

THE GOSPEL IN EZEKIEL

Illustrated in a Series of Discourses

by

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE NEW HEART

A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26).

As in a machine where the parts all fit each other, and, bathed in oil, move without din or discord, the most perfect harmony reigns throughout the kingdom of grace. Jesus Christ is the “**wisdom**,” as well as the “**power**” of God; nor in this kingdom is anything found corresponding to the anomalies and incongruities of the world lying without. There we sometimes see a high station disgraced by a man of low habits; while others are doomed to an inferior condition, who would shine like gilded, ornaments on the very pinnacles of society. That beautiful congruity in Christ’s kingdom is secured by those who are the objects of saving mercy being so renewed and sanctified that their nature is in harmony with their position, and the man within corresponds to all without.

Observe how this property of *new* runs through the whole economy of grace. When Mercy first rose upon this world, an attribute of Divinity appeared which was new to the eyes of men and angels. Again, the Saviour was born of a virgin; and He who came forth from a womb where no child had been previously conceived, was sepulchered in a tomb where no man had been previously interred. The Infant had a new birthplace; the Crucified had a new burial place.

Again, Jesus is the mediator of a new covenant, the author of a new testament, the founder of a new faith. Again, the redeemed receive a new name; they sing a new song; their home is not to be in the Old, but in the New Jerusalem, where they shall dwell on a new earth, and walk in glory beneath a new heaven.

Now it were surely strange, when all things else are new, if they themselves were not to partake of this general renovation. Nor strange only, for such a change is indispensable, a new name without a new nature were an imposture. It were not more an untruth to call a lion a lamb, or the rapacious vulture by the name of the gentle dove, than to give the title of sons of God to the venomous seed of the Serpent.

Then, again, unless man received a new nature, how could he sing the new song?

The raven, perched on the rock, where she whets her bloody beak, and impatiently watches the dying struggles of some unhappy lamb, cannot tune her croaking voice to the rich, mellow music of a thrush; and, since it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaketh, how could a sinner take up the strain and sing the song of saints?

Besides, unless a man were a new creature, he were out of place in the new creation. In circumstances neither adapted to his nature, nor fitted to minister to his happiness, a sinner in heaven would find himself as much out of his element as a finny inhabitant of the deep, or a sightless borrower in the soil, beside an eagle, soaring in the sky, or surveying her wide domain from the mountain crag.

In the works of God we see nothing more beautiful than the divine skill with which he suits his creatures to, their condition. He gives wings to birds, fins to fishes, sails to the thistle-seed, a lamp to light the glowworm, great roots to moor the cedar, and to the aspiring ivy her thousand hands to climb the wall. Nor is the wisdom so conspicuous in nature, less remarkable and adorable in the kingdom of grace. He forms a holy people for a holy heaven—fits heaven for them, and them for heaven. And calling up his Son to prepare the mansions for their tenants, and sending down his Spirit to prepare the tenants for their mansions, he thus establishes a perfect harmony between the new creature and the new creation.

You cannot have two hearts beating in the same bosom, else you would be, not a man, but a monster. Therefore, the very first thing to be done, in order to make things new, is just to take that which is old out of the way. And the taking away of the old heart is, after all, but a preparatory process. It is a means, but not the end. For—strange as it may at first sound—he is not religious who is without sin. A dead man is without sin; and he is sinless, who lies buried in dreamless slumber, so long as his eyes are sealed. Now, God requires more than a negative religion. Piety, like fire, light, electricity, magnetism, is an active, not a passive element; it has a positive, not merely a negative existence. For how is pure and undefiled religion defined? **“Pure religion and undefiled is to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction.”** And on whom does Jesus pronounce his beatitude? **“If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.”** And what is the sum of practical piety—the most portable form in which you can put an answer to Saul’s question, **“Lord, what wouldst thou have me to do?”**

What but this, **“Depart from evil, and do good.”** Therefore, while God promises to take the stony heart out of our flesh, he promises more. In taking away one heart, he engages to supply us with another; and to this further change and onward stage in the process of redemption.

