

THE GROUNDS AND REASONS OF CHRISTIAN REGENERATION OR THE NEW BIRTH

by William Law

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OF CHRISTIAN
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OR, THE
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Offered to the Consideration of
CHRISTIANS AND DEISTS

By
WILLIAM LAW, M.A.

The Introduction

I should reckon it a matter of great importance, if I knew how to bespeak the serious attention of the reader to one of the greatest articles of the Christian religion, and of the greatest concern to himself. And though the subject is particular, and seems only to relate to one point, yet the things which will here come under consideration, will extend to matters of the most general moment, and contain the most affecting reasons to awaken and convert the heart both of the Deist, and the Christian.

For it is my intent so to search and lay open the true grounds and reasons of the Christian new-birth, that the things said, may equally reach both these sorts of readers. For the Deists, and unbelievers, have a great share of my compassionate affections, and I never can think, or write of the infinite blessings of the Christian redemption, without feeling in my heart, an impatient longing to see them the happy partakers of them. And as one naturally believes, what one strongly wishes; so I cannot help hoping, that both Christians and Deists will here find truths of such a nature, as must in some degree touch their hearts, if not read with prejudice and aversion.

OF THE
Nature and Necessity
OF
REGENERATION,
OR, THE
NEW-BIRTH.

(1.) Man was created by God after his own image, and in his own likeness, a living mirror of the divine nature; where Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, each brought forth their own nature in a creaturely man.

(2.) As the Son, who is begotten of the Father, is the brightness of the Father's glory, and the Holy Ghost proceedeth from the Father and the Son, as an amiable, moving life of both; so it was in this created image of the Holy Trinity. In it, the Father's nature generated the nature of the Son, and the Holy Ghost proceeded from them both, as an amiable, moving life of both. (See "An Appeal to Deists, Arians, etc.i, c.i., pp. 45-58.) This was the likeness or image of God, in which the first man was created, a true offspring of God, in whom the divine birth sprung up as in the Deity, where Father, Son, and Holy Ghost saw themselves in a creaturely manner.

(3.) In the divine nature the Father cannot possibly be separated from the Son, nor the Holy Ghost from both, or either of them. But such separation could come to pass in the Trinity, become creaturely, or in the created living image of the Trinity.

(4.) If such separation could not have happened, man could not have fallen out of paradise; for so long as this image of the Holy Trinity continued unbroken, so long it must be in paradise, heaven, or the kingdom of divine joy.

(5.) But that this separation could happen in this created image of the

Trinity, viz., that the birth of the Son, and the arising or proceeding of the Holy Ghost, could be separated or lost, is also certain; because man is actually fallen out of paradise into this poor, wretched, perishable world.

(6.) Whilst man continued an unbroken image of the holy Trinity, he was necessarily in paradise, in the open enjoyment of the kingdom of God. He stood indeed upon the earth, and with the same outward world about him, as we do now; but paradise was over all, the cover of all; and therefore he neither saw nor felt either his own outward body, or the things of this outward world, in the manner, as we now see, and feel them. His own dark, gross, heavy, fleshly body, which appeared after the fall, and the naked grossness, heaviness, darkness, discord, contrariety, and enmity, of the elements of this outward world, the strife of heat and cold, of storms and tempests, were things suppressed in paradise, and as entirely hid from his eyes, as the darkness of the night is hid from our eyes by the light of the day.

(7.) This is plainly taught us in the holy scripture, where it is said of our first parents in paradise, before the fall, that “they were naked, and were not ashamed.” And again, after the fall it is said, “their eyes were opened,” and “they saw they were naked,” and through shame sought for a covering. It is not said, they saw their nakedness in paradise, but that though they were naked, that is, had such bodies as afterwards appeared to be naked, yet they were not ashamed, and the reason of their not being ashamed, was because that nakedness was not then visible, could not then show itself, but was concealed and covered from them by their paradisaical glory; but as soon as by sin, they died to the paradisaical life and glory, then they saw their nakedness, which sight filled them with shame and confusion.

(8.) From these two passages of scripture it is most plain, first, that another sort of seeing, or another sight of things, was opened in Adam after the fall, than that which he had before it: for he then first saw his own nakedness, and therefore first also then saw the outward world, with such eyes as he saw his own body, that is, in the same state of nakedness, as he saw himself, destitute of its paradisaical glory. Secondly, that before his fall, his seeing was divine, by means of a divine light, shining forth from the kingdom of God, that was then not hid, but powerfully opened within him. It was then with him, as with the heavenly city, of which St.

John says, “It had no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it; for the glory of God did enlighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.” Revelation 21:23. Thirdly, that after the fall, when the image of the Holy Trinity was broken in him, this divine light departed from him, and he was left to the firmamental light of this world, to the light of beasts, to see himself, and all other outward things, in no other light and glory, but such as the sun, stars, and elements, cast upon one another. Thus he stood with regard to this outward world, a poor prisoner of this earthly life, as much under the power and slavery of the elements, as his fellow-creatures the beasts.

(9.) Paradise being departed from the earth (which before kept all in harmony) now discord and contrariety broke forth in all the elements, and animals upon it. The elementary nature in man, and beasts, was in the same disorder with the outward elements and stars. From this time storms and tempests, thunders and lightnings, earthquakes, and all sorts of strife and contrarieties through all temporal nature; and in man, and other animals, arose the same disquiet; for the elements in and without man, were of the same nature, and therefore acted upon one another. Hence, heat, cold, pain, sorrow, fear, disquiet, diseases, sickness and death, came upon man, fallen out of paradise into this world.

(10.) This was the state of the world, and of man in it, after that paradise was retired from it; when, instead of the light and glory of paradise, which before made it all peace and unity, and a sweet habitation of divine joy, it had now only the light of the sun, which could only keep the elements in such harmony, and discord, as we now see in the world. Thus stood man in this outward world; let us now look at the inward state of his soul, and see what condition he was of, in the inward, and spiritual world.

(11.) We have before shown, that man was created a living image of the holy Trinity in Unity, that the divine birth arose in him, and that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, saw themselves in him, in a creaturely manner.

Now by his transgression this image of the Holy Trinity was broken; the generation of the Son, or Word, and the proceeding of the Holy Ghost in him, were at an end; in the day that he sinned, in that day he died this

death. And therefore what was he as to his soul? What must be said of it? It was something, that was deprived of that birth, which was the brightness of its glory, and which should be that in it, which the Son of God is to the Father; it wanted that Spirit, which was its amiable life, and which was to be that to it, which the Holy Ghost is to the Father, and the Son.

Yet the soul was still a life, an imperishable life, that could not be dissolved, or cease to be. Now seeing every life, whether spiritual or corporeal, consists in fire, or rather is fire; therefore we may say of the soul in this state, that it is a spiritual dark, fire-breath, an anger-fire, that must heat, and torment itself with its own inward burning strife, and yet be unable to reach, touch, or obtain any spark of light and love, to make its fire-life sweet and amiable, or such a flame of fire, as angels are said to be

(12.) This was the state of the soul after the fall, when the birth of the Son of God, and the proceeding of the Holy Ghost, were no more to be found, or felt in it. It was in the state and condition of the devils, who in their fallen nature, are from flames of love, become this spiritual, dark, raging, aching fire-breath, that can draw no light of love into it Reg-15

And the reason why, even the most profligate persons do not fully know, and perceive their souls to be in this miserable state, a dark root of self-tormenting fire, is this, because the soul, though thus fallen, was still united to the blood of an human body, and therefore the sweet, and cheering light of the sun, could reach the soul, and do that for it in some degree, and for some time, which it does to the darkness, sharpness, sourness, bitterness, and wrath that is in outward nature, that is, it could enlighten, sweeten, and cheer it in a certain degree Reg-16

But as this is not its own light, that is, does not arise in the soul itself, but only reaches it by means of the body; so if the soul hath in this time got no light of its own, then, when the death of the body breaks off its communion with the light of this world, the soul is left a mere dark, raging fire, in the state of devils

And if all the light of this world was to be immediately at once extinguished, all human souls that were not in some real degree of regeneration, would immediately find themselves to be nothing but the rage of fire, and the horror of darkness

(13.) Now, though the light and comfort of this outward world, keeps even the worst of men from any constant, strong sensibility of that wrathful, fiery, dark, and self-tormenting nature, that is the very essence of every fallen, unregenerate soul; yet every man in the world has, more or less, frequent and strong intimations given him, that so it is with him, in the inmost ground of his soul

How many inventions are some people forced to have recourse to, to keep off a certain inward uneasiness, which they are afraid of, and know not whence it comes? Alas, it is because there is a fallen spirit, a dark aching fire within them, which has never had its proper relief, and is trying to discover itself, and calling out for help, at every cessation of worldly joy

Why are some people, when under heavy disappointments, or some great worldly shame, at the very brink of distraction, unable to bear themselves, and desirous of death of any kind? 'Tis because worldly light and comforts, no longer acting sweetly upon the blood, the soul is left to its own dark, fiery raging nature, and would destroy the body at any rate, rather than continue under such a sensibility of its own wrathful, self-tormenting fire

Who has not at one time or other felt a sourness, wrath, selfishness, envy, and pride, which he could not tell what to do with, or how to bear, rising up in him without his consent, casting a blackness over all his thoughts, and then as suddenly going off again, either by the cheerfulness of the sun, or air, or some agreeable accident, and again, at times, as suddenly returning upon him? Sufficient indications are these to every man, that there is a dark guest within him, concealed under the cover of flesh and blood, often lulled asleep by worldly light and amusements, yet such as will, in spite of everything, show itself, which if it has not its proper relief in this life, must be his torment in eternity. And it was for the sake of this hidden hell within us, that our blessed Lord said when on earth, and says now to every soul, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

For as the soul is become this self-tormenting fire, only because the birth of the Son of God was extinguished in it by our first parents; so there is no other possible remedy for it, either in heaven or earth, but by its coming to

this Son of God, to be born again of him

Oh, poor unbelievers, that content yourselves with this foundation of hell in your nature, and either seek for no salvation, or, what is worse, turn your backs with disregard on the one only savior, that God himself can help you to

Think not of saving yourselves. It is no more in your power, than to save the fallen spirits that are in hell; you can no more do the one than the other. Talk not of the mercy and goodness of God; his mercy is indeed infinite, and his goodness above all conception; but then the infiniteness of it consists in this, that he of his own mere mercy found out, and offered this savior to all mankind, because in the nature of things, nothing less than this savior could redeem them

Therefore to rely upon a mercy of God, that is not within the Christian scheme of it, is to rely upon a fiction of our own minds; because all the mercy that God can show to mankind, all that his omnipotent love can do for them, is done and offered to them in, and through the redemption of Jesus Christ

If either devils, or lost souls could possibly be annihilated, neither of them would by the goodness of God, be suffered to exist in misery, for misery's sake. But a man may as well expect that his soul shall be annihilated through the goodness of God, though annihilation is impossible, and what cannot be done, as to expect to be saved through the divine goodness, without the mediation of the Son of God, when the birth of the Son of God in the soul, is the one only salvation, that the omnipotence of God can bestow upon him

