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“We associate John Witherspoon mostly with his immense contribution to the American republic. Thanks to Kevin DeYoung, we can now see him also as a premier Reformed theologian defending the biblical doctrines of justification and the new birth in a revivalistic context not so different from our own. I am thrilled that these accessible essays can have a fresh impact on churches today.”

—MICHAEL HORTON, Westminster Seminary California

“John Witherspoon’s two mid-eighteenth-century treatises on justification and regeneration are, on one level, a sober and straightforward statement of the two central concerns of a Reformed and evangelical faith, and deserve a place beside contemporaneous classics on these topics by John Gill, Thomas Boston, Ebenezer Erskine, and Thomas Halyburton. Just as important, these two writings plant Witherspoon firmly in the roiled waters of the Great Awakening and its bitterly divided aftermath, and link him firmly to the Old School family of Archibald Alexander and Charles Hodge. Witherspoon understood that bad practice was the fruit of defective doctrine, and that smoothing the path of revival by the sacrifice of truth concerning justification and regeneration would yield, in the end, neither truth nor revival. Kevin DeYoung’s careful edition of Witherspoon’s treatises is a must-have for any Reformed pastor’s shelf.

—ALLEN C. GUELZO, Princeton University

“Kevin DeYoung’s edition of *Justification and Regeneration* is not only an excellent and informative resource but also engaging. The glorious hymn lyric—‘...He breaks the power of cancelled sin...’—comes alive. Knowing the implications of justification for ‘cancelled sin’ and the blessings of emancipation in the ‘breaking of the power of sin’ will be afresh and anew. More than a lyric, it will become transformative in your life and ministry.”

—HARRY REEDER III, Briarwood Presbyterian Church

“I have spent much of my academic career reading the works of English Particular Baptist divines in the long eighteenth century. But two of the key books that they avidly read and recommended were not written by an English Baptist but by the Scottish Presbyterian John Witherspoon. . . Witherspoon’s essays proved to be particularly

helpful to these Calvinistic Baptists. Witherspoon on regeneration, with its link between the new birth and a life of virtue, helped them fight what Thomas Chalmers called ‘the hydra of Antinomianism.’ I am immensely pleased that these two classic works of Reformed theology are once again in print with their vital reminder of the nature of the Gospel. . .”

—MICHAEL A.G. HAYKIN, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“John Witherspoon is often portrayed as a patriot, academic, moralist, or churchman. These are all true. But here in these essays on justification and regeneration, carefully edited by Kevin DeYoung, we discover that Witherspoon was preeminently a theologian and gospel preacher. This descendent of John Knox was deeply committed to the imputation of the righteousness of Christ and the necessity of the new birth through the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. I’m grateful to Dr. DeYoung for pointing readers once again to what the influential college president, patriot, and Presbyterian preacher held to be ‘the doctrine of Christ, the Scripture method of salvation,’ and ‘fundamental truth,’ as well as the ‘substance of religion,’ namely that ‘except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’ The works reprinted here are wonderful evidence that Witherspoon, the only clergyman who signed the Declaration of Independence, not only believed in the great American cause, but more importantly, believed in the cause of the cross of Christ.”

—PETER A. LILLBACK, Westminster Theological Seminary

“Because of his omnipresent career in politics and education during the American founding, we are apt to forget that the Rev. Dr. John Witherspoon was called to Princeton on the strength of his theological orthodoxy. Kevin DeYoung’s much-needed and valuable edition of the treatises on regeneration and justification make it clear that the trustees of the struggling College of New Jersey made a prescient choice for their president. His star pupil, James Madison, stayed an extra post-graduate year studying Hebrew under him, with an eye toward the ministry. Thanks to DeYoung, today’s future leaders can also profit from the man Madison affectionately called the ‘Old Doctor.’”

—JEFFRY H. MORRISON, Christopher Newport University

JUSTIFICATION
&
REGENERATION

Practical Writings on Saving Faith

JOHN WITHERSPOON

Edited by KEVIN DEYOUNG

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*Justification and Regeneration:
Practical Writings on Saving Faith*

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INTRODUCTION

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

John Witherspoon was born on February 5, 1723, in Yester Parish, 25 miles east of Edinburgh in the village of Gifford. On both sides of his family, Witherspoon came from good Presbyterian stock. His father, James Witherspoon, was a Church of Scotland minister in Gifford from 1720 until his death in 1759. John's mother, Anna Walker, could trace her lineage through several pastors back to John Knox himself. Without exaggeration it can be said that John Witherspoon was born and bred a Presbyterian and remained thoroughly committed to Presbyterianism—the church and its doctrine—his entire life.

Witherspoon's formal education and preparation for the ministry took him away from home to one of Scotland's four ancient universities. In 1739, John Witherspoon defended his Latin dissertation, "On the Immortality of the Mind," and graduated from the University of Edinburgh. Continuing at Edinburgh, he studied divinity and was taught in both the new Enlightenment ideas coming out of Europe and in the confessional Reformed tradition. In particular, he was shaped by the theology of the Genevan professor Benedict Pictet (1655–1724). While at Edinburgh, Witherspoon studied alongside future Moderate ministers (and future ecclesiastical opponents) Hugh Blair, William Robertson, John Home, and his childhood friend Alexander Carlyle. Witherspoon finished his divinity studies in 1743, and, after completing his trials for the Presbytery of Haddington, was licensed to preach the gospel. He was ordained as a minister in the Church of Scotland a year and a half later.

Presbyterian Pastor

Witherspoon served two churches as a Kirk minister. His first church was in Beith, a small agricultural village in western Scotland. Witherspoon's twelve years in Beith (1745–1757) were eventful, both personally and professionally. In 1746, he led a group of militia volunteers from Beith intent on fighting for King George II against the pro-Catholic Jacobite uprising. Although Witherspoon was not engaged in any

military conflict, he was captured and imprisoned for a short time in Doune Castle. In 1748, he married Elizabeth Montgomery, the daughter of Robert Montgomery of Craighouse, one of the prominent families in the parish. Together John and Elizabeth had ten children.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, Presbyterians in Scotland were divided into two parties: the more theologically lax Moderate Party and the evangelical Popular Party. The two parties differed in their approach to ministry, in their theology, and in their response to patronage—the system whereby wealthy landowners and aristocrats could select a church’s pastor. Witherspoon aligned with the Popular Party in favor of honest subscription standards to the Westminster Confession of Faith and against the practice of patronage.