I now proceed to turn your attention; and, by way of general observation, I remark—

I. Our affections are engaged in religion.

An oak—not as it stands choked up in the crowded wood, with room neither to spread nor breathe, but as it stands in the open field—swelling out below where it anchors its roots in the ground, and swelling out above where it stretches its arms into the air, presents us with the most perfect form of firmness, self-support, stout and sturdy independence.

So perfectly formed, indeed, is the monarch of the forest to stand alone, and fight its own battles with the elements, that the architect of the Bell Rock Lighthouse is said to have borrowed his idea of its form from God in nature, and that, copying the work of a Divine Architect, he took the trunk of the oak as the model of a building which was to stand the blast of the storm, and the swell of winter seas.

In striking contrast with this tree, there are plants—some of them of the richest perfume and fairest beauty—such as the passion-flower, the ivy, the clematis, and the woodbine, which cannot stand alone. They have neither pith nor fiber to maintain themselves erect.

Yet these are not doomed to the base fate of being trodden in the dust by the hoof of every passing beast, and have their beauty soiled in the mire. Types of one whom God has called by his grace, and beautified with salvation, who is strong in weakness, and rises to the highest honors of heaven, these plants may overtop the tallest oak, and, holding on by the everlasting rocks, they have laughed at the storm which laid his proud head in the dust. This strength they have, and these honors they win, by help of the tendrils, the arms, those instruments of attachment with which God has kindly furnished them. These plants are formed to attach themselves to other objects; it is their nature to do so. If they get hold of one noble and lofty, they rise to the height of its nobility; if of a mean one—some rotten stake or shattered wall—they embrace the ruin, and, like a true friend, share its fate; and we have seen, when they had no other object on which to fix themselves, how—like a selfish man, who is the object of his own affections, and has a heart no bigger than his coffin, just large enough to hold himself—they would embrace themselves, and lie basely on the ground locked in forced embarrassment in their own arms.

It is with man as with these. What their tendrils are to them, our affections are to us. Ambition aims at independence; and men fancy, that when they have accumulated such or such a fortune, obtained such or such a place, arrived at such or such an age, they shall be independent.

Independent! what folly! man was never made to be self-supporting, and self-satisfying. Even when his home was Eden, and he enjoyed the full favors of a benignant God, the Lord said—“**It is not good for man to be alone.**”

We are constituted with affections, of which we can no more divest ourselves than of our skin. Be the object which we love noble or base, good or bad, generous or selfish, holy or sinful, belonging to earth or to heaven, some object we must love. It were as easy for a man to live without breathing, as to live without loving. It is not more natural for fire to burn, or light to shine, than for man to love. And the commandment, “**Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world,**” had been utterly impracticable, and impossible, save in conjunction with the other commandment, “**Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and soul, and mind.**”

It is with man’s soul as with this plant which is creeping on the earth; to upbraid it for its baseness, to reproach it for the mean objects around which its tendrils are entwined, will never make it stand erect; you cannot raise it unless you present some lofty object to which it may cling.

It is with our hearts as with vessels; you cannot empty them of one element without admitting or substituting another in its place. And just as I can empty a vessel filled with air or with oil by pouring water into it, because water is the heavier fluid, or as I can empty a vessel of water by pouring quicksilver into it, because the specific gravity of mercury is greatly in excess of that of water, so the only way by which you can empty my heart of the world, and the love of the world, is by filling it with the love of God.

This is the divine process and science of the Gospel. The Gospel is accommodated to our nature; its light is adapted to our darkness; its mercy to our misery; its pardon to our guilt; its sanctification to our impurity; its comforts to our griefs; and in substituting the love of Christ for the love of sin, in giving us an object to love, it meets our constitution, and satisfies the strongest cravings of our nature. It engages our affections, and, in taking away an old heart, supplies its place with a new one and a better.