Therefore to choose or rely upon some other goodness of God besides that, which he has offered to us in Jesus Christ, is the most dreadful mistake that can befall any man, and must, if persevered in, leave him out of the possibility of any kind, or degree of salvation. For as the Son of God is the brightness and glory of the Father, so no soul made in the likeness of God is capable of any degree of brightness and glory, but so far as the birth of the Son of God is in it; therefore to reject this birth, to refuse this method of redemption, is to reject all the goodness, that the divine nature itself hath for us

(14.) But to return. I have shown in few words the original dignity and glory of man's creation and state in paradise, and the lamentable change, that the fall has brought upon him

From a divine and heavenly creature, he is so wretchedly changed, as to have inwardly the nature, and dark fire of the devils, and outwardly the nature of all the beasts, a slave of this outward world, living at all uncertainties, amongst the pains, fears, sorrows, and diseases, till his body is forced to be removed from our sight, and hid in the earth

Now from this short view of what man is fallen from, and what he is fallen into, we may see at once in the strongest light the divine excellency and absolute necessity of those doctrines of our blessed Lord, calling us to all kinds of renouncing the world, to so many ways of denying all the passions and inclinations of flesh and blood

Were the world, as it now is, and we, as we now are, in the very first state in which God made it and us, there would be some foundation for saying, as some do, "What are all these things for, if they are not to be enjoyed? Why have we these passions and inclinations, if they may not be gratified?" But all these questions are fully answered, as soon as it is known, that the first state of things is quite altered; that we were not created to be in this world in the manner we are now in it; that paradise was our first state, where we should have stood in divine strength and ability, insensible of any evil from outward nature; that sin destroyed this first state of things, destroyed the divine life in the soul, and removed paradise from off the earth; that man, cast out of paradise, came as a malefactor into this outward world, to be punished and scourged by all its divided, warring elements; that by his falling into this world, it got the same power over him, as over the beasts, that are its proper inhabitants, and of the same nature with itself; that thus fallen under its dominion, it continually breathes its own corrupt nature into him, feeds him with such husks as the swine eat, and proposes such pleasures to him, as make him unwilling, and unable to regain his first divine life

Now, as soon as this is known to be the condition of man, thus fallen from a divine life under the dominion of this world, then all the renouncing, self-denying doctrines of the gospel, appear to have the utmost reason and

necessity in them; then it appears to be as much our happiness, to deny the tempers and inclinations of this earthly nature, and to be delivered from the power of its pleasures over us, as to be delivered from the power of death and hell

And the most sober reason thus acquainted with the nature of our fall, must be forced to consider this world as having merely the nature of an hospital, where people only are, because they are distempered, and where no happiness is sought for, but that of being healed, and made fit to leave it

(15.) To proceed: that I have not stated man's first dignity too high, is evidently plain from the scripture account of it. It is a fundamental truth of our religion, that he was created in paradise for a life suitable to it. But paradise is a divine habitation, still existing where it was at the first, though not visible to eyes which see only by the light of the sun, and is the habitation of such as have attained their first paradisaical nature; it was in this paradise, that our savior, through a miracle of love, promised to be with the thief on the cross

It is also a fundamental truth of scripture, that man was created to be immortal, incapable of death, and of everything that had any likeness to it, so long as he continued in the perfection of his state. That it was sin alone which brought sorrow, pain, evil, distress, sickness and death upon him

But if this be a truth that cannot be denied, then it must be equally true, that before he sinned, he must have stood in such a paradise, as kept everything in the outward world entirely under him, so that neither fire nor water, nor any other element, could have the least power over him. But if fire, the fiercest of the elements, had not the least power of touching his body in any hurtful manner, or of causing any pain to it; then it must be granted, that paradise covered, and governed the power of all the elements of this outward world; that man lived in it as an absolute Lord over it; and therefore it undeniably follows that the manner, in which he now is under the power of the elements, capable of receiving pain and evil from them, is a state that he was not in, till sin took paradise from him, and left him in the same poor condition, that we now are in, capable of receiving pain and death, from almost everything that is about us

That man in paradise lived in this world insensible, and also incapable of any evil from it, superior to all its elements, is plain from the tree of knowledge of good and evil

For how could it be more plainly told us, that outward things, the stars and elements could not affect his state, or make any impression upon him, than by telling us, that he had no knowledge of good and evil in this world, till he had eaten of that tree? Is not this directly telling us, that before such eating, he was above the nature of this world, that it had not power to operate upon him, or give him any sense or feeling, of what there was of good or evil in it

Now that he was created to be, and to continue thus a Lord over all temporal nature, superior to all the influences and effects of the stars and elements, is also plain from the prohibition given him, not to eat of this tree of knowledge

But he was not content with this happy superiority above the evil and good of outward nature. His imagination, helped on by the devil, longed to look into, to know and feel the secret working powers of that outward nature, which it was his happiness, and paradise to be insensible of

When God forbade his eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, it was the same thing as if he had said, Fall not into the outward world, under the dominion of its stars and elements, but keep thy state in paradise

When man disobeyed God, and took the fruit of the tree into his body, which brought the nature and power of the stars and elements into it; this is not to be considered, as that single act of eating, but it signifies as much as if he had said; By eating this fruit, I desire to come within the influences of the stars and elements, and to be made sensible, and feeling of the good and evil that is in them

Therefore, small as the action seems to be at the first view, and of a very limited nature, it was his refusing to be that, which God created him to be; it was his express, open, voluntary act and deed, by which he chose to fall into this outward world, in the manner we now are in it

Therefore it was not the mere eating of a fruit, that brought Adam's misery upon him, but it was the eating a fruit, as his chosen means of entering into this world

God himself was not angry at all, or at a small act of eating a fruit, and so in anger turned man out of paradise, into a world cursed for that sin. But man freely and voluntarily chose, against the will, and command of God, to be in the world in its cursed state, unblessed by paradise; for he chose to enter into a sensibility and feeling of its good and evil, which is directly choosing to be, where paradise is not; for nothing that is in paradise, can be touched, or hurt by anything of the outward world. Therefore the first state of man was a state of such glory, and heavenly prerogatives, as I have above related; and his fall, was a fall into, or under the power of this outward world

(16.) If it be also further asked, What sufficient proof there is, first, that the likeness and image of God, in which man was created, signified thus much, that Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, each brought forth their own nature in him, and in him saw themselves in a creaturely manner? And then, secondly, that by the first sin, this birth of the Son of God, and proceeding of the Holy Ghost was extinguished and lost in the soul of man? It may be answered, that these great truths stand attested by undeniable evidence of scripture

First, from the means and manner of our redemption. For there is nothing that can so fully, and justly show us the true nature of our fall, as the nature and manner of our redemption. And it seems highly suitable to the wisdom of God to let the first, be but in part discovered, till the latter showed and proved itself in an undeniable manner. And this, no doubt, is the reason why Moses is suffered to write no more of the nature of the fall of man, or what it implied, than he has done. Because the time for a plain insight into that matter, was not then come, and it was to lie as much a secret, as to the true nature of it, as the nature and manner of our redemption then did; which was then only obscurely declared, by an enmity between the seed of the woman, and the seed of the serpent

But when the seed of the woman showed itself to be the Son of God, the second person of the holy Trinity, united to our human nature; then the

nature of our fall, and what we fell from, and what was the seed of the serpent in us, manifested themselves in the same degree of certainty. And therefore it is very unreasonable to hold, that we ought to say no more of our first state before the fall, of its dignity and perfection, and what was lost by the fall, than what is openly and expressly declared by Moses. For as it seemed good to the divine wisdom to conceal the mystery of our redemption and salvation for many ages, and to let Moses only discover it under a declaration of a serpent-destroyer; so there was a fitness, and even necessity, that the nature and degree of our fall should be kept in the same degree of secrecy, then only to be discovered with a sufficient degree of plainness and certainty, when our redemption and salvation came plainly to be laid open. The religion of the Jews was suited to that state of things and times in which they lived; neither the mysteries of the creation, nor redemption, were then discovered; things past, and things to come, had then only their figures, shadows, and types

But when the Son of God became incarnate, and showed forth in the plainest manner, the nature, manner, and necessity of our redemption through his blood, and a life received from him, then the nature and degree of our fall became equally plain and manifest; and everything that he has told us of the nature and necessity of a new or second birth from him, was so much told us of our first birth in paradise

For the nature and greatness of our redemption, must show the nature and greatness of our fall. These things have such a necessary correspondence, as cannot be denied, but by a mind utterly indisposed to receive conviction

If our redemption proposed to restore to us a divine sight, would not this be a sufficient proof, that by the fall we had lost some divine manner of seeing? So, if God himself takes our nature upon him to redeem us, and it be declared that nothing, but this uniting the divine nature to the human, can be our redemption, can we want a proof, that the divine nature existed in some manner in us, before the fall

Now it is a plain, manifest doctrine of the holy scriptures, that man by the fall is in such a condition, that there was no help or remedy for him, either in the height above, or in the depth below, but by the Son of God's becoming incarnate, taking the fallen nature upon him. If this alone could

be the remedy, does not this enough show us the disease? Does not this speak plainly enough, what it was that man had lost by his fall, namely, the birth of the Son of God in his soul; and therefore it was, that only the Son of God in so mysterious a manner, could be his redeemer

If he had lost less, a less power could have redeemed him. If he had lost something else, the restoration of that something, would have been his redemption

But since it is an open, undeniable doctrine of the gospel, that there can be no salvation for mankind but in the name, and by the power of the Son of God, by his being united to the fallen nature, and so raising his own birth and life in it, is it not sufficiently declared to us, that what was lost by the fall, was the birth of the Son of God in the soul

Secondly, this same doctrine is not left to be drawn from any consequences of things, but is in express words taught us, when it is said, that we must be born again from above, born of God; for this is expressly telling us what birth we have lost, and is only saying, that the first birth is to be restored, or that the divine birth is to arise, or to be brought again into us, as at the first, when the living image of the Holy Trinity was brought forth in us

What this new regained birth is, we are plainly told by St. Peter, that is a being born again of an incorruptible seed by the Word, that is, the eternal Word, or Son of God. Which divine Word being only in the soul as a seed, is to restore by degrees the first birth of the Word, or Son of God in the soul. Which is proof enough that this was the state of the soul in its creation, that this birth was then in it, and so was an image of the Holy Trinity; and that the death which Adam died in the day that he sinned, was the losing this holy birth from his soul. And on this account it was, that nothing could restore him, but that which was able to restore this birth again to his soul, and make it again such an image of God, as that Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, might therein see themselves again in a creaturely manner, and dwell in it, and it in them

Thirdly, the Holy Ghost is in the scriptures declared to be the sanctifier, or renewer of holiness in the soul, and this in such a manner, that all the motions and operations of the soul, so far as they are without it, and

unmoved by it, are so far unholy, and unable even for a good thought

Now how could our thoughts or operations be unholy in themselves, and want the sanctification and renewing of the Holy Ghost, unless this Holy Spirit had first existed in us, and by our fall had been separated from us