In 1753, Witherspoon published a biting satire called *Ecclesiastical Characteristics* in which he laid out thirteen maxims for becoming a moderate man. The satire was a sensation, going through ten editions and giving Witherspoon the reputation of a champion of the people and making him a pariah among his Moderate colleagues. While at Beith, Witherspoon also published his *Essay on Justification* (1756) and his critique of the theater, *A Serious Enquiry into the Nature and Effects of the Stage* (1757).

Witherspoon’s second pastorate was to a church in Paisley, a growing manufacturing town on the outskirts of Glasgow, which seated 1,300 worshippers. During his eleven years in Paisley (1757–1768), Witherspoon published what many would later consider his best book, *A Practical Treatise on Regeneration* (1764), and another satire entitled *The History of the Corporation of Servants* (1765). Witherspoon also published two collections of sermons—*Practical Discourses on the Leading Truths of the Gospel* (1768), and *Sermons on Practical Subjects* (1768). While at Paisley, Witherspoon received calls from churches in Dublin, Rotterdam, and Dundee, prompting the town leaders to raise his salary to retain him.

By most accounts, Witherspoon’s pastoral ministry in Scotland was a success—his churches grew, he preached at important venues, he published popular books, and he was awarded an honorary doctorate from St. Andrews. But he also experienced a number of ecclesiastical failures and setbacks, owing to a combination of his own brashness and to the hostility of Moderate clergy. Witherspoon constantly complained that the Church of Scotland was not living up to

its lofty ideals and glorious history, and when he publicly rebuked lawyer John Snodgrass and his drunken friends for partaking in a mock Lord's Supper celebration, Snodgrass responded by suing Witherspoon for libel. The resulting legal process that began in 1762 lasted another fourteen years and may have been one of the reasons Witherspoon left for America.

“An Animated Son of Liberty”

In 1766, representatives for the College of New Jersey (later Princeton)—impressed by Witherspoon's educational background, pastoral experience, revivalist sympathies, and spirited defense of the faith—urged the Paisley pastor to become their next president. Witherspoon initially declined because of his wife's reticence to travel across the ocean, but he later changed his mind and agreed to their second round of entreaties. Witherspoon and his family landed in Philadelphia on August 17, 1768, and were welcomed to America by none other than Andrew Hodge (grandfather of Charles Hodge).

As president, Witherspoon was responsible for raising funds, recruiting students, furnishing the library, private tutoring, and teaching four regular courses: history, eloquence, divinity, and moral philosophy. In Witherspoon's day, the student dormitories, classrooms, dining hall, library, and chapel were all housed in Nassau Hall. There he earned the reputation of being a fine (if sometimes boring) teacher and a firm disciplinarian.

During his years at Princeton, Witherspoon wrote on a wide array of subjects, including slavery, education, marriage, parenting, the natural sciences, and economics. His most studied American work is his posthumous *Lectures on Moral Philosophy*, in which he distilled the leading European thinkers on ethics, law, and political theory. In the 1770s, he turned his attention increasingly to civil matters, with John Adams referring to him proudly as “an animated son of liberty.” Most famously, Witherspoon signed the Declaration of Independence, the only clergyman to do so.

Witherspoon not only left his mark on the Declaration; he also signed the Articles of Confederation, helped New Jersey ratify the Constitution, served in the state legislature, and participated in 126 committees during his six years in the Continental Congress. Furthermore, he personally instructed a generation of the new republic's educators,

legislators, and statesmen. A list of his Princeton students includes twelve members of the Continental Congress, five delegates to the Constitutional Convention, one U.S. president (James Madison), one vice president (Aaron Burr), forty-nine representatives, twenty-eight senators, three Supreme Court justices, eight district judges, one secretary of state, three attorneys general, and two foreign ministers.

On May 17, 1776, Witherspoon preached one of the most significant sermons in American history, a message based on Psalm 76:10 entitled *The Dominion of Providence Over the Passions of Men*. Partly an evangelistic call to repent and believe in Christ and partly an exploration of the colonies' right to revolt, the sermon is widely regarded as helping to prepare the way for Jefferson's Declaration. After the *Dominion* sermon, Witherspoon marshaled all of his energies and all the men and resources of Princeton to support the cause of independence.

Churchman to the End

While Witherspoon had been frequently stymied by the ecclesiastical powerbrokers in Scotland, he was warmly received by both church leaders and political leaders in America. He was known and respected by George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and Alexander Hamilton. Witherspoon was instrumental in the formation of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., contributing to many of its foundational documents and preaching the opening sermon at its inaugural Assembly in 1789. Of the 188 Presbyterian ministers who attended that assembly, ninety-seven were Princeton graduates, 52 of whom were former students of John Witherspoon.

In the last decade of his life, Witherspoon turned over many of the college's duties to his son-in-law, Samuel Stanhope Smith. Witherspoon continued to preach almost every Sunday to the congregation at Princeton, until his eyesight began to fail. After losing his first wife in 1789, Witherspoon remarried in 1791. He was 68, and, to the dismay of many, his new wife, a widow named Ann Dill, was only 24. They had two daughters together before Witherspoon died at his country home, Tusculum, on November 15, 1794.¹

1. This biographical sketch is a revised version of my entry on John Witherspoon in *American Religious History: Belief and Society through Time*, 3 vols, ed. Gary Scott Smith (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2020). Used with permission.

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PART I

An Essay on
Justification

An Essay on Justification

All the works and ways of God have something in them mysterious, above the comprehension of any finite understanding. As this is the case with his works of creation and providence, there is no reason to expect it should be otherwise in the astonishing method of the redemption of the world by Jesus Christ. From this their mysterious nature, or rather from the imperfect measure and degree in which they are revealed to us, they are admirably fitted for the trial of our ingenuity, humility and subjection. They are all of them, when seriously and impartially inquired into, holy, just and good; but at the same time not beyond the cavils and objections of men of prejudice, perverse and corrupt minds.