II. *Consider now the new heart—“A new heart also will I give you.”*

We have said enough in a preceding discourse to show that we are not to look for evidence of the new heart in the natural affections. Religion does not bestow these. We are born with them. We have some of them in common with the brutes that perish; and they may be found flourishing in all their beauty in those who are strangers to the love of God. To them, as to all things else, indeed, which are his gifts, sin is antagonistic and injurious.

Let sin ripen, so as to have its perfect work, and it acts like a cancer on man's best affections. It first indurates, then deadens, and at length destroys. Sinners are essentially selfish; and—as we see exemplified every day—the more men grow in sin, they grow the more heartless, and hesitate less to sacrifice the tenderest feelings and best interests of others to their own base and brutal gratifications.

There is a picture in the book of Romans, painted by the hand of a master, which is more appalling and affecting than any which Roman artists have hung on the walls of Rome. Here it is, a full length portrait of sinners drawn by the hand of Paul, in these vivid and terrible colors:

“God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient, being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters; inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful.”

What a dark and dreadful picture of humanity! Behold the monster into which sin, when fully developed, turns the sweetest child. What an abominable thing is sin! Like God, may we bate it with a perfect hatred!

Observe, that although the state of the natural affections does not furnish any certain evidence of conversion, it is the glory of piety that these are strengthened, elevated, sanctified by the change.

The lover of God will be the kindest, best, wisest lover of his fellow-creatures.

The heart that has room in it for God, grows so large, that it finds room for all God's train, for all that he loves, and for all that he has made; so that the church, with all its denominations of true Christians, the world, with all its perishing sinners, nay—all the worlds which he has created, find orbit-room to move, as in an expansive universe, within the capacious enlargement of a believer's heart. For while the love of sin acts as an astringent—contracting the dimensions of the natural heart, shutting and shriveling it up—the love of God expands and enlarges its capacity. Piety quickens the pulse of love, warms and strengthens our heart, . and sends forth fuller streams of natural affection toward all that have a claim on us, just as a strong and healthy heart sends tides of blood along the elastic arteries to every extremity of the body.

This new heart, however, mainly consists in a change of the affections as they regard spiritual objects. Without again traveling over ground which we have already surveyed, just look at the heart and feelings of an unconverted man. His mind being carnal, is enmity or hatred against God. This may be latent—not at first sight apparent, nor suspected—but how soon does it appear when put to the proof? Fairly tried, it comes out like those unseen elements which chemical tests reveal.

Let God, for instance, by his providences or laws, thwart the wishes or cross the propensities of our unrenewed nature—let there be a collision between His will and ours—and the latent enmity flashes out like latent fire when the cold black flint is struck with steel.

The Apostle pronounces men to be by nature lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God; and is it not a fact that the services of religion are so contrary to all our natural tastes, that we are prone to say of them, as of that day which brings down heaven to earth—"It is a weariness; when will it be over?" The affections of the natural man are like the branches of what are called weeping trees—they droop to the earth, and sweep the ground; harmless or deleterious, they are all directed earthward. This world is his god; his heaven is on earth; the paradise he seeks is here; his ten commandments are the opinions of men; his sins are his pleasures; his prayers are a task; his sabbaths are his longest, weariest days; and, although no sheeted ghosts rise at midnight and walk the churchyard to scare him, he has, in thoughts of God, of judgment, of eternity, specters that haunt him, and to escape from which he will fly into the arms of sin.

Now, if you have received a new heart, this state is past, or is passing. Your affections are not dried or frozen up; they are as warm, or rather warmer than ever—still flowing, only flowing toward different objects, and in a different channel. In obedience to a divine impulse, their course is not only in a different, but in a contrary direction; for the grace of God works such a complete change of feeling, that what was once hated you now love, and what was once loved you now loathe; you fly from what once you courted, and pursue what you once shunned.

For example.

- Did you not once, like Adam in the garden, hide yourself from God! Like Jacob, when about to encounter an angry brother,
- Did you not once tremble at the prospect of meeting God?