Had not the birth of the Holy Ghost arisen in us at our creation, we could no more be unholy for want of it, than the beasts are, nor any more now have wanted to be renewed by it, than the beasts that never had it. But since there is now no sanctification or redemption for us, but by having the Holy Ghost as a free gift of God breathed again into us, it is no less than a demonstration, that we had before we fell, this holiness by the nature which God gave us at first; and that the holiness of our creation consisted in this, that the Holy Spirit then proceeded, or arose forth in our soul, as the birth of the Son of God did; and that it might for the same reason be then called the holiness of our nature, as it is now after the fall, called a holiness by gift or grace. For if we are now to be born again of the Spirit by grace, does not this tell us, that we had this birth of the Spirit in us at the first, and that then it was the birth of our nature by creation

Fourthly, these same great truths are evidently signified to us in the fullest manner by our baptism, and the form of it. Our baptism is to signify our seeking and obtaining a new birth. And our being baptized in, or into the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, tells us in the plainest manner, what birth it is that we seek, namely, such a new birth as may make us again what we were at first, a living real image or offspring of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost

It is owned on all hands, that we are baptized into a renovation of some divine birth that we had lost? and that we may not be at a loss to know what that divine birth is, the form in baptism openly declares to us, that it is to regain that first birth of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost in our souls, which at the first made us to be truly and really images of the nature of the Holy Trinity in Unity. The form in baptism is but very imperfectly apprehended, till it is understood to have this great meaning in it. And it must be owned, that the scriptures tend wholly to guide us to this understanding of it. For since they teach us, a birth of God, a birth of the Spirit, that we must obtain, and that baptism, the appointed sacrament of

this new birth, is to be done into the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, can there be any doubt, that this sacrament is to signify the renovation of the birth of the Holy Trinity in our souls? And that therefore this was the holy image born or created at first, when God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our own likeness,” that is, so make him, that we may see ourselves, our own nature in him, in a creaturely manner

What an harmonious agreement does there thus appear, between our creation and redemption? and how finely, how surprisingly do our first and our second births answer to, and illustrate one another

At our first birth it is said thus, “Let us make man in our image, after our own likeness”; when the divine birth was lost, and man was to receive it again, it is said, “Be thou baptized into the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost”: which is saying, Let the divine birth, be brought forth again in thee, or be thou born again such an image of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, as thou wast at first

These considerations all taken from the plain words, and acknowledged doctrines of scripture, do, I think, sufficiently declare and prove to us, these great truths of the last importance, namely, that the image in which man was created, was such, as in which, the Holy Trinity saw itself, or its own nature in a creaturely manner, in which the Father’s nature generated the nature of the Son, and the Holy Ghost proceeded from them both, as the amiable moving life of both

That by Adam’s sin, this holy image of the Holy Trinity was broken, and in such a manner, that the birth of the Son of God, and of the Holy Spirit, was no more in it, and that therefore in a stupendous mystery of love, the Son of God united himself to our fallen nature, to recover, and restore to it, all that it had lost, and in such a manner, that it might never be lost again to all eternity

As soon as it is observed and known, that our fall consisted in the losing of the birth of the Son of God in our soul, and consequently the proceeding forth of the Holy Spirit in it, there appears a surprising agreeableness and fitness, in the means of our redemption, namely, that we could only be saved by the eternal Son of God; that he only could save us,

by taking our nature upon him, and so uniting it with him, that his life, or birth might again arise in us, as at the first, and so we become again a perfect living image of the Holy Trinity

(17.) Now the reason why I have gone thus far in inquiring into the dignity of man's original state, and searched thus deep into his lamentable fall, is this, to point out to the reader the true nature of the Christian religion, and the infinite importance of it; which religion is administered by God, as our only relief from our sad condition; and that he may at one view see the height and depth of divine love, which has had so great care of mankind

I persuade myself, no one can see these truths, in the manner that I have represented them, without being in some degree inclined to believe them; and in the same degree stirred up to act in conformity to them

We know nothing truly of the nature of the Christian religion, and our deep concern in it, but so far as we see into the nature of our first state in the creation, and our present state by the fall. And as this knowledge is in some degree necessary, so is it also in some degree obvious to every man

Every man has a consciousness within himself, that a perfection in all kinds of virtue becomes him; this consciousness obliges him to set the best foot forwards, and to put on the appearance of all the virtue that he can. Now what else is this, but an inward strong testimony of his own mind, declaring to him, that perfection was his first state, and that because his nature once had it, he can neither lose the agreeable idea of it, nor quit his pretenses to it; so that every man carries in his own breast, in the depth of his own frame and constitution, a strong proof of all those truths, that I have deduced from scripture. For I have not been speaking of things foreign or strange to us, but of things sensible felt within us, and spoken to us, by the whole form of our nature

(18.) The condition in which I have represented our soul to be by the fall, a mere dark fire-breath, of an hellish nature, showing itself in every man more or less by its fruits, by such eruptions and breakings forth of dark passions, but hiding itself under an outward appearance of good, and a feigned civility or rectitude of manners, is what every man must be forced to own to be more or less in himself

For this is the state of every man's soul, because it has lost the birth of the Son of God in it, and so is only as a strong root of a fiery life, unenlightened, and unblessed by that holy Word, which is the brightness of the Father's glory

This dark root of a fiery, self-tormenting life, which is the whole nature of the fallen soul, destitute of the birth of the Son of God in it, is a life that subsists in four elements, as the life of this world hath its four elements

Now the four elements of this dark, fiery soul, or fallen nature, are,

- (1.) a restless selfishness;
- (2.) a restless envy;
- (3.) a restless pride; and,
- (4.) a restless wrath or anger.

I call them the elements of the fallen soul, because they are that to it, which the four elements of this world are to the life of the body

Now these four elements which nourish and keep up the life of the fallen soul, are also the four elements of hell, in which the devils dwell; they can no more depart from, or exist out of these elements, than an earthly life can depart from, or exist without the four elements of this world, fire, air, water, and earth

Now, as the soul, by the losing of the birth of the Son of God in it, is become an aching dark root of fire, that has this restless selfishness, restless envy, restless pride, and restless wrath in it, which are the four elements of hell; so by its being in these, or having them in it, it is come to pass, that evil spirits have such communion with it, and so great power over it

Every stirring of the soul in the element of pride, is a moving in the devil's element, where he is, and has power to join and act with it; every motion in the element of envy or wrath, is so far empowering him to enter into the breath of our life, and settle his fiery kingdom in us

And thus in every one of these four elements, so far as we willingly are in their sphere of activity, and act and stir according to them, so far we become members of the devil's kingdom, and have him for our leader, and

guide. How watchful therefore ought we to be of our hearts, how fearful of consenting to, or not enough resisting every motion of these elements within us, since every voluntary yielding to them, is opening the kingdom of darkness in our souls, and giving the devil power to infuse his wretched nature into us. And we have still further reason for this fear and watchfulness, if it be considered, that as no one of the elements of this outward world could be, or subsist, if the other three were not, because they are the mutual cause of one another; so it is in these other elements, if we live in one, we live in all; selfishness cannot be, or subsist without envy, nor pride without wrath and selfishness, nor any one of the four, without carrying the other three in its bosom; therefore we must have the same fear of any one, as of them all, for the name of every one is legion

Could we see, as we see outward objects, what a dreadful misery these four elements bring upon our souls, we should shun and fly from everything that gave life and strength to them, with more earnestness, than from the most violent evils that could threaten our bodies; we should choose to burn in any fire, rather than in that of our own wrath and pride, any poverty of outward life, rather than that of our own pinching envy, any prison, rather than to be shut up in our own dark selfishness. For all outward fires, chains, torments, slaveries, poverties, are but transient shadows, of the tormenting, fiery, dark slavery of an unredeemed soul, left, and given up to these four elements of hell

And the reason why they are not a hell to profligate men now upon earth, is, as has been said, because we now live in flesh and blood, under the cheering influences of the sun, and the diversion and amusement of outward things, and in several forms of happiness, which our imagination through its own inventions of delight, hinders the poor soul from feeling what it is, in its own nature; and therefore, though ever so much a slave of these elements, it only feels or perceives the torment of them by fits, and on certain occasions. And yet sometimes it is seen, that one or other of these elements awakens so violently, as to become intolerable, and to give a true and plain foretaste of the condition and nature of hell in the soul that feels it

Here again, I cannot help observing by-the-by, the wondrous excellency and divine nature of the gospel religion, which knowing our fall to consist

in this darkened fire of the soul, dwelling in these elements of hell, has set before us such amazing representations of humility, meekness, and universal love, as the imagination of man could never have thought of; namely, the humility, meekness, and lowliness of the Son of God, who left his glory, to take upon him the form of a servant for our sakes; the great love of God towards us sinners, in giving his only begotten Son to redeem us, and the love of God the Son, in laying his life down for us, that we might imitate this amazing humility, meekness, and divine love, and love one another as he has loved us. These are mysteries of love and mercy that are set before us, to quench the fiery wrath of our fallen nature, and to compel us, if possible, to abhor our own dark passions, and in humility and meekness become lovers of God, and one another

(19.) Now so far as we, by true resignation to God, die to the element of selfishness and own will, so far as by humility we die to the element of pride, so far as by meekness we die to the element of wrath, so far we get away from the devil, enter into another kingdom, and leave him to dwell without us in his own elements

These are not fictions of a visionary imagination, but sober truths, spoken by the Word of God in scripture, and written and engraven in the book of every man's own nature

No man since the fall, but is a living witness to these truths; to deny them, is to own and prove them: for we could not tell a lie, or resist the truth, but because we have this dark enemy to truth hidden in our bosom

(20.) Now the greatest good that any man can do to himself, is to give leave to this inward deformity to show itself, and not to strive by any art or management, either of negligence or amusement to conceal it from him. First, because this root of a dark fire-life within us, which is of the nature of hell, with all its elements of selfishness, envy, pride, and wrath, must be in some sort discovered to us, and felt by us, before we can enough feel, and enough groan under the weight of our disorder. Repentance is but a kind of table-talk, till we see so much of the deformity of our inward nature, as to be in some degree frightened and terrified at the sight of it. There must be some kind of an earthquake within us, something that must rend and shake us to the bottom, before we can be enough sensible, either

of the state of death we are in, or enough desirous of that savior, who alone can raise us from it

A plausible form of an outward life, that has only learned rules and modes of religion by use and custom, often keeps the soul for some time at ease, though all its inward root and ground of sin has never been shaken or molested, though it has never tasted the bitter waters of repentance, and has only known the want of a savior by hearsay

But things cannot pass thus: sooner or later, repentance must have a broken, and a contrite heart; we must with our blessed Lord go over the brook Cedron, and with him sweat great drops of sorrow, before he can say for us, as he said for himself, "It is finished.