The Apostle Paul, in his epistle to the Romans, among whom he had never been in person, at great length establishes the fundamental doctrine of the gospel that sinners are justified by the free grace of God through the imputed righteousness of a Redeemer. To this doctrine men do by nature make the strongest opposition, and are, with the utmost difficulty, brought to receive and apply it. We may well say of it in particular what the same apostle says of the truths of God in general, that “the natural man doth not receive them” (1 Cor. 2:14). It is therefore highly necessary to prevent or remove, as far as possible, the objections that may be brought against it by the art or malice of Satan, who will, no doubt, bend the chief force of all his engines against this truth, knowing that the cordial reception of it is a sure and effectual, and indeed the sure and effectual means, of destroying his power and influence in the heart. Accordingly, we find the apostle, in the sixth chapter of the above-named epistle, and first verse, supposes an objection made against this doctrine in the following terms: “What shall we say then? shall we continue to sin that grace may abound?” To which he answers, by rejecting the consequence with the utmost abhorrence, and in the strongest manner affirming it to be without any foundation.

From the introduction of this objection by the apostle, we may either infer that there were, even in these early days, some who branded the doctrine of redemption by the free grace of God with this odious

consequence, or that he by the inspiration of the Almighty did foresee that there should arise in some future periods of the Christian church adversaries who would attempt to load it with this imputation: or that the doctrine is indeed liable, on a superficial view, to be abused to this unhappy purpose by the deceitful hearts of men who are wedded to their lusts. It is probable that all the three observations are just, and the two latter render it a peculiarly proper subject for our attention and consideration at this time, and in this age.

It is well known that there are many enemies of this doctrine, of different characters and of different principles, who all agree in assaulting it with this objection—that it weakens the obligations to holiness of life by making our justification before God depend entirely upon the righteousness and merit of another. And so far, I think, we must join with the adversaries of this doctrine, as to lay it down for a principle—that whatever belief or persuasion, by its native and genuine tendency, weakens the obligations to practice, must be false. And I will also assert, in opposition to some modern infidels (though some may think that my cause might avail itself of the contrary opinion) that a man's inward principle or the persuasion of his mind, has a necessary and unavoidable influence upon his practice.¹ So that, if I am not able to show that justification through the imputed righteousness of Christ is so far from weakening the obligations of holiness, that, on the contrary, the belief and reception of it, as its necessary consequence, must make men greater lovers of purity and holiness and fill them with a greater horror of sin than any other persuasion on the same subject, I am content to give up the cause.

I hope we may be indulged a candid hearing on this subject, as experience does not seem to be unfavorable to the doctrine I am essaying to defend. If it appeared in fact that its friends upon a fair and just comparison, were more loose in their practice than their adversaries

1. JW: That is to say, so far as it can be applied to practice, and so far as is real or prevalent above its opposite; for there are many truths of a religious nature which men think they believe sometimes, but which yet their corrupt passions often make them doubt of; and these doubts are nine parts in ten of their lives observant to their minds, as a vindication of their licentious practice; in some sense, such may be said to act in contradiction to their principles; but they are principles either not really believed, or, which is the same thing, not habitually recollected; an none can expect that men will act upon a principle, though once ever so firmly believed, if it be forgotten, or at the time of action entirely out of view.

KD: Observant is an obsolete word meaning conversant or familiar.

of any of the opposite opinions, it would be a strong prejudice against it; or rather, if this were always the case, it would be an unquestionable evidence of its falsehood. But does not the contrary appear to be the very face of the world? Are not the persons who profess to deny their own righteousness, and hope for justification through Christ, ordinarily the most tender and most fearful of sinning themselves, and the most faithful and diligent in promoting the reformation of others? And do not all careless, profane and sensual livers, almost to a man, profess themselves enemies to this doctrine? I could almost appeal to anyone who has the least experience of, or commerce in the world, whether he would expect to find, upon a strict search and inquiry, the worship of God more constantly attended, the name of God more regularly called upon in families, children and servants more carefully instructed and more dutifully governed, a greater freedom from levity, profanity, unchastity, pride, malice, or insincerity of conversation, amongst the friends or enemies of this doctrine? So true is this, that they commonly have the appellation of the *stricter sort* given them, by which is certainly understood, at least an apparent strictness of life and manners.²

As therefore experience does not hinder, or rather as it warrants us to affirm, that those who expect justification by free grace are, of all others, the most holy in their lives, I propose to show that it must be so and that this is but the native fruit and necessary consequence of their principles. What has induced me to this attempt is not only the calumnies of enemies, but the weakness or treachery of professed friends. These last injure the truth often in two different ways. Some speak in such a manner as to confirm and harden enemies in their opposition to it; they use such rash and uncautious expressions, as do indeed justify the objection which the apostle rejects with so great abhorrence; and in the heat of their zeal against the self-righteous

2. JW: I am not ignorant that it is the useful refuge of those who are evidently dissolute in their own lives to allege that there is indeed an appearance of this, but that it is no more than appearance, being all hypocrisy. It would be going out of the way to enter upon a large refutation of the slander. Therefore acknowledging that, no doubt, whatever number of hypocrites there are in the world, and there are too many, they must herd amongst or attach themselves to the society of the best part of it; I observe that the general charge of hypocrisy is only thrown out at a venture, is a judging of the heart; and by the very supposition, contrary to appearances, justified, for the most part, by a steady perseverance. Whereas, usually the whole merit of those who bring the accusation is that of being uniformly wicked, and not so much as professing what it was their indefensible duty both to have professed and practiced.

legalist, seem to state themselves as enemies, in every respect, to the law of God, which is holy, just and good. Others, on the contrary, defend it in such a manner, as to destroy the doctrine itself, and give such interpretations of the Word of God, as if they were just, and known to be so, the objection would never have been made, because there would not have been so much as an occasion given to it.³

But of all the pretended Christians, one sort is worthy of the highest contempt, who, acknowledging the truth of this doctrine, call it dangerous, and are backward to teach or publish it, lest it should be abused. Would such weak, half-thinking mortals, be wiser than God? Has he published it, and shall we throw a veil over it to remedy the rashness of his proceeding? Do the Scriptures reveal, and are we backward to “testify the gospel of the grace of God?” All the works of God are capable of being abused; that this may be so likewise the apostle supposes. It is, however, not the less useful or important; only let us endeavor to vindicate it from the false charge of favoring or encouraging licentiousness of life. This I would willingly do in such a manner, as to assert while I defend it; to maintain the doctrine itself, while I show not only its innocence, but its usefulness in practice.