How did you fret under the yoke of his law? In those who bore his image, how did you revile, and shun, and hate him? You could not banish him from the universe, but how did you try to banish the thought of him from your thoughts, and so put him and keep him out of your mind, that it might be that black, cold, empty, dark, dead, atheistic spot of this creation, where God should not be? Believers! Oh what a blessed revolution has grace wrought? Praise ye the Lord.

Although our attainments come far short of David's, and the love of our bosoms may burn with a dimmer and feebler flame, and we should therefore perhaps pitch the expression of our feelings on a lower key, let the Psalmist express for us the language of a renewed heart—

“Oh how love I thy law 1 it is my meditation all the day. Thy testimonies are better to me than thousands of gold and silver. like as the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God.

One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life. I love the Lord because he hath heard my prayer and the voice of my supplication. Bless the Lord, ye his angels, that excel in strength. Bless the Lord, all ye his hosts.

Bless the Lord, all his works. Bless the Lord, my soul. Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord.”

III. *In conversion God gives a new spirit.*

Conversion does not bestow new faculties. It does not turn a weak man into a philosopher. Yet, along with our affections, the temper, the will, the judgment partake of this great and holy change. Thus, while the heart ceases to be dead, his head, illuminated by a light within, ceases to be dark; the understanding is enlightened; the will is renewed; and our whole temper is sweetened and sanctified by the Spirit of God.

To consider these in their order, I remark—By this change the understanding and judgment are enlightened. Sin is the greatest folly, and the sinner the greatest fool in the world. There is no such madness in the most fitful lunacy.

Think of a man risking eternity and his everlasting happiness on the uncertain chance of surviving another year. Think of a man purchasing a momentary pleasure at the cost of endless pain. Think of a dying man living as if he were never to die. Is there a convert to God who looks back upon his unconverted state, and does not say with David, “Lord, I was as a beast before thee.”

Now conversion not only restores God to the heart, but reason also to her throne. Time and eternity are now seen in their just proportions—in their right relative dimensions; the one in its littleness, and the other in its greatness. When the light of heaven rises on the soul, what grand discoveries does she make of the exceeding evil of sin, of the holiness of the divine law, of the infinite purity of divine justice, of the grace and greatness of divine love.

On Sinai's summit and on Calvary's cross, what new, sublime, affecting scenes open on her astonished eyes!

She now, as by one convulsive bound, leaps to the conclusion that salvation is the one thing needful, and that if a man will give all he hath for the life that now is, much more should he part with all for the life to come. The Saviour and Satan, the soul and body, holiness and sin, have competing claims. Between these reason now holds the balance even, and man finds, in the visit of converting grace, what the demoniac found in Jesus' advent. The man whose dwelling was among the tombs, whom no chains could bind, is seated at the feet of Jesus, "**clothed, and in his right mind.**"

By this change the will is renewed.

Bad men are worse, and good men are better than they appear. In conversion the will is so changed and sanctified; that although a pious man is in some respects less, in other respects he is more holy than the world gives him credit for. The attainments of a believer are always beneath his aims; his desires are nobler than his deeds; his wishes are holier than his works. Give other men their will—full swing to their passions—and they would be worse than they are; give that to him, and he would be better than he is. And if you have experienced the gracious change, it will be your daily grief that you are not what you not only know you should be, but what you wish to be. To be complaining with Paul, "**When I would do good, evil is present with me; that which I would I do not, and what I would not, that I do,**" is one of the best evidences of a gracious, saving change.