Now, though this sensibility of the sinfulness of our inward ground, is not to be expected to be the same in all, yet the truth and reality of it must, and will be in all, that do but give way to the discovery of it; and our sinfulness would ever be in our sight, if we did not industriously turn our eyes from it. If we used but half the pains, to find out the evil that is hidden in us, as we do to hide the appearance of it from others, we should soon find, that in the midst of our most orderly life, we are in death, and want a savior, to make our most apparent virtues to be virtuous

It is therefore exceeding good and beneficial to us, to discover this dark, disordered fire of our soul; because when rightly known, and rightly dealt with, it can as well be made the foundation of heaven, as it is of hell

For when the fire and strength of the soul, is sprinkled with the blood of the Lamb, then its fire, becomes a fire of light, and its strength is changed into a strength of triumphing love, and will be fitted to have a place amongst those flames of love, that wait about the throne of God

The reason why we know so little of Jesus Christ, as our savior, atonement, and justification, why we are so destitute of that faith in him, which alone can change, rectify, and redeem our souls, why we live starving in the coldness and deadness of a formal, historical, hearsay-religion, is this; we are strangers to our own inward misery and wants, we know not that we lie in the jaws of death and hell; we keep all things quiet within us, partly by outward forms, and modes of religion and

morality, and partly by the comforts, cares and delights of this world. Hence it is that we consent to receive a savior, as we consent to admit of the four gospels, because only four are received by the church. We believe in a savior, not because we feel an absolute want of one, but because we have been told there is one, and that it would be a rebellion against God to reject him. We believe in Christ as our atonement, just as we believe, that he cast seven devils out of Mary Magdalene, and so are no more helped, delivered, and justified by believing that he is our atonement, than by believing that he cured Mary Magdalene

True faith, is a coming to Jesus Christ to be saved, and delivered from a sinful nature, as the Canaanitish woman came to him, and would not be denied. It is a faith of love, a faith of hunger, a faith of thirst, a faith of certainty and firm assurance, that in love and longing, and hunger, and thirst, and full assurance, will lay hold on Christ, as its loving, assured, certain and infallible savior and atonement

It is this faith, that breaks off all the bars and chains of death and hell in the soul; it is to this faith, that Christ always says, what he said in the gospel, "Thy faith hath saved thee, thy sins are forgiven thee; go in peace." Nothing can be denied to this faith; all things are possible to it; and he that thus seeks Christ, must find him to be his salvation

On the other hand, all things will be dull and heavy, difficult and impossible to us, we shall toil all the night and take nothing, we shall be tired with resisting temptations, grow old and stiff in our sins and infirmities, if we do not with a strong, full, loving, and joyful assurance, seek and come to Christ for every kind, and degree of strength, salvation and redemption. We must come unto Christ, as the blind, the sick, and the leprous came to him, expecting all from him, and nothing from themselves. When we have this faith, then it is, that Christ can do all his mighty works in us

(21.) From the foregoing account anyone may be supposed already to see the nature and necessity of regeneration, or the new birth. It is as necessary as our salvation. By our fall, our soul has lost the birth of the Son of God in it; by this loss it is become a dark, wrathful, self-tormenting root of fire, shut up in the four hellish elements of selfishness, envy, pride,

and wrath; considered as a fallen soul, it cannot stir one step, or exert one motion but in, and according to these elements; therefore it is as necessary to have this nature itself changed, and to be born again from above, as it is necessary to be delivered from hell, and eternal death

For these elements are hell, and eternal death itself, and not without, or standing at a distance from us, but hell and death springing up in the forms, and essences of our fallen nature; they are the serpent that is in us, and constitute that gnawing worm which never dieth; for they mutually beget, and mutually torment each other, and so constitute a worm, or worming pain, that never dieth

Now as this hell, serpent, worm, and death, are all within us, rising up in the forms and essences of our fallen soul; so our redeemer, or regenerator, whatever it be, must be also equally within us, and spring up from as great a depth in our nature. Now the scripture sufficiently tells us, that it is only the promised seed of the woman, the eternal Word, or Son of God made man, that can bruise this head, or kill this life of the serpent in us; therefore this seed of the woman must have its dwelling in the ground and essence of our nature, because the serpent is there, that a new life or a new nature may arise from this seed within us; and therefore it is plain, that regeneration, or the new birth, is, and can be no other thing, but the recovering of the birth of the Son of God in the fallen soul

And this is what the scripture means by the necessity of our being born of God, born again from above, born of the Spirit. Hence also we see in the clearest light, the meaning of all those passages of scripture, where we are said to be in Christ, that Christ is in us; that he must put on Christ; that he must be formed in us; that he is our life; that we must eat his flesh and drink his blood; that he is our atonement, that his blood alone cleanseth us from all our sins; that we have life from him, as the branches have life from the vine; that he is our justification, or righteousness; that in him we are created again to good works; that without him we can do nothing, and have no life in us: all these, I say, and the like sayings of scripture, have a wonderful congruity and plainness in them, and fill the mind with the most excellent and solid truths, as soon as it is known, that regeneration is absolutely necessary, and that this regeneration signifies, the recovering of the birth of the Son of God in the soul

(22.) And as it does this justice to so great and concerning a part of scripture, so it sets the whole scheme of the Christian salvation in the most agreeable and engaging light, and such as is enough even to compel everyone, to embrace it with the utmost earnestness. The mystery of this salvation is still preserved, and yet hereby so unfolded, that every man has as much reason to desire to be born again, and to believe that the Son of God can only bring forth this birth in him, as to believe that God made him, and can alone make him happy

A mediator, an atonement, regenerator, thus understood, must be as agreeable and desirable to every human mind, and as much according to his own wishes, as to be delivered from the uneasiness and disquiets of a nature, which he finds himself not master of, nor able to fix it in a state of better enjoyment

What is it that any thoughtful, serious man could wish for, but to have a new heart, and a new spirit, free from the hellish, self-tormenting elements of selfishness, envy, pride, and wrath? His own experience has shown him, that nothing human can do this for him; can take away the root of evil that is in him; and it is so natural to him to think, that God alone can do it, that he has often been tempted to accuse God, for suffering it to be so with him

Therefore to have the Son of God come from heaven to redeem him by a birth of his own divine nature in him, must be a way of salvation, highly suited to his own sense, wants and experience; because he finds, that his evil lies deep in the very essence and forms of his nature, and therefore can only be removed by the arising of a new birth, or life in the first essences of it

Therefore an inward savior, a savior, that is God himself, raising his own divine birth in the fallen soul, has such an agreeableness and fitness in it, to do for him all that he wants, as must make every sober man, with open arms, ready and willing to receive such a salvation

(23.) Some people have an idea, or notion of the Christian religion, as if God was thereby declared so full of wrath against fallen man, that nothing but the blood of his only begotten Son could satisfy his vengeance

Nay, some have gone such lengths of wickedness, as to assert that God had by immutable decrees reprobated, and rejected a great part of the race of Adam, to an inevitable damnation, to show forth and magnify the glory of his justice

But these are miserable mistakers of the divine nature, and miserable reproachers of his great love, and goodness in the Christian dispensation

For God is love, yea, all love, and so all love, that nothing but love can come from him; and the Christian religion, is nothing else but an open, full manifestation of the universal love towards all mankind. (See “Spirit of Prayer.”)

As the light of the sun has only one common nature towards all objects that can receive it, so God has only one common nature of goodness towards all created nature, breaking forth in infinite flames of love, upon every part of the creation, and calling everything to the highest happiness it is capable of

God so loved man, when his fall was foreseen, that he chose him to salvation in Christ Jesus, before the foundation of the world. When man was actually fallen, God was so without all wrath towards him, so full of love for him, that he sent his only begotten Son into the world to redeem him. Therefore God has no nature towards man, but love, and all that he does to man, is love

(24.) There is no wrath that stands between God and us, but what is awakened in the dark fire of our own fallen nature; and to quench this wrath, and not his own, God gave his only begotten Son to be made man. God has no more wrath in himself now, than he had before the creation, when he had only himself to love. The precious blood of his Son was not poured out to pacify himself (who in himself had no nature towards man but love), but it was poured out, to quench the wrath, and fire of the fallen soul, and kindle in it a birth of light, and love. (See “Spirit of Love”, part ii, p. 50, etc.)

As man lives, and moves, and has his being in the divine nature, and is supported by it, whether his nature be good or bad; so the wrath of man, which was awakened in the dark fire of his fallen nature, may, in a certain

sense, be called the wrath of God, as hell itself may be said to be in God, because nothing can be out of his immensity; yet this hell, is not God, but the dark habitation of the devil. And this wrath which may be called the wrath of God, is not God, but the fiery wrath of the fallen soul

And it was solely to quench this wrath, awakened in the human soul, that the blood of the Son of God was necessary, because nothing but a life and a birth, derived from him into the human soul, could change this darkened root of a self-tormenting fire, into an amiable image of the Holy Trinity, as it was at first created

This was the wrath, vengeance, and vindictive justice that wanted to be satisfied, in order to our salvation; it was the wrath and fire of nature and creature kindled only in itself, by its departing from due resignation, and obedience to God

When Adam and Eve went trembling behind the trees, through fear and dread of God, it was only this wrath of God awakened in them; it was a terror, and horror, and shivering of nature, that arose up in themselves, because the divine life, the birth of the Son of God, which is the brightness and joy of the soul, was departed from it, and had left it, to feel its own poor miserable state without it. And this may well enough be called the wrath, and justice of God upon them, because it was a punishment, or painful state of the soul, that necessarily followed their revolting from God

But still there was no wrath, or painful sensation, that wanted to be appeased, or satisfied, but in nature and creature; it was only the wrath of fallen nature, that wanted to be changed, into its first state of peace and love. When God spoke to them, he spoke only love; Adam, where art thou? And he called him, only to comfort him with a promised redemption, through a seed of the woman, a spark of the Word of life which should reign in him, and his posterity, till all enemies were under their feet. God therefore is all love, and nothing but love and goodness can come from him. He is as far from anger in himself, as from pain and darkness. But when the fallen soul of man, had awakened in itself, a wrathful, self-tormenting fire, which could never be put out by itself, which could never be relieved by the natural power of any creature

whatsoever, then the Son of God, by a love, greater than that which created the world, became man, and gave his own blood, and life into the fallen soul, that it might through his life in it, be raised, quickened, and born again into its first state of inward peace and delight, glory and perfection, never to be lost any more. O inestimable truths! precious mysteries, of the love of God, enough to split the hardest rock of the most obdurate heart, that is but able to receive one glimpse of them! Can the world resist such love as this? Or can any man doubt, whether he should open all that is within him, to receive such a salvation

O unhappy unbelievers, this mystery of love compels me in love, to call upon you, to beseech and entreat you, to look upon the Christian redemption in this amiable light. All the ideas that your own minds can form of love and goodness, must sink into nothing, as soon as compared with God's love and goodness in the redemption of mankind

I appeal to nothing but the state of your own hearts and consciences, to prove the necessity of your embracing this mystery of divine love. I will grant you all that you can suppose, of the goodness of God, and that no creature will be finally lost, but what infinite love cannot save