The words of the inspired apostle are, “God forbid, how shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer there in?” In which he affirms that the grace of God abounding in the gospel is so far from being an encouragement to sin that it destroys the power of sin and removes the inclination of it so far as it prevails. The language is very strong, “We that are dead to sin.”—It seems to put us in mind of the total effectual breach of relation between a dead man, and the objects with which he was formerly connected in life: they are nothing to him, nor he to them; he neither loves them, needs them, nor uses them. So in proportion as the grace of God offered through Christ in the gospel is received and applied, sin is mortified in the heart; thus says the apostle elsewhere, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (Gal. 6:14). This, which indeed is the language

3. JW: I have often thought that there cannot be a stronger argument to the explication commonly given by Calvinists of the passages of Scripture on this subject is just, than the apostle’s supposition of an objection of this nature arising from it. For if the explication of some others were supposed to be the obvious meaning of the text, and were substituted in its room, as all just definitions may be without inconvenience, the apostle’s words, “What shall we say then? shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?” would be quite unnatural and absurd.

of Scripture throughout, is not merely denying the accusation, but establishing the contrary truth, the influence of this doctrine upon the purity of heart and life, which we find the apostle also asserting in the middle of his reasoning upon the point, “Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law” (Rom. 3:31).

DEFINING THE DOCTRINE

In the prosecution of this subject, it will be necessary, first, in a few words, to state that doctrine against which the objection is made. It may be delivered in Scripture-language thus, “That all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God—That every mouth must be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God—Therefore by deeds of the law, there shall be no flesh justified in his sight—But we are justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:—Whom God has set forth as a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness, for their remission or sins that are past, through the forbearance of God—Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay, but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude, that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law—Moreover, the law entered, that the offence might abound; but where sin abounded, grace did much more abound; that sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord.”

The doctrine asserted in the above and other passages of Scripture may be thus paraphrased: that every intelligent creature is under an unchangeable and unalienable obligation perfectly to obey the whole law of God; that all men proceeding from Adam by ordinary generation are the children of polluted parents, alienated in heart from God, transgressors of his holy law, inexcusable in this transgression, and therefore exposed to the dreadful consequences of his displeasure; that it was not agreeable to the dictates of his wisdom, holiness and justice, to forgive their sins without an atonement or satisfaction; and therefore he raised up for them a Savior, Jesus Christ, who, as the second Adam, perfectly fulfilled the whole law, and offered himself up a sacrifice upon the cross in their stead; that this his righteousness

is imputed to them as the sole foundation of their justification in the sight of a holy God, and their reception into his favor; that the means of their being interested in this salvation is a deep humiliation of mind, confession of guilt and pardon and peace through Christ Jesus, which they neither have contributed to the procuring, nor can contribute to the continuance of by their own merit, but expect the renovation of their natures to be inclined and enabled to keep the commandments of God as the work of the Spirit, and a part of the purchase of their Redeemer.⁴

This short account of the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness will be further illustrated and explained in the progress of this discourse, intended to show that in those who do cordially embrace it, the obligations to holiness are not weakened but strengthened and confirmed. For this purpose, be pleased to attend to the following observations; in all of which I desire it may be remembered, even where not expressly mentioned, an opposition is intended between the principles and views of a believer in Christ,

4. JW: The intelligent reader will probably perceive that I have expressed the above doctrine in such general terms as not distinctly to take a part in the differences that are to be found among some authors, as to the way of explaining it, and particularly as to the nature of faith. The reason of my doing so is that I would willingly rather reconcile than widen these differences; and because it is my firm persuasion that however some think it justest, or wisest, or falsest, to express themselves one way, and some another, yet all who have a deep and real conviction that they are by nature in a lost state and under the wrath of God, and that there is no salvation in any other but in Christ, are, if they understood one another, at bottom, or least in all things any way material, entirely of the same opinion. Accordingly the reader will, I hope, find that the reasoning in the following pages may easily be applied by them all without exception.

KD: The footnote above illustrates Witherspoon's ecumenical streak. Although a committed Calvinist and Presbyterian, Witherspoon was not a man of party spirit. He often expressed an eagerness for those with basic evangelical and Reformational convictions to find common ground despite their different denominational homes. In this vein, Witherspoon looked, whenever he could, for the theological agreement behind the disagreement (at least in dealing with fellow Calvinist evangelicals). In light of this, he may have John MacLaurin's "Essay in Christian Piety" in mind. McLaurin was a well-regarded evangelical theologian and preacher whose work on the nature of faith drew on Enlightenment perceptions of the human mind (*Sermons and Essays by the Late Reverend Mr. John McLaurin* [Glasgow: James Knox, 1755]). Years later in a 1766 sermon entitled "The Nature of Faith," Witherspoon criticized those who were raising unprofitable controversies on the subject and perplexing the minds of real Christians (*Works*, 1:316). This was likely a reference to *The Nature of Christian Faith*, published by his friend John Erskine in *Theological Dissertations* (London: Edward and Charley Dilly) in 1765. Erskine's work, which borrowed from John Locke and came dangerously close to the views of John Glas and Robert Sandeman, who conceived of faith strictly as an intellectual exercise, began as a sermon preached in 1748. Erskine's views may also have been on Witherspoon's mind when he added this footnote.

who rests his hope on his imputed righteousness, and those who act on any contrary principle.