Children of God! let not your souls be cast down. This struggle between the new will and the old man—painful and prolonged although it be—proves beyond all doubt the advent of the Holy Spirit. Until the Saviour appeared there was no sword drawn, nor blood, shed in Bethlehem, nor murderous decree issued against its innocents—they slept safely in their mothers' bosoms, Herod enjoyed his security and pleasure, and Rachel rose not from her grave to weep for her children because they were not. Christ's coming rouses all the devil in the soul. The fruits of holy peace are reaped with swords on the fields of war; and this struggle within your breast proves that grace, even in its infancy a cradled Saviour, is engaged in strangling the old Serpent. When the shadow of calamity falls on many homes, and the tidings of victory come with sad news to many a family, and the brave are lying thick in the deadly breach, men comfort us by saying, that there are things worse than war. That is emphatically true of this holy war. Rejoice that the peace of death is gone.

By conversion the temper and disposition are changed and sanctified.

Christians are occasionally to be found with a tone of mind and a temper as little calculated to recommend their faith as to promote their happiness. I believe that there are cases in which this is due to a deranged condition of the nervous system, or the presence of disease in some other vital organ.

These unhappy persons are more deserving of our pity than our censure.

This is not only the judgment of Christian charity, but of sound philosophy, and is a conclusion to which we are conducted in studying the union between mind and body, and the manner in which they act and react upon each other. So long as grace dwells in a “**vile body**,” which is the seat of frequent disorder and many diseases—these infirmities of temper admit no more, perhaps, of being entirely removed, than a defect of speech, or any physical deformity.

The good temper for which some take credit, may be the result of good health and a well-developed frame—a physical more than a moral virtue; and an ill-temper, springing from bad health, or an imperfect organization, may be a physical rather than a moral defect—giving its victim a claim on our charity and forbearance. But, admitting this apology for the unhappy tone and temper of some pious men, the true Christian will bitterly bewail his defect, and, regretting his infirmity more than others do a deformity, he will carefully guard and earnestly pray against it.

Considering it as a thorn in his flesh, a messenger of Satan sent to buffet him, it will often send him to his knees in prayer to God, that the grace which conquers nature may be made “**sufficient for him**.”

Those, however, who have no such plea to urge in palliation of a suspicious, sour, discontented, irritable temperament, have good ground to suspect their Christianity. Grace sweetens where it sanctifies. In the name of God and Christianity, what has Christ to do with Belial? What has grace to do with that avaricious, envious, malignant, implacable disposition, which is utterly opposed to the genius of the Gospel and the Spirit that was in Jesus Christ?

- Am I told that his disciples sought fire from heaven to consume their enemies?
- Am I told that, with the intolerance of bigotry, and a narrowness of mind still too common, they thought to silence those whom they regarded as rivals?
- Am I told that, set on fire of an earthly ambition, they blazed out into unseemly quarrels with each other?
- Am I told that, even on the solemn eve of a Saviour’s sufferings, when their tears should have quenched all unhallowed fires, they strove for the highest place in the kingdom?
- Am I told how harshly they silenced the cries, and rebuked the importunity of suffering, and how haughtily these proud fishermen bore themselves to the mothers and babes of Israel?

True; but this temper passed away. Their Master cast out the unclean spirit. Pentecost baptized them with another nature. With the peace of Jesus they received his gentle, generous, gracious, loving, forbearing, forgiving temper. These Elishas entered on their work clothed in the mantle of their ascended Master. Had it been otherwise—had they not been made of love, as well as messengers of love—had the love they preached not breathed in every tone, and beamed in every look—had they not illustrated in their practice the genius of the Gospel, their mission had been a signal failure; they had never opened the hearts of men; they had never made their way in a resistant world—never conquered it. Just as it is not with stubborn but pliant iron that locks are picked, the hearts of sinners are to be opened only by those who bring a Christlike gentleness to the work; and who are ready, with Paul’s large, loving, kind, and generous disposition, to be all things to all men, if so be that they may win some.

Never had the disciples gone forth “**conquering and to conquer**,” had they brought their old bigoted, quarrelsome, unsanctified temper to the mission. They might have died for Christianity, but she had died with them; and, bound to their stake, and expiring in their ashes, she had been entombed in the sepulcher of her first and last apostles.

I pray you to cultivate the temper that was in Jesus Christ.

