translate it, 'though it be great;' and the Hebrew word **גָּדוֹל** will bear both. The psalmist useth two arguments, God's name, and the greatness of his sin. And both are as good arguments as they were then. Thou mayest go to God with this language in thy mouth; Lord, my impurity is great, there is more need therefore of thy washing

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me; my wound is deep, the greater is the necessity of some plaster for a cure. What charitable man in the world would not hasten a medicine, rather than refuse to grant it! What earthly physician would object, The disease is great, therefore there is no necessity of a cure; therefore there is no room left for my skill! And shall God be less charitable than man? Dogs may lay claim to crumbs that fall from the master's table. Thou mayest use also the argument of God's name. Sinners may plead for grace upon the account of God's glory, viz., the glory God will have by it. His wisdom is eminent in serving his own ends by his greatest enemy. His power in conquering sin, his grace in pardoning. Show him his own name, Exod. 34, and see if he will deny any letter of it.

If thy disease were not so great, Christ's glory would not be so illustrious. Pardon of such sins enhanceth the mercy and skill of thy Saviour. The multitude of devils which were in Mary Magdalene, are recorded to shew the power of that Saviour that expelled them, and wrought so remarkable a change. Are thy sins the greatest? God that loves to advance his free grace in the highest manner, will be glad of the opportunity to have so great a sinner follow the chariot of it, and to manifest thereby its uncontrollable power. Use David's argument, Ps. 37:12, when, ver. 8, he prayed that God would deliver him from his transgressions; ver. 12, he useth this argument, that he was a stranger. I know no reason but it may be thine, for if thy sins be great, thou art more alienated from God than the ordinary rank of men. Lord, thou dost command us to shew kindness to strangers, to love our enemies; and wilt thou not use the same mercy to a stranger that thou commandest others to use, and shew the same love to so great an enemy as I am? The greater my enmity, the more glorious will be thy love.

(1.) Plead therefore the infiniteness of God's mercy. It is strange if thy debts should be so great, that the exchequer of the King of kings cannot discharge them. Why should the apostle say God was 'rich in merey,' Eph. 4, and call it 'great love,' if it were spent only upon little sins, and if any debts could exhaust it; for surely an infinite God cannot be finitely rich. If God be rich in mercy, he is surely infinitely rich; thou canst not think that any that have got to heaven before thee have drained his treasures, for then it had been finite, not infinite. They were not unsearchable riches, if the sins of all the world could find the bottom of them.

God looks upon his grace as the greatest part of his estate. He calls it his riches, which title he gives not any other attribute. Now riches are not to lie by and rust, but to be laid out and traded with; and the more they are traded with, the more wealth they bring in. God hath not delight to keep these riches by him, and to hoard them up for no use; for *omne bonum est sui diffusivum* (good diffuses itself through all things); therefore the more goodness anything hath, the more

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diffusive it is of itself. God loves to distribute his wealth upon his own terms, and to venture out riches of grace, that he may have returns of riches of glory; so that if you come to God, you have all his estate at your service. Till thou canst be as sinful as God is merciful, as evil as God is good, do not think thy iniquities can check an almighty goodness. Mercy bears the greatest sway in God's name, Exod. 34:6, 7. There is but one letter of his power, two of his justice, and nine or ten expressions of his mercy. His power attends his mercy as well as his justice, so that on mercy's side against justice there is five to one, which is great odds.

Plead then with God, Lord, it is said in thy word, 'Say not unto thy neighbour, Go, and come again, and to-morrow I will give thee, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it,' Prov. 3:28. Should a man not refuse to give to his neighbour when he has it by him? And shall the merciful God deny me that mercy which I beg of him upon my knees, when he has it all in store by him? Must I forgive my brother, if he offends seventy-seven times, a double perfect number? And must I be more charitable to man than infinite mercy will be to me? Shall thy justice only speak, and thy mercy be silent, and plead nothing on my behalf? Hast thou not said that thou art he 'that blots out transgressions for thy own sake?' Isa. 43:25; that thou dost 'blot out iniquities like a thick cloud?' Isa. 44:22. Is there any cloud so thick as to master the melting power of the sun; and shall ever a cloud of sin be so thick as to master the power of thy mercy? Has not thy mercy as much strength and eloquence to plead for me, as thy justice has to declaim against me? Is thy justice better armed with reason than thy kindness with compassions? Have thy compassions no eloquence? Oh, who can resist their pleasing rhetoric!