BENEFIT #1: CONVICTION REGARDING THE LAW'S OBLIGATION FOR ALL

In the first place, he who expects justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ has the clearest and strongest conviction of the obligation of the holy law of God upon every reasonable creature, and of its extent and purity. This will appear very evidently, if we consider what it is that brings any person to a belief or relish of this doctrine. It must be a sense of sin, and fear of deserved wrath. Let us search out the cause by tracing the effects. Whence arises the fear of wrath, or apprehension of God's displeasure? Only from a conviction of guilt. And what can produce a conviction of guilt but a sense of obligation? This is manifestly the doctrine of Scripture, which teaches us, that "by the law is the knowledge of sin"—and that "the law is a school-master to bring us to Christ." Those who have none at all, or a very imperfect sense of the obligation of the divine law, will never have the least esteem of the righteousness of Christ, which atones for their transgression of it; it must appear to them to be foolishness; whereas those who have a strong conviction of the justice of the demand of the law, both esteem and use the plea of their Savior's merit. Such also have a strong sense of the extent and purity of the law of God, as well as its obligation in general. While others consider nothing as sin but the grossest and most notorious crimes, they are deeply sensible of the alienation of their hearts from God, whom they are bound supremely to love, and to whose glory they are obliged to be habitually and universally subservient.

This conviction of the obligation of the divine law, so essentially connected with, or rather so necessary previous to, and acceptance of the imputed righteousness of Christ, is evidently founded upon the relation of man to God as a creature to his Creator. This relation then continues, and must continue, unchangeable; therefore, the obligation founded upon it must be unalienable; and all those who have once been sensible of it, must continue to be so, unless we suppose them blinded to the knowledge of God as Creator by the discovery of his mercy in Christ the Redeemer. But this is absurd; for the subsequent

relation of a sinner to God, as forgiven and reconciled through Christ, never can take away, nay, never can alter his natural relation as a creature, nor the obligation founded upon it. Neither can it be conceived as consistent with the perfections of God to abate the demands of his law; that is to say, a perfect conformity to his holy will.⁵ Even the least deviation from it, by transgression or neglect of duty, must still be seen and esteemed to be so by the God of truth, who cannot lie. Now, is there anything in the gospel that has the least tendency to lessen the sense of this obligation after it has been once discovered? Very far from it: on the contrary, all that Christ has done for the salvation of sinners, as its immediate consequence, magnifies the law, and makes it honorable.

Perhaps it may be thought that the releasing a sinner from the sanction of the law, or the punishment incurred by pardon purchased and bestowed, has this effect: and here it is, to be sure, that men by their partial views are apt to suppose the objection lies.

But let us only reflect that the obligation to duty and obedience to the Creator has been seen by a believer in the strongest light, and must continue to be sensible. Will he then be induced to act in the face of a perceived obligation by an instance of unspeakable mercy? Is

5. JW: Since mention has been made of perfect conformity to the will of God, or perfect obedience to his law, as the duty of man, which is indeed the foundation of this whole doctrine, I think it necessary to observe, that some deny this to be properly required of a man, as his duty in the present fallen state, because he is not able to perform it. But such do not seem to attend either to the meaning of perfect obedience, or to the nature or cause of this inability. Perfect obedience, or to the nature or cause of this inability. Perfect obedience by any creature, to the utmost extent of his natural powers. Even in a state of innocence, the holy dispositions of Adam would not have been equal in strength and activity to those of creatures of an higher rank: but surely to love God, who is infinitely amiable, with all the heart, and above all, to consecrate all his powers and faculties, without exception, and without intermission, to God's service, must be undeniably the duty of every intelligent creature. And what sort of inability are we under to pay this? Our natural faculties are surely as fit for the service of God as for any baser purpose: the inability is only moral, and lies wholly in the aversion of our hearts from such employment. Does this then take away the guilt? Must God relax his law because we are not willing to obey it? Consult even modern philosophers; and such of them as allow there is any such thing as vice, will tell you, that it lies in evil or misplaced affections. Will then that which is ill in itself excuse its fruits in any degree from guilt or blame? The truth is, notwithstanding the loud charge of licentiousness upon the truths of the gospel, there is no other system that ever I pursued, which preserves the obligation of the law of God in its strength: the most part of them, when thoroughly examined, just amount to this, that men are bound, and that it is RIGHT and MEET and FIT that they should be as good and as holy as they themselves incline.

KD: This distinction between natural and moral inability has a complicated history in Reformed thought. Witherspoon uses the distinction again in the *Treatise on Regeneration*. See my footnote (155n) in the *Treatise on Regeneration* for a fuller discussion.

this reasonable to suppose? Or rather, is it not self-contradictory and absurd? It is so far from being true that this mercy disposes to obedience as a peculiar and additional motive as I shall afterwards show more fully in its proper place. In the meantime, it is self-evident that it can be no hindrance. What leads us into error in this matter is what happens sometimes in human affairs. In a human government, mercy or a promise of impunity for past crimes, may enable, though even in that case, not incline a rebellious traitor to renew his wickedness. But this is a most unjust and partial view of the case, in which the very circumstance in wanting upon which the chief stress ought to be laid. Human laws reach only outward actions, because human knowledge is so imperfect that it cannot discover the disposition of the heart: and as all professions are not sincere, so kindness is often bestowed on improper objects. This kindness, however, though it may discover the impropriety cannot cause it.

But make the similitude complete and see how it will lead us to determine. Suppose one who has been in rebellion, deeply and inwardly convinced of the evil of rebellion, and his obligation to submission; suppose this conviction so strong that he confesses the justness of the sentence condemning him to die, which is very confident with a desire of life: will a pardon offered or intimated to such a person make him disloyal? Is this a natural, nay, is it its possible effect? If it could be supposed to have such consequence at all, it could only be in this distant way that pardon seems to lessen the sense of a judge's displeasure at the crime. But even this can have no place here, because sufficient care is taken to prevent any such abuse of it by the substitution and vicarious sufferings of a Mediator.

I cannot help observing here that the similitude above used will lead us to the discovery of one great cause of the objection against which I am reasoning. It arises from that corruption of heart, and inward opposition to the law of God in its extent and purity, which is in all men by nature, and continues in all who are not renewed in the spirit of their minds. As they have a strong tendency and inclination to transgress the law where they dare, they are ready to think, that the hopes of impurity must encourage everyone to a bold violation of it. And no doubt this would be true, if there could be any real esteem or cordial acceptance of the gospel, without a previous conviction of the obligation of the law, and the guilt and demerit

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PART II

A Practical Treatise on Regeneration

*“Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily,
I say unto thee, Except a man be born again,
he cannot see the kingdom of God.”*

(John 3:3)

Introduction

The condition on which ministers of the gospel hold their office is extremely awful. “They must render an account unto God” of their fidelity to the souls committed to their charge. Their duty and danger, as servants of God, are jointly and strongly expressed in the commission given to the prophet Ezekiel. “Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel, therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way to save his life; the same wicked mean shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet, if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity: but thou hast delivered thy soul” (Ezek. 3:17–19).