- Is he like a follower of the Lamb who is raging like a roaring lion?
- Is he like a pardoned criminal who sits moping with a cloud upon his brow?
- Is he like an heir of heaven, like a man destined to a crown, who is vexed and fretted with some petty loss?
- Is he like one in whose bosom the Dove of heaven is nestling, who is full of all manner of bile and bitterness?

Oh, let the same mind be in you that was in Jesus, A kind, gentle, loving temper is one of the most winning features of religion; and by its silent and softening influence you will do more real service to Christianity than by the loudest professions, or the exhibition of a cold and skeleton orthodoxy.

Let it appear in you, that it is with the believer under the influences of the Spirit as with fruit ripened beneath the genial influences of heaven’s dews and sunbeams.

At first hard, it grows soft; at first sour, it becomes sweet; at first green, it assumes in time a rich and mellow color; at first adhering tenaciously to the tree, when it becomes ripe, it is ready to drop at the slightest touch. So with the man who is ripening for heaven. His affections and temper grow sweet, soft, mellow, loose from earth and earthly things. He comes away readily to the hand of death, and leaves the world without a wrench.

IV. *In conversion God gives a heart of flesh. “I will give you a heart of flesh.”*

Near by a stone—a mass of rock that had fallen from the overhanging crag—which had some wild flowers growing in its fissures, and on its top the foxglove, with its spike of beautiful but deadly flowers, we once came upon an adder as it lay in ribbon coil, basking on the sunny ground. At our approach the reptile stirred, uncoiled itself, and raising its venomous head, with eyes like burning coals, it shook its cloven tongue, and, hissing, gave signs of battle. Attacked, it retreated; and, making for that gray stone, wormed itself into a hole in its side. Its nest and home were there.

And in looking on that shattered rock—fallen from its primeval elevation—with its flowery but fatal charms, the home and nest of the adder, where nothing grew but poisoned beauty, and nothing dwelt but a poisoned brood, it seemed to us an emblem of that heart which the text describes as a stone, which experience proves is a habitation of devils, and which the prophet pronounces to be desperately wicked. I have already explained why the heart is described as a stone. It is cold as a stone; hard as a stone; dead and insensible as a stone. Now, as by the term “**flesh**” we understand qualities the very opposite of these, I therefore remark that—

In conversion a man gets a warm heart.

Let us restrict ourselves to a single example. When faith receives the Saviour, how does the heart warm to Jesus Christ? There is music in his name. **“His name is as an ointment poured forth.”**

All the old indifference to his cause, his people and the interests of his kingdom, has passed away; and now these have the warmest place in a believer’s bosom, and are the objects of its strongest and tenderest affections. The only place, alas! that religion has in the hearts of many is a burial-place; but the believer can say with Paul, **“Christ liveth in me.”**

Nor is his heart like the cottage of Bethany, favored only with occasional visits. Jesus abides there in the double character of guest and master—its most loving and best loved inmate; and there is a difference as great between that heart as it is, and that heart as it was, as between the warm bosom where the Infant slept or smiled in Mary’s arms and the dark, cold sepulcher where weeping followers laid and left the Crucified.

Is there such a heart in you? Do you appreciate Christ’s matchless excellences? Having cast away every sin to embrace him, do you set him above your chiefest joy? Would you leave father, mother, wife, children, to follow him, with bleeding feet, over life’s roughest path? Rather than part with him, would you part with a thousand worlds? Were he now on earth, would you leave a throne to stoop and tie his latchet? If I might so speak, would you be proud to carry his shoes?

Then, indeed, you have got the new, warm heart of flesh. The new love of Christ, and the old love of the world, may still meet in opposing currents; but in the war and strife of these antagonistic principles, the celestial shall overpower the terrestrial, as, at the river’s mouth, I have seen the ocean tide, when it came rolling in with a thousand billows at its back, fill all the channel, carry all before its conquering swell, dam up the fresh water of the land, and drive it back with resistless power.