But still, here is no shadow of security for infidelity; and your refusing to be saved through the Son of God, whilst the soul is in the redeemable state of this life, may at the separation of the body, for aught you know, leave it in such a hell, as the infinite love of God cannot deliver it from. For, first, you have no kind, or degree of proof, that your soul is not that dark, self-tormenting, anguishing and imperishable fire, above-mentioned, which has lost its own proper light, and is only comforted by the light of the sun, till its redemption be effected. Secondly, you have no kind, or degree of proof, that God himself can redeem, or save, or enlighten this dark fire-soul, any other way than, as the gospel proposes, by the birth of the Son of God in it. Therefore your own hearts must tell you, that for aught you know, infidelity, or the refusing of this birth of the Son of God, may, at the end of life, leave you in such a state of self-torment, as the infinite love of God can no way deliver you from

You build much upon certain clear ideas, founded in the nature and fitness of things; but I beseech you to consider, that here in this great point, on

which all depends, you have no ideas at all; for you have not one clear, or even obscure idea, that your souls cannot be in this disordered state, or that they can be set into a right order, without the birth of the Son of God brought forth in them

But to return

(25.) What has been already said of the nature of regeneration, may sufficiently show us, how greatly it is mistaken, when it is said to signify only a moral change of our tempers and inclinations

Tempers and inclinations are the fruits of the new-born nature, and not the nature itself; and as fruits and flowers are entirely distinct, and different from the root and the tree, and necessarily suppose the root and the tree, before they can be brought forth; so good tempers and inclinations are as distinct from, and posterior to that nature, which is to produce them, as its fruits

And if good tempers rightly purified, could really arise, or be brought forth in us, without a change first made in the root, or nature, that is to bring them forth, it would be no absurdity to say, that men may gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles

But if our blessed Lord has declared this, to be contrary to the nature of things, and has further said, that the tree must first be made good, before it can bring forth good fruit; then we can with sufficient ground of assurance say, that our nature must first be made good, its root and stock must be new made, or regenerated again, before it can bring forth good fruits of moral behavior

(26.) Angels are justly represented to us, as flames of love; now every flame must have a hidden fire for its root, from which it has its subsistence; and the spiritual flaming angelical nature, must have a spiritual fire concealed under it. Now let it be supposed, that in an angel this flame of love was extinguished, and that there then only remained that inward root of a spiritual fire. Let it be supposed, that this spiritual fire that has lost its flame of love cannot cease to be, and to be a fiery spirit; that it cannot, by any properties of its fire kindle itself in its first flame of love; that all its own stirrings can produce no one thought, motion or desire, but

what solely tends either to selfishness, envy, pride, or wrath; that it can of itself no more come out of this state, than fire locked up in a flint, can of itself become a flame; could it be said, that this angel had only lost some moral good dispositions? Must it not be said, to have lost that nature, from which alone, its good tempers could proceed? Let it be further supposed, that God, by a miracle of love entered into the fiery root, or essence of this fallen angel, and by a new birth made it again to be a flame of love; could it be said, that it had gained nothing by this new birth, but only a change of some moral tempers? Must it not be said to have gained a new nature, a flame of love, instead of a dark fire? and from this new nature, its angelical and good tempers can alone proceed

(27.) But the representing the new-birth as signifying only a change of moral behavior, is not only thus false and absurd in itself, but is also exceeding prejudicial to true conversion, and saps the foundation of our redemption

That it is highly prejudicial to true conversion, is most evident from this, that it hides and suppresses the real nature of our fallen state, and the true greatness of the love and mercy of God in our redemption. Now these two things it inevitably does in a great degree, and therefore the hurt that it does us, is more than can well be imagined

And it is owing to this cause more than to any other, that even amongst people of sober behavior, religion is only a superficial thing, that has no true depth in them, because they have never understood the true depth of religion, nor conceived, in how deep a manner, their nature is concerned in it

A heathen may say, that by going to such a neighborhood, or marrying into such a family, or falling into acquaintance with such a man, he obtained an entire change in his moral behavior. Now if Christians are told, that this is the true, and only meaning of their new birth in Christ Jesus, namely, a great change in their moral behavior, a thing that happens to heathens, by the ordinary occurrences of human life, it is no wonder, that they live all their lives, strangers to true humility, and penitence, are never truly converted to God, or have any just sense of his infinite mercy, in the manner of their salvation

For if they are to believe, that to be born of God, born from above, born of the Spirit, born of an incorruptible seed of the Word of God, signifies no more than this now mentioned, must not this naturally lead them, to take everything that is said of God and Christ, in the mysteries of their redemption, in a sense as much below the expression, as this of the new birth? Must it not naturally lead them to think, that all scripture -doctrines, have more of height and mystery in the expression, than in the thing itself? and that there is no need to fear, or hope, or believe, or trust, or resign, or love, or seek, or do, or bear, or give, or suffer according to the apparent language, and plain expression of the gospel? And thus, the words of him that spoke as never man spoke, have all their spirit and life taken from them; and we may be said to have the words of Christ, as though we had them not

(28.) The whole nature of the Christian religion, stands upon these two great pillars, namely, the greatness of our fall, and the greatness of our redemption. In the full and true knowledge of these truths, lie all the reasons of a deep humility, penitence, and self-denial, and also all the motives and incitements, to a most hearty, sincere, and total conversion to God. And everyone is necessarily more or less of a true penitent, and more less truly converted to God, according as he is more or less deeply, and inwardly sensible of these truths

And till these two great truths, have awakened, and opened our minds for the full reception of the divine light; all reformation and pretense to amendment, is but a dead and superficial thing, a mere garment of hypocrisy, to hide us from ourselves, and others

Nothing can truly awaken a sinner, but a true sense, of the deep inward possession, and power that sin has in him. When he sees, that sin begins with his being, that it rises up in the essences of his nature, and lives in the first forms of his life, and that he lies thus chained, and barred up in the very jaws of death and hell, as unable to alter his own state, as to create another creature; when along with this knowledge he sees that the free grace of God, has provided him a remedy equal to his distress, that he has given him the holy blood and life of Jesus Christ, the true Son of God, to enter as deep into his soul, as sin has entered, to change the first forms, and essences of his life, and bring forth in them a new birth of a divine

nature, which is to be an immortal image of the Holy Trinity, everlastingly safe, blessed, and enriched in the bosom of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; when a man once truly knows, and feels these two truths, he may be said, truly to know, and feel so much of the power of Christ brought to life in him. And there seems to be no more, that you need to do outwardly for him. The voice of his inward teacher is ever so speaking, so ever heard, and loved within him, that you can say nothing to him outwardly of any humility, penitence, or self-abasement, but what is less, than his own wounded heart suggests to him. Humility can only be feigned or false, before this conviction. He can now, no more take any degree of good to himself, than assume any share in the creation of angels; and all pride or self-esteem of any kind, seems to him to contain as great a lie in it, as if he was to say, that he helped to create himself

You need not tell him that he must turn unto God with all his strength, with all his heart, all his soul, and all his spirit; for all that he can offer unto God, seems to him already less than the least of his mercies towards him. He has so seen the exceeding love of God, in the manner and degree of his redemption, that it would be the greatest of pain to him, to do anything, but upon a motive of divine love. As his soul has found God to be all love, so it has but one desire, and that is, to be itself all love of God. This is the conviction and conversion, that necessarily arises from a full, inward sensibility of these truths; the soul is thereby wholly consecrated to God, and can like, or love, or do nothing, but what it can, some way or other, turn into a service of love towards him. But where the weight and power of these truths is not livingly felt in the heart, there it is not to be wondered at, if religion has no root, that is able to bring forth its proper fruits

And if the generality of Christians, are a number of dead, superficial consenters to the history of scripture-doctrines, as unwilling to have the spirit, as to part with the form of their religion; loath to hear of any kind of self-denial, fond of worldly ease, indulgence, and riches, unwilling to be called to the perfection of the gospel, professing and practicing religion, merely as the fashion and custom of the place they are in, require; if some rest in outward forms of religion, others in certain orthodoxy of opinions; if some expect to be saved by the goodness of the sect they are of, others by a certain change of their outward behavior; if some content themselves

with a lukewarm spirit, and others depend upon their own works, these are delusions, that must happen to those, who do not know and feel, in some good degree, the true nature of their own fallen soul, and what a kind of regeneration can alone save them

But all these errors, delusions, and false rests, are cut up by the root, as soon as a man knows the true reason and necessity of his wanting so great a savior

For he that knows the ground and essences of his soul to be so many essences of sin, which form sin as they form his life, entirely incapable of producing any good, till a birth from God has arisen in them; such a one can neither place his redemption, where it is not, nor seek it coolly and negligently, where it is

For knowing, that it is the hell within his own nature, that only wants to be destroyed, he is intent only upon bringing destruction upon that; and this secures him from false religion

And knowing, that this inward hell cannot be destroyed, unless God becomes his redeemer, or regenerator in the ground of his soul; this makes him believe all, expect all, and hope all from his savior Jesus Christ alone

And knowing that all this redemption, or salvation, is to be brought about in the inmost ground and depth of his heart, this makes him always apply to God, as the God of his heart; and therefore what he offers to God is his own heart; and this keeps him always spiritually alive, wholly employed and intent upon the true work of religion, the fitting and preparing his heart for all the operations of God's Holy Spirit upon it. And so he is a true inward Christian, who, as our blessed Lord speaks, has the kingdom of God within him, where the state and habit of his heart continually, thankfully, worships the Father in spirit and in truth

(29.) Having sufficiently shown the nature and necessity of regeneration, that it consists solely in the restoration of the birth of the Son of God in the human soul, it must be plain from thence, that it is solely the work of God, he being alone able to effect it; and that man can have no other share in it, but that of complying with the terms, on which it is to be received of God

It may be proper to inquire, when, and how this great work is done in the soul

The mercy and infinite goodness of God, has chosen all mankind to salvation in Jesus Christ, before the foundation of the world. Now this eternal decree of God, took place upon the fall of Adam; and as he was admitted into the terms of Christian salvation immediately after his transgression, so all mankind, as being in his loins, were taken into the same covenant of grace, and what was then done to Adam, was done to him, as the common parent of mankind

The bruise of the serpent given to Adam, as his savior, was not a verbal promise of something only, that should come to pass in future ages to redeem him, and which left his soul in the same state of inward darkness, disorder, and weakness in which it found him; but it was a redeeming power, which by the mercy of God, was treasured up in his fallen nature, which was to resist and overcome the wrath and death, and awakened nature of hell, that was in his soul; and from that time of God's accepting him to a salvation, through the seed of the woman, he was saved by the power of Christ within him, as really, as those that lived, and believed in Christ, after he had been incarnate. As nothing can save the last man, or become his righteousness, or redemption, but the divine nature of Jesus Christ, derived into his soul, so nothing else could be righteousness, redemption, or salvation to the first man

All men therefore that ever were, or shall be descended from Adam, have Jesus Christ for their savior, as Adam had, they receive the promise made to him, and receive by that promise, that which he received by it, they have a seed of the woman, an incorruptible seed of life, springing up in the first essences of their life, which is to oppose and resist the seed of the serpent, or the diabolical nature that is in them also. And therefore no son of Adam is without a savior, or can be lost, or entirely overcome by the evil, that the fall has brought upon him, but by his own turning away from this savior within him, and giving himself up to the suggestions, and workings of the evil nature, that is in him