It is natural for us, in such a situation, to be often revolving in our minds this great and weighty trust. It is at once our duty and interest to consider with all possible care in what way we may have the easiest and most effectual access to the hearts of sinners: what views of divine truth will be most convincing; what forms of address will make the strongest and most lasting impression; in one word, how we may acquit ourselves of our ministry, so as to be a “savour of life unto life,” to many of those who hear us, and to “deliver our own souls” from the blood of those that perish.

Such, indeed, is the undeniable moment and importance of the truths of the gospel that I am often ready to think it will be easy to set them in so clear and convincing a light as no person of common understanding shall be able to resist. I am often ready to say within myself, Surely, if they be warned, they will no more dare to rush on the thick bosses of the Almighty’s buckler; surely, the boldest sinner must tremble at the thoughts of death, judgment and eternity, fast approaching, and from which it is impossible to fly. But when we see how many are able to sit unmoved under the most awful threatening from the Word of God, how may continue unchanged under the most alarming dispensations of Providence, our thoughts are immediately carried to the unsearchable depth of the divine counsels; and we must

say with our blessed Savior, “Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight” (Luke 10:21); or with the Apostle Paul, “But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them” (2 Cor. 4:3–4).

The secret counsel of the Most High, however, though we must adore with reverence, it is impossible for us to comprehend. What influence this has upon the final state of particular persons no man in the present life is, and probably no created being shall ever be, able fully to explain. This only we know: that it is not such as to take away the guilt of sin, or destroy the efficacy of means. A sense of duty therefore constrains us to resume the arduous and difficult task, entreating the assistance and blessing of God, under a firm persuasion that he will hear the prayer of faith, and make his own word “quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and the joints and the marrow, and a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” [Heb. 4:12].

The subject I have made choice of, and intend to handle in the ensuing treatise, immediately regards the substance of religion, and is happily as little entangled in controversy as any that could be named. We are told that “except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” In this all parties, every profession and denomination of Christians, do or ought to agree. By whatever name you are called, whatsoever leader you profess to follow, whatever ordinances you enjoy, if you are not “born again,” you shall not enter into the kingdom of God.

That manner of preaching of the gospel, explaining or recommending divine truth, appears to be most profitable which brings oftenest into view, or, rather, never loses view of the great and essential difference between believers and unbelievers, saints and sinners, heirs of glory and heirs of hell. These are mixed together on earth. They have common privileges as men and citizens. They cannot be certainly distinguished by human observation; for though the image of God shines in a bright and sensible manner in some on the one hand, and some bear very plain and deadly symptoms on the other, whose state may be determined with little hazard of mistake; yet, in

the intermediate degrees, there are multitudes whose real character is known only to God. What then can be said more awakening, and at the same time, more certainly true, than that every hearer of the gospel, and every reader of such a treatise as this, is either reconciled to God and the object of his love, or at enmity with God, having “neither part nor portion” in his favor; and as many as die in this last condition shall be the everlasting monuments of divine wrath. How important a distinction! and can any man refrain from saying, “Lord, thou knowest all things—to which of these classes do I belong?”

But there is something, if possible, still more pressing in the passage of Scripture which I have placed at the head of this discourse. Not only are all men of two different and opposite characters now, but all men are originally of one character, unfit for the kingdom of God; unless a change has passed upon them, they continue so; and unless a change do pass upon them hereafter, they must be forever excluded. This our Lord introduces with strong asseveration, and signal note of importance: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” These words were spoken to Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This “master in Israel” came to Jesus by night. Convinced he seems to have been of the power which attended his ministry, but, under a still stronger attachment to his worldly interest, he dare not openly avow his conviction. Our Lord, at once to enlighten his mind with the most salutary of all truths, and level his pride of understanding by the manner of conveying it, says to him, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” This appears to have been extremely astonishing by his answer in the following verse, “Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?”

It is not my purpose to give a tedious explication of the passage or entertain the reader with a profusion of criticism upon the words. This expression, the kingdom of God, has various significations in Scripture, but chiefly two in the New Testament: 1. The gospel dispensation, or government of the Messiah, as distinguished from the preceding periods; 2. The kingdom of heaven, where the sincere disciples of Christ shall be put in full possession of the blessings of his purchase. I take it to be the last of these, that is, either only, or

chiefly intended in this place. Both of them, indeed, may be meant in their proper order, and for their different purposes. An open profession and receiving the external badge was necessary to a concealed friend and cowardly disciple; but a right to the spiritual privileges of the gospel, and the promise of eternal life, was the only thing that could make the profession valuable or desirable. Accordingly, our Savior seems to speak of both in his reply to Nicodemus's admission in the visible church by baptism, and renovation by the Holy Ghost. Jesus answered, "Verily I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

I am sensible that regeneration or the new-birth is a subject, at present, very unfashionable; or, at least, a style of language which has gone very much into desuetude. It is, however, a subject of unspeakable moment, or, rather, it is one subject in which all others meet as in a center. The grand inquiry, in comparison of which everything else, how excellent soever, is but specious trifling. What does it signify, though you have good to eat in plenty and variety of raiment to put on, if you are not born again; if after a few mornings and evenings spent in unthinking mirth, sensuality and riot, you die in your sins and lie down in sorrow? What does it signify, though you are well accomplished in every other respect, to act your part in life if you meet at last with this repulse from the Supreme Judge, "Depart from me, I know you not, ye workers of iniquity?"