(2.) Christ's, and God's intent in his coming, was to discharge great sins. He was called Jesus, a Saviour, because he was to save his people from their sins. And do you think some of his people's sins were not as great as any men's sins in the world? To save only from little iniquities, had not been a work suitable to the glorious name of Jesus. Neither can we conceive how Christ should enter into such strict bonds to his Father to be a surety only for some smaller debts. If this had not been his intent, he would have put some limitation in that prayer he taught his disciples, and not have commanded them to pray, 'Forgive us our trespasses,' but forgive us our little sins, or sins of such a size. He never asked what sins, and how many sins, men were guilty of when they came to him; but upon faith, saith he, 'Thy sins are forgiven thee.' Plead therefore with Christ, and say, Thou didst come to do thy Father's will, which was, that none should be cast off that come unto thee; and thou hast said the same; it is not sufficient for thee to say it merely, and not to do it. Wilt thou draw me with the cords of a man (for I could not thus come to thee unless thou didst draw me), and shall I be beaten back with a frown?

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(3.) Christ's death was a satisfaction for the greatest sins, both *ex parte facientis*, Christ, and *ex parte acceptantis*, God; for God could not accept any satisfaction but what was infinite. 'One sacrifice for sins for ever,' &c., Heb. 10:12; not *one sin*, but sins; not *little sins*, but sins without exception. Yea, and it is all sin, 1 John 1:7; and all includes great as well as little. Satan once came to a sick man, and shews him a great catalogue of his sins, concluding from thence his eternal damnation. The sick man, strengthening himself by the word of God, bid the devil write over the catalogue in great letters those words, 1 John 1:7, whereupon the devil presently leaves. Are thy sins be greater than Christ's merit? Or thine offences than his sacrifice? It is strange if the malignity of thy sin should be as infinite as the virtue of his death. He hath satisfied for all the saints that ever came to heaven; and put thy sins in the balance with theirs, and surely they cannot weigh so much. He was 'a propitiation for the sins of the whole world;' and are thy sins as great as the sins of the whole world? If part of his merits be enough to save ten thousand damned souls in hell, if they had applied it, is it not enough to satisfy God for thy sins, which are far less? Was not Christ charged with as great sins as thine can be when he was upon the cross? Or are thy single sins bigger or than all those the prophet means when he saith, 'And the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all'? Isa. 53:6.

Well, then, plead thy Saviour's death, since it was for his honour to satisfy for sins of so deep a dye. It is said in thy word, it is a joy to a righteous man to perform judgment, and shall it not be much more a joy to the righteous God? Behold, here I offer thee the atonement thy Son and my Saviour has made, and if it be not enough, I am content to perish; but if it be, I desire thee to do me justice with that joy that a righteous man would do it with, and discharge my transgressions. And if thou dost object, that I have flung away this satisfaction, and would not have it, I answer, my Saviour's satisfaction was for such sins as those, otherwise none would be saved; for was there any but refused the proffer of it at first, made demurs before they entertained it? Let thy objections be what they will, Christ shall be my advocate to answer for me.

(4.) Christ is able to take away great sins. Did he ever let any one that came to him with a great infirmity, go back without a cure, and dishonour himself so much, as that it should be said, it was a distemper too great for the power of Jesus to remedy? And why should there be any sin that he cannot pardon? It is as easy for him to heal the one as the other; for he did with as much ease and delight say, 'Thy sins are forgiven thee;' as say, 'Take up thy bed, and walk.' Hast thou seven devils? Suppose a legion, *i.e.* six thousand six hundred and sixty-six; he did dispossess a body of as many: can he not as easily dispossess a soul? If thou hadst

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ten thousand legions, I dare say Christ would not lose an opportunity of such a conquest; for it would please him more to do great works than little, and to shew how far his power could reach.

Were it not for such objects, we could not know whether he could 'save to the utmost,' or no, Heb. 7:25. What has he this ability for? To lie idle? No, surely to be exercised about the most difficult tasks. Suppose the scroll of thy sins were as long as to reach from earth to the highest heavens, would this reach to the utmost of Christ's ability? If thou hadst sinned as far as any man in the world can sin, yet still thou art not got without the verge of Christ's saying power. That word utmost I dare set against all thy objections. If you had the sins of all the damned in hell upon you, you could not put either his free grace or vast power to a nonplus. His blood is of that virtue, that were it poured out upon a devil, it would make him presently commence a glorious angel. What is either a great or a light disease to omnipotence, when with the same word he can cure the greatest as well as the least distempers?

But may the soul say, I do not question his power, but his will. Therefore,

(5.) Christ's nature leads him to shew mercy to the greatest sinners. Some question whether Christ will pardon them, for they look upon him as a hard master, that will not easily forgive. But Christ gives another character of himself, Mat. 11:28, 29, when he exhorts men to come to him; he tells them they must not judge him to be of a ragged and implacable nature, but as meek as they are sinful. Meekness is seen in pardoning of injuries, not keeping them in memory, to beget and cherish revenge. Now, the greater the provocation, the more transcendent is that meekness to pass it by. Did he ever upbraid any with their offences, and hit them in the teeth with their former extravagances? Luke 7:44. Christ makes a narrative of Mary's acts of kindness to him, but not a syllable of her foul transgressions. Are thy sins so great? Surely Christ, who delights in his compassions, will not lose such an opportunity of evidencing both his power and his pity upon such a subject; for if there cannot be so great a sinner as thou art, he is never like to have such a season for it, if he miss of thee.