(30.) This mystery of an inward power of a salvation hidden in all men, has had just such degrees of obscurity and manifestation, as the nature,

and birth, and person of the messiah have had; that is, as the nature and person of Jesus Christ, as an atonement, savior and redeemer of mankind, were for several ages of the world only obscurely pointed at, and typified by the religion of the Jews; so this seed of a new birth, or saving power of Christ hidden in the souls of all men, was, through the same ages, under the same veil, and obscurity

But when the eternal Son of God became incarnate, and manifested to the world the mysteries of his nature, person, and office, when it was publicly declared, that he was the life and light of the world, the only source of goodness in every creature, the “Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world”; that we must all be born again of him, be born again from above, be born of the Spirit, and that everyone was to profess the owning, seeking and desiring this divine birth, by a baptism into the Name, or nature, of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; then it became plainly manifest, what Christianity was from the beginning, and in what manner Jesus Christ was the savior of Adam, and what it was that he received, by receiving a bruise of the serpent, into the first essences of his life

Therefore when Jesus Christ came into the world, declaring the necessity of a new birth, to be owned, and sought, by a baptism into the Name of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; this was not a new kind, or power of salvation, but only an open declaration of the same salvation, that had been till then, only typified, and veiled under certain figures and shadows, as he himself had been. And men were called not to a new faith in him, as then first become their inward life, and light, but to a more open and plain acknowledgement of him, who from the beginning, had been the one life and light, and only salvation of the first man, and all that were to descend from him

(31.) Now the things required on our part, towards the raising and bringing forth this new birth in us, are repentance, and faith. These are to be the continual support of our regeneration, carrying it on to the end of our lives

But now though repentance and faith are to bring forth, and carry on our regeneration; yet they are themselves the effect and fruit of it, viz., of that first seed or light of life, which God willed to be in Adam

For had not God of his own free grace, chosen Adam and Eve to salvation

in Jesus Christ, by doing inwardly in the deep, and darkened essences of their fallen souls, something like that, which he did to the “darkness which was upon the face of the deep,” when he said, “Let there be light” in it; Adam and Eve, and all their posterity, had been inwardly, as to their souls, only of the nature of the devils, full of their dark and fiery dispositions, shut up in their elements, incapable of any thought or motion, but what tended to selfishness, envy, pride, and wrath

Neither they, nor any of their posterity, could have brought forth any degree of humility, resignation, love, faith, hope, or desire of God; but had lived hardened and fixed, in the above-named elements of hell, full of their own perverse will, without all conscience, or instinct of goodness

And therefore when God of free grace, provided that falling man should fall into a state of redemption, that is, into a possibility of being God’s creature again; this was effected by God’s treasuring up, or preserving in him a seed of the woman, a remaining spark of his first divine life; which first divine life, was then, Christ in him, his full birth of glory, as certainly, as Christ in us, is now our hope of glory

St. Paul says, “God hath chosen us in Christ Jesus, before the foundation of the world.” Now from this eternal, foreseeing goodness of God towards all mankind, it is, that a root or remains of the first divine life, called a seed of the woman, the ingrafted Word, a kingdom of God, a pearl of great price, a treasure hid in a field, was fore-ordained to be preserved, and treasured up, though hidden under that death, which Adam died in paradise. And thence it was, that the goodness of God, could direct distressed Adam to this comfort, viz., “The seed of the woman shall bruise the head of the serpent”; not a foreign seed, to be sown into thee from without, but a remaining, preserved seed of thy first life of Christ, which through the divine love for thee, is hidden, and securely treasured up under thy own fallen earthly nature, as a pearl hidden in thy own field, a principle of holiness, a touch of love, the pledge of immortality, and fund of everlasting happiness. For this heavenly pearl, called by St. Peter, “the incorruptible seed of the Word,” shall surely come forth again out of its state of hiddenness and death; shall quicken and revive into its first glory, through Christ, who is, and ever shall be, the resurrection, and life of all that, which was hid and lost in the death, that Adam died

(32.) And here it is, that we see again how “God is love,” universal love towards all mankind, having put all into a state of redemption. For if all men, as sons of Adam, are by the free grace of God made sons of the second Adam, and, as such, have a seed of life in them from him, in order to be raised up to a perfection of the new man in Christ Jesus; and if this seed of a new birth, or light of life, is the general, and preventing grace of all men, that enables them so to act, as to obtain God’s assisting grace, in the renewal of their hearts and minds, then it is a glorious and undeniable truth, that there is no partiality in God, no election of one people to mercy in Christ Jesus, and dereliction of another to their own helpless misery, but that all men, have a general call, and a general capacity to obtain their salvation; and that as certainly as all fell and died in Adam, so all were restored in his restoration

(33.) Now as the first power and ability of our having one good thought, or desire of turning to God in penitence and faith, is the effect of this first seed of a new birth in all men; so this seed of a new birth is quickened, strengthened, and brought forth to its full stature or highest degree of perfection, by acts, or rather habits of repentance and faith

So that faith and repentance are the life of the new man, or the acts by which it grows, and is brought forth into its proper state of perfection. There is no difference between faith and works, in this inward new-born man. Its faith is its works, and its works are its faith. For faith is its turning to God, and its turning to God, is its aversion, or turning from all evil; so that faith and good works, are only two considerations of one and the same thing, or of one and the same state of mind, in the new-born man

(34.) This seed of the new birth, that is God’s free, and fore-ordained gift to man, as the power that is to redeem him, is the reason and foundation of that language in scripture, of a new, inward and spiritual man, and of an old, natural, and outward rational man, and of the enmity between the one and the other; in which enmity, the whole warfare, and trial of the Christian life, consist

The seed of the new birth, is the inward and new man, which is to grow up into that spiritual and holy man, which was first created in paradise

This inward man, is alone the subject of religion and divine grace; he only

is of God, and heareth God's Word; he only hath eyes to see, and ears to hear, and a heart to conceive the things of God

This is he alone, that is born of God, and cannot sin, because he has no sin in his nature. This is he alone, that overcometh the world, because he is of a divine nature, and is both contrary to the world, and above it. This is he alone, that can love his brother as himself, because the love of God is alone alive, and abideth in him

The old, natural man, or the rational man of this world, is the dark fallen nature, enlightened only, and solely with the light of this outward world; it is the diabolical nature, only softened with flesh and blood, quieted and comforted with the light of the sun, by this light, he can only see the outward images of things, whether divine or human, and can only reason, dispute, and wrangle about his own shadowy images, but can know no more of God, and the things of God, than such dead images can represent unto him

The old or natural man, may be an historian, a poet, an orator, a critic, a politician, or worldly wise man, etc., all this skill and art lies within his reach; the fire of his soul, kindled only by the light of the sun, may do all this. But notwithstanding all these trappings and endowments, he is wholly shut up in his own dark prison of selfishness, envy, pride, and wrath; his virtues, piety, and goodness can be only such, as give no disturbance to these four elements of the fallen nature

He is an animal, full of earthly, sensual passions and tempers, and can only favor such things as can gratify their nature

Here, and here only, lies the true, solid, and immutable distinction, between the old and the new man, and the plain reason, why the life of the one, is the death of the other

(35.) Now in this essential difference, between the old and the new man, we may at one view, see a clear and solid ground of distinction, between what is called a bare historical, and superficial faith, which cannot save the soul, but leaves it a slave to sin, and that living and real faith, which effecteth our salvation, and sets us in the glorious liberty of the sons of God

Human reason, or the natural man of this life, can believe and assent to this truth, that Christ is our savior, and that we are to be saved by a righteousness from him, as easily, as it can assent to any other relation, or matter of fact. But whilst it is human reason only, that assents to this truth, little or nothing is done to the soul by it; the soul is under much the same power of sin as before, because only the notion, or image, or history of the truth is taken in by it; and reason of itself can take in no more

But when the seed of the new birth, called the inward man, has faith awakened in it, its faith is not a notion, but a real, strong, essential hunger, an attracting, or magnetic desire of Christ, which as it proceeds from a seed of the divine nature in us, so it attracts and unites with its like, it lays hold on Christ, puts on the divine nature, and in a living and real manner, grows powerful over all sins, and effectually works out our salvation

And therefore it is justly called a divine faith, not only because of its divine effects, but chiefly because it arises from that, which is divine within us, and by its attracting hunger, and thirst after that fountain of life, from whence it came, becomes essentially united with it; breathes by that Spirit, and lives by that Word which eternally proceeds out of the mouth of God. Of this faith alone it is, that our Lord speaks, when he says, “whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life.

When this faith is thus awakened, and sprung up in the inward man, then we may be said to have a strong saving faith, or a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ

(36.) From these two sorts of faith here mentioned, we may very plainly see and perceive, why there is such a misunderstanding between two sorts of believers, and why they speak a language so unsatisfactory, and disgusting to one another

Busy inquisitive reason, learned enough in its own sphere, grammatically skilled in scripture-knowledge, looking no further, or deeper into the things of God, than a dictionary can guide it, cannot bear the language of the regenerate, inward man, but condemns it as fanatical, and enthusiastic; not considering, that this rational man, which is made the judge of salvation, is that very individual old man with his deeds, that we are by the religion of the gospel, to be saved, and delivered from; and that we should have no

occasion for a new seed of a divine life in us, no occasion to be born again of God, but because this natural man of human reason, can neither see nor hear, nor feel, nor taste, nor understand the things of God, as they are in themselves

(37.) From this difference between the new, and the old man, which is a difference as real, as that between heaven and earth, several lessons of great instruction may be learnt

When religion is in the hands of the mere natural man, he is always the worse for it; it adds a bad heat to his own dark fire, and helps to inflame his four elements of selfishness, envy, pride, and wrath. And hence it is, that worse passions, or a worse degree of them, are to be found in persons of great religious zeal, than in others that make no pretenses to it. History also furnishes us with instances of persons of great piety and devotion, who have fallen into great delusions, and deceived both themselves and others. The occasion of their fall was this; it was, because they made a saint of the natural man. My meaning is, they considered their whole nature, as the subject of religion, and divine graces; and therefore their religion was according to the workings of their whole nature, and the old man was as busy, and as much delighted in it, as the new. And hence it was, that persons of this stamp, all inflamed, as they seemed to be, with piety, yet overlooked in their own lives, such errors of moral behavior, as the first beginners in religion, dare not allow themselves in

Others again, perhaps truly awakened by the Spirit of God, to devote themselves wholly to piety, and the service of God, yet making too much haste to have the glory of saints, the elements of fallen nature, selfishness, envy, pride, and wrath, could secretly go along with them. For to seek eminence, and significancy in grace, is but like seeking for eminence and significancy in nature. And the old man can relish glory, and distinction in religion, as well as in common life, and will be content to undergo as many labors, pains, and self-denials, for the sake of religious, as for the sake of secular glory. There is nothing safe in religion, but in such a course of behavior, as leaves nothing for corrupt nature to feed, or live upon; which can only then be done, when every degree of perfection we aim at, is a degree of death to the passions of the natural man