If this subject is, indeed, unfashionable and neglected, we are miserably deceiving ourselves. If a new nature is necessary to attempt to repair and new model the old will be found to be lost labor. If the spring is polluted and continues so, what a vain and fruitless attempt it is to endeavor, by addition, or by foreign mixture, to purify the streams. Just so it is by no means sufficient, or, to speak more properly, it is altogether impossible, to reform the irregularities and vicious lives of sinners, and bring them to a real conformity to the law of God, till their hearts are renewed and changed. It is like rearing up an old fabric, adding to its towers, and painting its walls, while the foundation is gone. See what the prophet Ezekiel says of such foolish builders, "Wo to the foolish prophets—because, even because they have seduced my people, saying, Peace, and there was no peace; and one built up a wall, and lo, others daubed it with untempered mortar: say unto them which daub it with untempered

mortar, that it shall fall: there shall be an overflowing shower, and ye, O great hailstones, shall fall, and a stormy wind shall rent it” (Ezek. 13:10–11).

But, perhaps, the substance of the doctrine is retained while the language is held in derision. We are told it is but a figurative expression, and the same in its meaning with repentance and reformation. Doubtless it is so. And it were greatly to be wished that many did thoroughly understand what is implied in repentance unto life. But the reader is entreated to observe that it is a metaphor frequently used in the Holy Scripture. I think, also, it is a metaphor of peculiar propriety and force; well adapted to bring into view both the nature and the change which it describes, and the means by which it is accomplished. If there are any who in writing, or speaking on this subject, have introduced or invented unscriptural phrases, and gone into unintelligible mysticism, this is neither wonderful in itself, nor ought it to be any injury or disparagement to the truth. There is no subject either of divine or human learning on which some have not written weakly, foolishly or erroneously; but that ought not to excite any aversion to the doctrine itself, which has been perverted or abused. I pray that God may enable me to write upon this interesting subject in a clear, intelligible and convincing manner; to support the truth from the evidence of Scripture and reason; to resolve, in a satisfying manner, any objections that may seem to lie against it; but, above all, to carry it home with a persuasive force upon the conscience and heart. I contend for no phrases of man’s invention, but for such as I find in the Holy Scriptures; from these I am resolved, through the grace of God, never to depart. And, in the meantime, I adopt the words of the eminent and useful Dr. Doddridge, “If this doctrine, in one form or another, be generally taught by my brethren in the ministry, I rejoice in it for their own sakes, as well as for that of the people who are under their care.”¹

The plan of the following treatise is this:

I. To make some general observations upon the metaphor used by the Apostle John, “Except a man be born again;” and the same, or similar expressions, to be found in other parts of the Word of God.

1. KD: Philip Doddridge (1702-1751) was an influential nonconformist minister, writer, and educator. This quotation comes from the Preface in Doddridge’s *Practical Discourses on Regeneration* (1741).

II. To show wherein this change does properly and directly consist, together with some of its principal evidences and effects.

III. To show by what steps, or by what means, it is usually brought about.

IV. In the last place, to improve the subject by a few practical addresses to persons of different characters.

Chapter I

Some general observations on the metaphor used by the Apostle John, Except a man be born again, and the same or similar expressions, to be found in other parts of the Word of God.

It deserves the serious attention of every Christian, that, as this declaration was made by our Savior in a very solemn manner, and by a very peculiar metaphor, so this is not the single passage in which the same metaphor is used. We find it in the Apostle Paul's epistle to Titus, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Titus 3:5). We find one perfectly similar to it in the same apostle's Second Epistle to the Corinthians, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are past away, behold, all things are becoming new" (2 Cor. 5:17). It is elsewhere called a new creation, with reference to the power exerted in the production: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). It is still a figure of the same kind that is used when we are exhorted "to put off, concerning the former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts: and to be renewed in the spirit of our mind; and put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness, and true holiness" (Eph. 4:22–24). To name more passages, the real believer is said to be "born of God" (1 John 5:4); in which the very expression of the text is repeated, and the change attributed to God as his proper work.

Whoever believes in the perfection of the Scriptures will readily admit that it is intended we should learn something from this very way of speaking itself. Let us therefore consider what may be safely deduced from it. And, as I would not willingly strain the metaphor, and draw from it any uncertain conclusion, so it is no part of my design to run it out into an extraordinary length. Many smaller resemblances might easily be formed between the image and the truth, but they would be more fanciful than useful. The reader is only entreated

to attend to a few leading truths, which seem naturally to arise from this metaphor, and may be both supported and illustrated from the whole tenor of Scripture doctrine.

SECTION I

I. From this expression, Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God, we may learn the greatness of that change which must pass upon every child of Adam before he can become an heir of life.

No stronger expression could have been chosen to signify a great and remarkable change of state and character, whether we take the metaphor in a stricter or a looser sense. If we take the metaphor in a stricter sense, it may be intended to point out the change of state in an infant newly born from what it was in immediately before the birth. The manner of its existence, of deriving its nourishment, the use and application of its faculties, and its desires and enjoyments, are all entirely different. If we take the metaphor in a looser sense, being born may be considered as the beginning of our existence. To this sense we seem to be directed by the other expressions, of being created in Christ Jesus, and made new creatures. Does not this still teach us the greatness of the change? We must be entirely different from what we were before, as one creature differs from another, or as that which begins to be at any time, nor cannot be the same, with what did formerly exist.

This may also be well supported from a variety of other passages of Scripture and is a consequence of different truths contained in the Word of God. For example, our natural state is, in Scripture, compared to death, and our recovery to our being restored to life. Thus the Apostle Paul in writing to the Ephesians says, “And you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1). And a little after, “But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were DEAD in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ” (Eph. 2:4–5). To the same purpose the Apostle John says, “We know that we have passed from DEATH to life” (1 John 3:14). The change is sometimes described by passing from darkness to light; than which two things, none can stand in greater

opposition to one another. "Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord" (Eph. 5:8). Everyone must be sensible how easy it would be to multiply passages of the same kind. But this I forbear, and only wish we had all of us a deep impression of the meaning and importance of these upon our hearts.

It will not be improper, however, to observe how plainly the same truth appears from the power which the Scripture represents as exerted in bringing a sinner from a state of nature to a state of grace. It is constantly affirmed to be the work of God, the effect of his power, nay, the exceeding greatness of his power. "By grace ye are saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8). "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:12). "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). Now is there any need of a divine agent to perform a work of no moment? Would it be celebrated as an effect of the power of God, if it were not truly great?