(6.) Christ was exalted by God upon this very account: 'Wherefore he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him,' Heb. 7:25. How comes Christ to be so able to save to the uttermost? It is 'because he ever lives to make intercession for them.' For whom? For those that come to God by him. What has Christ his life in heaven for, but to intercede? And would his Father's love to him, and the greatness of his interest in God be discovered by granting some small requests, the pardon of a few and little sins? Christ is consecrated

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priest by the oath of God, Heb. 7:28; would God put himself to his oath for a light business, a thing of little moment? 'What is the end of this oath? Compare it with: 'For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath,' Heb. 6:16-18; and all is that you 'might have a strong consolation.' What strong comfort could there be, if only little debts were remitted? What is the end of an oath? Ver. 16, to take away strife. Men do not strive with God, or doubt of his mercy to forgive little sins, for they think that will be done of course. But the great contest men have with God is about his willingness to remit great debts, scarlet sins: upon this account the strife is between God and doubting sinners; therefore, to bring this contest to a period, God hath put himself to his oath, and sworn that Christ should be a priest for ever, to take away all strife between him and believing sinners. For whom is this strong consolation founded upon God's oath? For those that 'fly for refuge,' ver. 18. Now the cities of refuge were not appointed for ordinary crimes, but for blood, to secure the malefactor from the avenger.

Shall I add further, God is best pleased with Christ when he makes intercession for the greatest transgressors. Suppose thou hadst been one of Christ's murderers, and hadst given thy vote against him; perhaps thou wouldst have thought this a more crimson sin than any thou art guilty of. You know Christ prayed for their pardon while he was upon the cross; and, God gives this as one reason why he would exalt him: 'He shall divide him, &c., Isa. 53:12. Why? 'Because he poured out his soul to death.' What should he bear sin for, if God had no mind to pardon it? And because 'he was numbered among the transgressors,' which the evangelist understands of his being crucified with thieves, Mark 15:28. And therefore his making intercession for transgressors, must be understood of his prayer upon the cross. And if God did exalt him for this, would God be pleased with him, or would Christ answer the end of his exaltation, if he did cease to make intercession for sinners of the like stamp? Go and tell God, that he sent Christ to bless you, Acts 3:26, in converting you; and desire Christ to do his office.

(7.) Christ is entrusted by God to give out his grace to great sinners. Christ is God's Lord-almoner, for the dispensing redemption, and the riches of his grace. To whom? Not to the righteous, they have no need of it but to sinners, and those that have the greatest necessity. He would be an ill steward, who, when entrusted by his lord to bestow his alms upon the poor, should overlook the most miserable, indigent, and necessitous persons, when they crave it of him, and relieve those that had not so great and crying wants. Christ is a priest for intents of the same nature as the legal typical priests were. They were to have compassion, Heb. 5:2,

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μετριοπαθειν, to measure out their compassion, to order the sacrifice according to the nature of the sin of the person that presented it. So is Christ, by virtue of his office, to measure out his grace according to the greatness of a man's necessity, as manna was to be gathered according to every one's wants.

Fourthly, The caution which this subject suggests. 1. Think not thy sins are pardoned because they are not so great as those God has pardoned in others. This is *ad suam consolationem aliena numerare vitia*. (Comforting yourself by counting this sins of others.) Consider God cast off Saul for less sins than David committed. Evil angels were cast off for one sin. A few small sands may sink a ship as well as a great rock. Thy sins may be pardoned though as great as others, but then you must have equal qualifications with them. They had great sins, so hast thou; but have you as great a hatred and loathing of sin as they had?

2. Let not this doctrine encourage any person to go on in sin. If thou dost now suck such poison out of this doctrine, and boast of that name God proclaims, Exod. 34:6, 7, take this caution along with thee, and remember it is one part of his name 'by no means to clear the guilty.' He never intended those mercies for sinners as sinners, but as penitent. Penitents, as such, are not guilty, because repentance is a moral revocation of a sin, and always supposes faith in Christ. There is 'forgiveness with God,' Ps. 130:4; but it is 'that he may be feared,' not despised. God never intended mercy as a sanctuary to protect sin.