(38.) It may now perhaps be said, if regeneration is so great a matter, if it signifies the restoring to the soul its first paradisaical light, or the renewing of the birth of the Son of God in it; surely so great a thing, and transacted within us, must not only be known and felt, when it is brought about, but must be known and felt in some strange, and extraordinary manner

It may be answered, first, that all mankind may in a certain and good sense, be said to be in some degree sharers of this regeneration, as having in them a seed of life, that is contrary to their corrupt nature; which seed they partake of, as heirs of the first grace, granted to Adam in the ingrafted Word. This first seed, or light of life, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world, is the first seed of the new birth; which birth stands in this life, as a tree or plant in the soil, and is only in a state of growing during this life. For was the new birth, with regard both to soul and body, ever totally finished in anyone, he would be as certainly in paradise, as Adam was, and be as much above the power of the elements of this world, as Adam was at his creation. Secondly, all Christians are in a higher and further state of regeneration, by the grace of baptism into the Name of the Holy Trinity. By baptism, they profess themselves disciples of Jesus Christ, in his kingdom of grace, to seek for life, righteousness, and sanctification in him; to live by his Spirit, in conformity to his doctrine, life, sufferings and death, in a continual resistance of the corruptions of their nature, the temptations of the world and the devil

This profession faithfully kept, is their progress in the way of regeneration. Some only outwardly make this profession, and so only have the name of Christians. Some make it in a much better manner; yet being very defective in their conformity to the life and doctrines of Jesus, live and die far short of that purification, or renewal of the inward man, which the religion of the gospel proposes

Others renouncing all for Christ, and following his counsels, as well as his precepts, arrive at high degrees of regeneration, and experience such a life in Christ, or such a manifestation of Christ in them, as others less faithful to their master, must be strangers to

To ask therefore by what strange or extraordinary effects, the work of the new birth is to be known, and felt to be done in the soul, is a very

improper, and useless question. Because regeneration is not to be considered as a thing, done, but as a state that is progressive, or as a thing, that is continually doing

(39.) If it be further asked, what are then the certain marks, or effects of a highly advanced degree of regeneration, which Christians are to look for

It may be answered, this question is not useful: first, because there is no obligation upon anyone, to know and feel the height, or advancement of his state. Secondly, because the inquiry after such knowledge, and inward feeling of it, is very dangerous. Thirdly, because it can be no hurt to anyone's piety and holiness, to take it to be lower than it really is. Fourthly, because nothing keeps up our progress in the way of regeneration, let it be in what degree it will in us, but our constant fidelity in conforming to the doctrines, life, and death of Jesus Christ. Fifthly, because this question directs, and turns people's minds to the seeking after certain effects, merely from ideas and descriptions of them, when their minds should only be set upon the causes that are to produce them

Thus, supposing it to be true, that an assurance of salvation, or continuance in grace, was a genuine effect of a certain degree of regeneration; Christians should not be directed to seek for this assurance, as a certain mark or effect of such a degree of regeneration, for this is directing them to seek for this effect from their own selves, and not from the state of their regeneration

For their minds and imaginations will be naturally upon the stretch, how to work themselves up into this pitch of assurance, and so it will be something, that they have seized upon by their own will, and not received as the genuine effects of their state in grace. Whereas, supposing (but not granting) this assurance to be the proper effect of a certain degree of the new birth, yet it is an effect that is not to be sought for beforehand, but only to be received when its proper cause has produced it

(40.) It is a great error, to fix any certain marks or effects to such a degree of regeneration; for its effects will be various in different persons, from a variety of causes, both on the part of God, and man

The truly pious Christian, in whom the Holy Ghost dwelleth as in his

temple, is indeed in a state of high acquiescence in God; but he wants no more to have this acquiescence turned into an assurance of his own mind, that he cannot fall from his state of grace, than he wants to have the promises of God made sure to him, by the promise of some mortal man

And if it pleases God to impress strongly and plainly upon his mind, that his salvation is secured, he receives it, as he does everything from God, with a grateful mind; yet will he not rest in it, or receive it as a sign of his high regeneration, but rather as a sign that God saw his weakness stood in need of it; and so will pass over it, and return to an humble, total resignation of his whole soul, spirit, and body, both for time and eternity, into the hands of God, through faith in the merits of his savior Jesus Christ

Least of all can such a one call peremptorily upon others, for such an assurance as he has had, or condemn their resignation and peace in the want of it; he will be more afraid of thus meddling with the things of God, than of being a busy-body in other men's matters

(41.) The only useful question in this matter, is this, how a man may know that he is in the way of regeneration, that he is spiritually alive, and growing in the inward and new man

It may be answered, just as the state, nature, and life of the natural man makes itself to be known, and felt. The soul of man, or that which is the subject both of the old and new nature, is not two, but one soul. The fire of the soul, or that spiritual fire which is the soul itself, is kindled or enlightened by the light of the sun; this makes the natural man, and from whence the imagination, will, desires, thoughts, and inclinations of the natural man arise

The same individual fire-soul, enlightened by the Son of God, makes the true new man, from which soul thus enlightened, the imagination, will, desires, thoughts, and inclinations of the new man arise. So that the same proofs are to be expected in both cases, the spiritual man is to know that he is alive in the same manner, as the natural man knows and feels his life. In these things, in the imagination, will, desires, thoughts, and inclinations, consists the life of each nature; and what are more than these, are to be considered as the outward fruits and effects of each nature

(42.) Now though the natural life in all men is one and the same, yet there are under it variety of complexions, which makes men of the same nature, almost infinitely different from one another. Now the matter is just thus with the spiritual man, or in the inward world. As many different complexions arise in the soul, enlightened by the Son of God, as in the soul, enlightened by the outward light of this world

For the outward world is but a glass, or representation of the inward; and everything and variety of things in temporal nature, must have its root, or hidden cause, in something that is more inward

It is therefore a well-grounded, and undeniable truth, that the new spiritual man hath his particular complexion, as sure as the outward and natural man hath. Hence it is, that there has been so great a difference, in the form and character of the most eminent and faithful servants of God; one could think of nothing but penitence and penitential austerities; another all inflamed with the love of God, could think or speak of nothing else; some have been driven into a holy solitude, living as John the Baptist; others have been wholly taken up in works of charity, loving their neighbor even more than themselves. A great variety of this kind, has been always found amongst those, who were most truly devoted to God, whose variety, is not only not hurtful in itself, nor displeasing to God, but is as much according to his will, and the designs of his wisdom, as the difference between cherubims and seraphims, or the variety of the stars in the firmament

Every complexion of the inward man, when sanctified by humility, and suffering itself to be turned, and struck, and moved by the Holy Spirit of God, according to its particular frame and turn, helps mightily to increase that harmony of divine praise, thanksgiving, and adoration, which must arise from different instruments, sounds, and voices. To condemn this variety in the servants of God, or to be angry at those who have not served him, in the way that we have chosen for ourselves, is but too plain a sign, that we have not enough renounced the elements of selfishness, pride, and anger

(43.) From this variety of complexions both in the inward and outward man, we may make some useful observations. And the first may be this,

that every man whose complexion is strong in him, as to one particular kind, is vehemently inclined to imprint the same upon others, and that others of the same kind, are naturally disposed to catch and receive it from him. But I shall consider this matter only with regard to religion. Let it be supposed that men of a certain complexion, have taken upon them to try the religious state of others by these questions: Are you sure that you should be able to die a martyr? Do you find certain strong resolutions, not in your head, or your brain, but in your inward man, that you would not refuse a martyrdom of any kind? Have you the witness of the Spirit within you, bearing witness with your spirit, that you are in this state

Now, it is beyond all question, that an examination of this kind, or a demand of such a faith, can have no better foundation than complexion. Who do you think would be most likely to come into this faith? First, it would be those that were most unlikely to keep it. It would be those who knew the least of themselves, and whose piety had more of heat than of light in it. It would be those, whose outward man was of the same complexion, that was sanguine, capable of a false fire, and willing to have the glory of resolutions, and fine persuasions at so easy a rate. Let it now be supposed, that people of another complexion should put questions such as these: Do you know and feel that all your sins are forgiven you? Do you know when and where, or at what time, and in what place, you received this forgiveness? Do you know when and where you ceased to be one of those sinners called to repentance? And became one of those whole, that need not a physician? Have you an absolute assurance of your salvation, and that you cannot possibly fall from your state of grace? Now who may be thought the most likely to come into this religion

First, not he who is deeply humble, that abhors self-justification, and truly knows the free grace of God. Such a one would say, I believe the forgiveness of sins, with as much assurance, as I believe there is a God; I believe that Jesus Christ does now to all those who have a true, and full faith in him, that which he did to those who so believed in him, when he was upon earth. That he forgives their sins, as immediately, as certainly, as fully, as when he said by an outward voice, "Thy sins are forgiven thee." I believe that in this faith lies all our strength, and possibility of growing up in the inward man, and recovering that image and likeness of God, in which we were created; that to this faith all things are possible,

and that by this faith, every enemy we have, whether he be within us, or without us, may, and must be entirely overcome. I believe, that to repentance and faith in Christ, salvation is made as secure, and as absolutely assured, as paradise was made secure to the thief upon the cross, by the express word of our savior. I believe that my own sins, were they greater, and more than the sins of the whole world, would be wholly expiated, and taken away by my faith, in the blood and life of my blessed savior

But if I now want to add something of my own to this faith, if this great and glorious faith is defective, and saves me not, till I can add my own sense, and my own feeling to it, at such a time or place, is not this saying in the plainest manner, that faith alone cannot justify me? Is not this making this faith in the blood of Christ defective, and insufficient to my salvation, till as self-justification, an own-pleasure, an own-taste, are joined with it? Might it not better be said, that faith could not justify me till it had works, than that it cannot justify me without these inward workings, feelings, witnessings, of my own mind, sense, and imagination? Is there not likely to be a more hurtful self-seeking, a more hurtful self-confidence, a more hurtful self-trust, a more dangerous self-deceit, in making faith to depend upon these inward workings and feelings, than in making it depend upon outward good works of our own

Secondly, no one who was truly resigned unto God in all things, would come into these questions; for to be resigned unto God in all things, and yet seek to be not resigned to him, in these great matters above mentioned, is a contradiction

Such a one would say, I seek not to have an inward sense and feeling of the certainty of these things, because that would be departing from that pure, entire, full, and naked faith in God, and resignation of myself to him, which alone can justify me in his sight, and make me capable of the operations of his Holy Spirit. He can only then, do all his good pleasure in me, when I have no own will, no self-seeking; this total resignation of myself to him, is the one only immediate disposition, or capability of enjoying God himself with all his infinite treasures, particular impressions, sensible convictions, strong tastes, high satisfactions, though they may be often the good gifts of God, yet if they are much sought for, or rested in,

they minister food to a spiritual self-love, and self-seeking, and lay the foundation of spiritual pride; and so become a wall of partition between God and the soul. For the soul may be as fully fixed in selfishness, through a fondness of sensible sweetness, pious motions, and delightful enjoyments in spiritual things, as by a fondness for earthly satisfactions