Let me now, in the most earnest manner, beseech every person who reads these lines to consider deliberately with himself what is the import of this truth, and how firmly it is established. It appears that regeneration, repentance, conversion, or call it what you will, is a very great change from the state in which every man comes into the world. This appears from our Savior's assertion that we must be "born again." It appears from a variety of other Scripture phrases, and is the certain consequence of some of the most essential doctrines of the gospel.

With what jealousy ought this to fill many of the state of their souls? How slight and inconsiderable a thing is it that with multitudes passes for religion? Especially in these days of serenity and sunshine to the church, when they are not compelled by danger to weigh the matter with deliberation? A few cold forms, a little outward decency, some faint desires, rather than endeavors, is all they can afford for securing their everlasting happiness. Can the weakness and insufficiency of these things possibly appear in a stronger light than when true religion is considered as a new creation, and a second birth? If the inspired writers be allowed to express themselves either with propriety

or truth, it is painful to think of the unhappy deluded state of so great a number of our fellow-sinners.

Will so great a change take place, and yet have no visible effect? Had any great change happened in your worldly circumstances, from riches to poverty, or from poverty to riches, all around you would have speedily discerned it. Had any such change happened in your health, it had been impossible to conceal it. Had it happened in your intellectual accomplishments, from ignorance to knowledge, it would have been quickly celebrated. How comes it then to be quite undiscernible when it is from sin to holiness? I am sensible that men are very ingenious in justifying their conduct, and very successful in deceiving themselves. They will tell us that religion is a hidden thing, not to be seen by the world, but lying open to his view who judges the secrets of all hearts. And doubtless this is, in one view, a great truth: true religion is not given to ostentation; diffident of itself, it is unwilling to promise much, lest it should be found wanting. But it ought to be considered that, however concealed the inward principle may be, the practical effects must of necessity appear. As one table of the moral law consists entirely of our duty to others, whoever is born again, and renewed in the spirit of his mind, will be found a quite different person from what he was before in his conversation with his fellow-creatures.

Hypocritical pretenses to extraordinary sanctity are indeed highly criminal in themselves and extremely odious in the sight of God. But the present age does not seem to have the least tendency to this extreme. There is another thing much more common, not less absurd, and infinitely more dangerous to mankind in general: a demand upon the public, that, by an extraordinary effort of charity, they should always suppose the reality of religion in the heart when there is not the least symptom of it in the life.¹ Nay, some are hardly satisfied even with this, but insist that men should believe well of others, not only without but against evidence. A bad opinion expressed of a man, even upon the most open instances of profanity, is often answered with, "What have you to do to judge the heart?" It is amazing to think

1. KD: In conjunction with the publication of his sermon "The Absolute Necessity of Salvation through Christ" (1758), Witherspoon penned a vigorous defense for pointing out error, entitled "An Inquiry into the Scripture Meaning of Charity." Witherspoon was skeptical of calls for "charity" when "charity" was really a cover for doctrinal latitudinarianism.

what inward consolation sinners derive to themselves from this claim of forbearance from their fellow creatures. Let me beseech all such to consider that as God cannot be deceived, and will not be mocked, so in truth they usually deceive none but themselves. Every human affection, when it is strong and lively, will discover itself by its apparent effects; and it is as true of religious affections as of any other that “the tree is known by its fruits.”

But if they have reason to suspect themselves whose change is not visible to others, how much more those, who, if they deal faithfully, must confess they are quite strangers to any such thing in their own hearts. I do not mean that every person should be able to give an account of the time and manner of his conversion. This is often effected in so slow and gradual a manner that it cannot be confined to a precise or particular period. But surely those who are no way sensible of any change in the course of their affections, and the objects at which they are pointed, can scarcely think that they are born again, or be able to affix a proper meaning to so strong an expression. I have read an observation of an eminent author that those who cannot remember the time when they were ignorant or unlearned have reason to conclude that they are so still: because, however slow and insensible the steps of improvement have been, the effects will at last clearly appear by comparison with an uncultivated state. In the same manner, whoever cannot remember the time when he served the former lusts in his ignorance has reason to conclude that no change deserving the name of regeneration has ever yet taken place.

It will be, perhaps, accounted an exception to this that some are so early formed for the service of God, by his blessing on a pious education, and happily preserved from ever entering upon the descriptive paths of vice, that they cannot be supposed to recollect the time when they were at enmity with God. But this is an objection of no consequence. The persons here described have generally so much tenderness of conscience, so deep a sense of the evil of sin, that of all others, they will mostly readily discover and confess the workings of corruption in their own hearts and that “law in their members that warreth against the law of God in their minds.” They will be of all others most sensible of the growth of the new, and mortification of the old nature; and will often remember the folly and vanity of youth in instances that by most others would have been reckoned perfectly harmless.

What has been said in this section is expressly designed to awaken such secure and careless formalists as may have any general belief of the Word of God. To be born again must be a great change. Can you then suppose that you have undergone this, not only without any application to it, but without so much as being sensible of it, or being able to discover its proper effects.

SECTION II

This expression, Except a man be born again, and other similar expressions, imply that the change here intended is not merely partial but universal.

A new birth evidently implies an universal change. It must be of the whole man, not in some particulars, but in all without exception. As this is a truth, which naturally arises from the subject, so it is a truth of the last moment and importance, which merits the most serious attention of all those who desire to keep themselves from illusion and self-deceit in this interesting question.

Innumerable are the deceits of Satan. If he cannot keep sinners in absolute blindness and security, which is his first attempt, he industriously endeavors to prevent their views of religion, either by causing them to mistake appearances for realities, or substituting a part for the whole. This branch of the subject is of the more consequence that I am persuaded it is peculiarly applicable to great numbers of the ordinary hearers of the gospel as such. The great bulk of those who finally fall short of everlasting life, though they lived under the administration of the word and sacraments, are ruined by mistakes of this kind. There are few of them, if any at all, who have at no time, through their whole lives, any serious impressions about their souls, or do nothing in the way of religion. There are still fewer who are speculative unbelievers and fortify themselves in their profane practices by irreligious principles. The far greatest number do some things, and abstain from others, to quiet the inward complaints of conscience, and must have some broken reed or other on which they may rest their eternal hopes.

It might serve in general to alarm such persons, that, as I have observed above, the change is evidently very great, and therefore they ought not easily to suppose that that it is already past. But I now add

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