(1.) It is disingenuous to do so. Great love requires great duties, not great sins. Freeness of grace should make us increase holiness in a more cheerful manner. What high ingratitude is it to be inclined to sin because God is inclined to pardon, to have a frozen heart to him because he hath a melting heart to thee! What, to rebel against him because he hath a compassionate heart, and to be wicked because God is good! to turn grace itself into wantonness! Is this to fear his goodness? No, it is to trample on it; to make that which should excite thee to holiness a bawd to thy lust, and God himself a pander to the devil. If thou dost thus slight the design of this mercy, which thou canst never prize at too high a rate, it is certain thou never hadst the least taste of it. If thou hadst, thou couldst not sin so freely; for when grace enters, it makes the soul dead to sin, Rom. 6:1, 2. The apostle answers such a consequence with a *God forbid!*

(2.) It is foolish so to do. Would any man be so simple as to set his house on fire because he has a great river running by his door, from whence he may have water to quench it; or wound himself, because there is an excellent plaster which has cured several?

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(3.) It is dangerous to do so. If thou lovest the present time, thou art in danger to lose eternity. There are many in hell never sinned at such a presumptuous rate. He is merciful to the penitent, but he will not be unfaithful to his threatenings. If thou art willing to receive grace, thou mayest have it, but upon God's conditions. He will not pin it upon thy sleeve whether thou wilt or no. This is to make that which is the savour of life to become the savour of death unto thee. See what an answer Paul gives to such an imagination, Let us do evil, that good may come; whose damnation is just,' Rom. 3:8. He takes a handful of hell-fire and flings it in their faces. Let but Deut. 29:18, 19, stare thee in the face, and promise thyself peace in this course if thou canst 'Lest there should be among you a root that beareth gall and wormwood and it cometh to pass, when he beareth the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart.' As his goodness is great, which thou dost despise; so the wrath will be the hotter thou dost treasure up. Though great sins are occasions of great grace, yet sin doth not necessitate grace. Who can tell whether ever God would have shewn mercy to Paul, had he done that against knowledge which he did ignorantly? Repentance must first be; see the order, 'Repent, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out,' Acts 3:19. First, repentance and conversion, then justification. This grace is only given to penitent sinners. You know not whether you shall repent, but you may know, that if you do not repent you shall be damned. As there is infinite grace to pardon you, if you repent; so there is infinite justice to punish you, if you do not repent. The gospel binds us to our good behaviour as much as the law.

Well, then, to conclude this exhortation. Embolden thyself to draw near to Christ. It is the apostle's use he makes of all his foregoing doctrine, Heb. 10:19, &c. God requires not a heart without sin, but a heart without guile. Who needs more boldness than great sinners? And the apostle sets no limits to it. Let us, who have been as great sinners as any, resolve to do as they in Jeremiah did, Jer. 3:22. They had both a command and a promise. 'Return,' there is the command. 'I will heal,' &c., there is the promise. Presently they reply, 'We will come to thee,' &c. They seem to snatch the promise out of God's mouth. How will these quick and ready converts rise up in judgment against thy slowness and dulness! Shall they do this upon one promise; and when thou hast all the promises in the book of God repeated to thee, shall God hear no other answer but this, We will not return, or We dare not come, We dare not believe thee? Did God give but one promise to Adam, and did he embrace it, and live upon it all his life (for we read of no more he had than that of the seed of the woman breaking the serpent's head); and wilt thou not return, when thou hast so many promises, filling every page in the Scripture?

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Hast thou not a world of precedents? Did not God take up all his saints from the dunghill with all their rags, and clothe them? Were any of them born princes and sons of heaven? Alas, every man at first sued for a Saviour in the right of a sinner; and all pleaded in the court of heaven *in forma pauperis* (as a bankrupt). Were they not debtors, and could they do that which might make God cross out one of those sums they owed him? Oh, think not then thou canst dam up that torrent of love that has flowed so freely to the world for so many ages. Though thy disease be grievous, Yet it is not irrecoverable, provided thou goest to the physician. He can with a breath burn up thy corruption, as soon as dissolve the creation. Christ can turn the muddiest water into such wine that can please the heart both of God and man. As you have been vessels of sin, if you will be vessels of repentance God will make you brimful of mercy. Plead not, therefore, thy own unworthiness. Man's unworthiness never yet hindered the flowing of God's kindness. It is too weak a bank to stop the current of God's favour. The greater thy unworthiness, the greater advantage has free grace to manifest its uncontrollable excellency. That man dishonours God that sets his sin above God's goodness, or his unworthiness above God's condescension. You cannot do God a greater pleasure than to come to him to be made clean. When he reckons up thy sin, it is not with an upbraiding, but a compassionate sigh, Jer. 13:27. He longs for the time of thy returning, and minds thee of thy sin, that thou mayest the sooner seek a remedy, and wonders thou wilt continue in such a filthy condition so long.

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