In conversion a man gets a soft heart.

As **“flesh,”** it is soft and sensitive. It is flesh, and can be wounded or healed. It is flesh, and feels alike the kiss of kindness and the rod of correction. It is flesh; and no longer a stone, hard, obdurate, and impenetrable to the genial influences of heaven. A hard block of ice, it has yielded to the beams of the sun, and been melted into flowing water. How are you moved now, stirred now, quickened now, sanctified now, by truths once felt no more than dews falling out of starry heavens, in soft silence, upon rugged rock.

The heart of grace is endowed with a delicate sensibility, and vibrates to the slightest touch of a Saviour’s fingers. How does the truth of God affect it now? A stone no longer, it melts under the heavenly fire—a stone no longer, it bends beneath the hammer of the word; no longer like the rugged rock, on which rains and sunbeams were wasted, it receives the impression of God’s power, and retains the footprints of his presence. Like the flowers that close their eyes at night, but waken at the voice of morning, like the earth that gapes in summer drought, the new heart opens to receive the bounties of grace and the gifts of heaven.

Have you experienced such a change? In proof and evidence of its reality, is David's language yours—"I have stretched out my hands unto thee. My soul thirsteth after thee as a thirsty land?"

In conversion a man gets a living heart.

The perfection of this life is death—it is to be dead to sin, but alive to righteousness, alive to Christ, alive to everything which touches his honor, and crown, and kingdom. With Christ living in his heart, the believer feels that now he is not himself—not his own; and, as another's, the grand object of his life is to live to Christ. He reckons him an object worth living for, had he a thousand lives to live; worth dying for, had he a thousand deaths to die.

He says with Paul, "**I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live.**"

In the highest sense alive, he is dead—dead to things he was once alive to; and he wishes that he were more dead to them—thoroughly dead. He wishes that he could loathe the seductions of the world, and sin's voluptuous charms, with the cold, unmoved stare of death, and that these had no more power to kindle a desire in him, than in the icy bosom of a corpse. "**Understandest thou what thou readest?**"

It is a mark of grace, that the believer, in his progress heavenward, grows more and more alive to the claims of Jesus. If you "**know the love of Christ,**" his is the latest name you will desire to utter; his is the latest thought you will desire to form; upon Him you will fix your last look on earth; upon Him your first in heaven.

When memory is oblivious of all other objects—when all that attracted the natural eye is wrapped in the mists of death—when the tongue is cleaving to the roof of our mouth, and speech is gone, and sight is gone, and hearing gone, and the right hand, lying powerless by our side, has lost its cunning, Jesus! then may we remember Thee!

If the shadows of death are to be thrown in deepest darkness on the valley, when we are passing along it to glory, may it be ours to die like that saint, beside whose bed wife and children once stood, weeping over the wreck of faded faculties, and a blank, departed memory. One had asked him, "Father, do you remember me?" and received no answer; and another, and another, but still no answer. And then, all making way for the venerable companion of a long and loving pilgrimage—the tender partner of many a past joy and sorrow—his wife, draws near. She bends over him, and as her tears fall thick upon his face, she cries, "Do you not remember me?" A stare—but it is vacant.

There is no soul in that filmy eye; and the seal of death lies upon these lips. The sun is down, and life's brief twilight is darkening fast into a starless night.

At this moment one, calm enough to remember how the love of Christ's spouse is "**strong as death**"—a love that "**many waters cannot quench**"—stooped to his ear, and said, "Do you remember Jesus Christ?"

The word was no sooner uttered than it seemed to recall the spirit, hovering for a moment, ere it took wing to heaven. Touched as by an electric influence, the heart beat once more to the name of Jesus; the features, fixed in death, relax; the countenance, dark in death, flushes up like the last gleam of day; and, with a smile in which the soul passed away to glory, he replied, "Remember Jesus Christ! dear Jesus Christ! he is all my salvation, and all my desire."

IV. *By conversion man is ennobled.*

Infidelity regards man as little better than an animated statue, living clay, a superior animal. She sees no jewel of immortality flashing in this earthly casket. According to her, our future being is a brilliant but baseless dream of the present; death, sleep; and that dark, low, loathsome grave our eternal sepulcher.

Vice, again, looks on man as an animal formed for the indulgence of brutal appetites. She sees no divinity in his intellect, nor pure feelings, nor lofty aspirations worthy of cultivation for the coming state. Her foul finger never points him to the skies. She leaves powers and feelings which might have been trained to heaven to trail upon the ground; to be soiled and trodden in the mire, or to entwine themselves around the basest objects. In virtuous shame, in modesty, purity, integrity, gentleness, natural affection, she blights with, her poisonous breath whatever is of beauty have survived the Fall; and when she has done her perfect work, she leaves man a wreck, a wretch, an object of loathing, not only to God and angels, but—lowest and deepest of all degradation—an object of contempt and loathing to himself.

While infidelity regards man as a mere animal, to be dissolved at death into ashes and air, and vice changes man into a brute or devil. Mammon enslaves him. She mates him a serf, and condemns him to be a gold digger for life in the mines. She puts her collar on his neck, and locks it; and bending his head to the soil, and bathing his brow in sweat, she says, Toil, Toil, Toil; as if this creature, originally made in the image of God, this dethroned and exiled monarch, to save whom the Son of God descended from the skies, and bled on Calvary, were a living machine, constructed of sinew, bone, and muscle, and made for no higher end than to work to live, and live to work.

Contrast with these the benign aspect in which the Gospel looks on man. Religion descends from heaven to break our chains. She alone raises me from degradation, and bids me lift my drooping head, and look up to heaven.

Yes; it is that very Gospel which by some is supposed to present such dark, degrading, gloomy views of man and his destiny, which lifts me from the dust and the dunghill to set me among princes—on a level with angels—in a sense above them. To say nothing of the divine nobility grace imparts to a soul which is stamped anew with the likeness and image of God, how sacred and venerable does even this body appear in the eye of piety!

No longer a form of animated dust; no longer the subject of passions shared in common with the brutes; no longer the drudge and slave of Mammon, the once "vile body" rises into a temple of the Holy Ghost.

Vile in one sense it may be; yet what, although it be covered with sores? what, although it be clothed in rags? what, although, in unseemly decrepitude, it want its fair proportions? that poor, pale, sickly, shattered form is the casket of a precious jewel. This mean and crumbling tabernacle lodges a guest nobler than palaces may boast of; angels hover around its walls; the Spirit of God dwells within it.

What as incentive to holiness, to purity of life and conduct, lies in the fact that the body of a saint is the temple of God—a truer, nobler temple than that which Solomon dedicated by his prayers, and Jesus consecrated by his presence.

In Popish cathedrals, where the light streamed through painted window, and the organ pealed along lofty aisles, and candles gleamed on golden cups and silver crosses, and incense floated in fragrant clouds, we have seen the blinded worshiper uncover his head, drop reverently on his knees, and raise his awe-struck eye on the imposing spectacle; we have seen him kiss the marble floor, and knew that sooner would he be smitten dead upon that floor than be guilty of defiling it.

How does this devotee rebuke us! We wonder at his superstition; how may he wonder at our profanity? Can we look on the lowly veneration he expresses for an edifice which has been erected by some dead man's genius, which holds but some image of a deified virgin, or bones of a canonized saint, and which—proudly as it raises its cathedral towers—time shall one day cast to the ground, and bury in the dust; can we, I say, look on that, and, if sensible to rebuke, not feel reproved by the spectacle?

In how much more respect, in how much holier veneration should we hold this body? The shrine of immortality, and a temple dedicated to the Son of God, it is consecrated by the presence of the Spirit—a living temple, over whose porch the eye of piety reads what the finger of inspiration has written —“**If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.**”

~ end of chapter 16 ~

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