Thirdly, no one, whose heart was truly touched by a pure and perfect love of God, could come into these questions. For this love cannot seek for self-comfort in the answer of such questions as these

Such a person would say, my religion consists in living wholly to my beloved, according to his satisfaction, and not my own. What God wills, that I will; what God loves, that I love; what pleases God, that pleases me. I have no desire to know anything of myself, or to feel anything in myself, but that I am an instrument in the hands of God, to be, to do, and suffer, according to his good pleasure. I am content to know that I love and rejoice in God alone, that he is what he is, and that I am what he pleases to make of me, and do with me

(44.) Seeing then it appears that the truly humble man, the man that is wholly resigned to God, and the pure lover of him, are not likely to come into the religion of these questions, let us now see who may be supposed ready to receive it

First, all young persons, whose passions had not yet been much awakened, or spent their fire; who had but little experience of themselves, and the deceitfulness of their own hearts; for everything in their nature, would help them to like, love, and obtain such an assurance, strength of conviction, inward feeling, as is here required

Secondly, all restless self-lovers, who were uneasy with themselves, and everything else, who could find nothing in religion, or common life, that enough pleased them; these would be easily persuaded to work themselves up into a belief, that their sins were forgiven them at such a time, or that Christ took an entire possession of them as such a place. For hearing that true religion consisted solely in this, and that they only wanted it, because of their want of faith in it, they would naturally embrace this, as the shortest way to comfort and rest in themselves, in their own self-convictions

Thirdly, all persons of a sanguine, tender, and imaginary complexion, would be likely to strike in with the religion of these questions. For such persons receiving everything strongly, and having a power of believing and imagining almost in any degree, as they please, they would not find it hard, to comply with doctrines so suited to their nature, and which indulged that in them, which wanted most to be indulged, a sanguine imagination

Fourthly, all those who so blaspheme God, as to make him from all eternity absolutely to elect some to an irresistible salvation, and absolutely to reprobate others to an unavoidable damnation. For there could be no subsisting under such an horrid belief as this, but by those, who through a blind partiality, strong bias of self-love, and self-esteem, can work themselves up into a full awareness, inward infallible feeling, that they are in the number of the absolutely elected from all eternity

Lastly, these questions are a great bait to all kinds of hypocrites, who must find themselves much inclined to enter into a religion, where they may pass immediately for saints, upon their own testimony, and stand in the highest rank of piety, and of interest in Christ, merely by their own laying claim to it

(45.) Suppose it was to be asked Christians, as necessary to their salvation, Do you believe and know that you have the self-denial and mortification of John the Baptist? Have you an inward conviction that you have a zeal equal to that of St. Paul? Have you an assurance that your love is full as high as that of John the Evangelist? That your penitence is equal to that of Mary Magdalene

Could these questions, with any warrant from scripture, be put to all Christians, as terms of their salvation

Yet there is as much foundation in the gospel, for putting such questions as these, and making the salvation of Christians to depend upon them, as for asking them, on the same account, when, and where, they felt their sins were forgiven them? When and where they felt Christ to take an entire possession of them? When and where they felt themselves made sure of their salvation, and incapable of falling from their state of grace

For what is all this but calling, hastening, and stirring up people to seek for

self-justification, and compelling them to think highly, and affirm rashly of themselves, in order to be saved? Why might it not be as well to call upon them to say, I feel myself to be as good as St. Paul, as pious as St. John, as to say, I feel that my salvation is secure, and that I cannot fall from my state of grace? Is not this making faith in one's self, as good, as necessary, and as beneficial to us, as faith in Christ

Would it not be as well, nay better, to make good works of our own, necessary to true faith, than to make self-justification, which is not a good work, to be the very essence and perfection of it

The matter will not be much mended by saying, that this feeling and assurance is acknowledged to be the pure gift of God, and so cannot be called our own, or our own justification. For if I have not this gift of God, till I pronounce it myself, till my own feeling and assurance confirms it to me, I am self-justified, because my justification arises, from what I feel and declare of myself

(46.) How strangely must they have read the gospel, who can take a naked implicit faith, and an humble total resignation of our spirit, state, and life, into the mercy and goodness of God, to be not only a poor and imperfect, but a reprobate state; or that a man has no true and saving faith, till it is an infallible own-feeling, and self-assurance? What must such people think of our savior dying upon the cross, with these words in his mouth, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!" Will they say that this is a dangerous state? Is the spirit of Christ here to be renounced? Will they say, that no new-born Christian can die in this manner? Or that if he does, he is not in a state of salvation

To know no more, and to seek to know no more of our salvation, than we can know by an implicit faith, and absolute resignation of ourselves to God in Christ Jesus, is the true saving knowledge of Christ, and such as keeps us in the highest degree of fitness to receive our perfect salvation

(47.) I hope it will here be observed, that I no way depreciate, undervalue, or reject any particular impressions, strong influences, delightful sensations, or heavenly foretastes in the inward man, which the Holy Spirit of God may at times bestow upon good souls; I leave them their just worth, I acknowledge them to be the good gifts of God, as special calls,

and awakenings to forsake our sins, as great incitements to deny ourselves, and take up our cross, and follow Christ with greater courage, and resolution

They may be as beneficial, and useful to us in our spiritual life, as other blessings of God, such as prosperity, health, happy complexion, and the like. But then, as outward blessings, remarkable providences, religious complexion, and the like, may be very serviceable to awaken us, and excite our conversion to God, and much assist the spiritual life; so they may very easily have a contrary effect, serve to fill us with pride, and self-satisfaction, and make us esteem ourselves, as greater favorites of God, than those that want them. Who may yet be led to a higher degree of goodness, be in a more purified state, and stand nearer to God in their poor, naked, and destitute condition, than we in the midst of great blessings

It is just thus with regard to those inward blessings of the spiritual life. They are so many spurs, motives, and incitements to live wholly unto God; yet they may instead of that, fill us with self-satisfaction and self-esteem, and prompt us to despise others that want them, as in a poor, mean, and reprobate state; who yet may be higher advanced, and stand in a nearer degree of union with God, by humility, faith, resignation, and pure love, in their inward poverty and emptiness, than we who live high upon spiritual satisfaction, and can talk of nothing, but our feasts of fat things

All that I would here say of these inward delights and enjoyments, is only this, they are not holiness, they are not piety, they are not perfection, but they are God's gracious allurements, and calls to seek after holiness and spiritual perfection. They are not to be sought for, for their own sakes; they are not to be prayed for, but with such a perfect indifference and resignation, as we must pray for any earthly blessings; they are not to be rested in, as the perfection of our souls, but to be received as cordials, that suppose us to be sick, faint, and languishing; and ought rather to convince us, that we are as yet, but babes, than that we are really men of God

But to demand them in others, to make them uneasy under the want of them, full of search and endeavor how to come at them, and satisfied in the enjoyment of them, is as great a mistake in itself, and as prejudicial to true

piety, as to make outward blessings of providence, marks of salvation, or worldly poverty, pains, and distress, to be proofs, that we are not born of God

“There are indeed impressions and communications from God, which are more necessary and essential to the pious life of the soul, than the impressions of the sun are to the comfortable life of our outward man. And he that prays for nothing else but these divine communications and impressions, who thinks of nothing else, trusts in nothing else, as able to comfort, strengthen, and enrich his soul; he that is thus all prayer, all love, all desire, and all faith, in these communications and impressions from above, is just in the same state of sobriety, as he that only prays that God would not leave him to himself. For he that is without anything of these communications and impressions of God upon him, is in the same state of death and separation from God, as the devils are.” (“Demonstration of the gross errors, etc., in the Plain Account of the Sacrament, p. 287.)

These impressions or operations of God upon our souls, are of the essence of religion, which has no goodness in it, but so far as it introduces the life, power, and presence of God into the soul. The praying therefore for impressions of this kind from God, is only praying that we may not be left to ourselves; to pray always for these with faith, and hunger and thirst after them, is only praying earnestly, that the kingdom of God may come, and his will be done in us

For the soul is only so far cleansed from its corruption, so far delivered from the power of sin, and so far purified, as it has renounced all own will, and own desire, to have nothing, receive nothing, and be nothing, but what the one will of God chooses for it, and does to it

This, and this alone is the true kingdom of God opened in the soul, when stripped of all selfishness, it has only one love, and one will in it, when it has no motion or desire, but what branches from the love of God, and resigns itself wholly to the will of God

There is nothing evil, or the cause of evil to either man, or devil, but his own will; there is nothing good in itself, but the will of God; he therefore who wholly renounces his own will, turns away from all evil; and he who gives himself up wholly to the will of God, puts himself in the possession

of all that is good

(48.) It may freely be granted, that conversion to God, is often very sudden and instantaneous, unexpectedly raised from variety of occasions. Thus, one by seeing only a withered tree (Frere Laurent.), another by reading the lives and deaths of the antediluvian fathers, one by hearing of heaven, another hell, one by reading of the love, or wrath of God, another of the sufferings of Christ, may find himself, as it were, melted into penitence all on a sudden. It may be granted also, that the greatest sinner, may in a moment be converted to God, and feel himself wounded in such a degree, as perhaps those never were, who had been turning to God all their lives

But then it is to be observed, that this suddenness of change, or flash of conversion, is by no means of the essence of true conversion, and is no more to be demanded in ourselves, or others, than such a light from heaven, as shone round St. Paul, and cast him to the ground. Secondly, that no one is to expect, or require, that another should receive his conversion, or awakening, from the same cause, or in the same manner, as he has done, that is, that heaven, or hell, or the justice, or love of God, or faith in Christ, either as our light, or our atonement, must needs be the first awakening of the soul, because it has been so with him. Thirdly, that this stroke of conversion, is not to be considered, as signifying our high state of a new birth in Christ, or a proof that we are on a sudden made new creatures, but that we are thus suddenly called, and stirred up to look after a newness of nature. Fourthly, that this sensibility, or manifest feeling of the operations of God upon our souls, which we have experienced in these first awakenings, is not to be expected, or desired, to go along with us, through the course of our purification. Fifthly, that regeneration, or the renewal of our first birth and state, is something entirely distinct, from this first sudden conversion, or call to repentance; that it is not a thing done in an instant, but is a certain process, a gradual release from our captivity and disorder, consisting of several stages and degrees, both of death and life, which the soul must go through, before it can have thoroughly put off the old man. I will not say that this must needs be in the same degree in all, or that there cannot be any exceptions to this. But thus much is true and certain, that Jesus Christ is our pattern, that what he did for us, that we are also to do for ourselves, or, in other words, we must follow him in the

regeneration. For what he did, he did, both as our atonement, and example, his process, or course of life, temptations, sufferings, denying his own will, death and resurrection, all done, and gone through, on our account, because the human soul wanted such a process of regeneration and redemption; because, only in such a gradual process, all that was lost in Adam, could be restored to us again. And therefore it is beyond all doubt, that this process is to be looked upon, as the stated method of our purification

It is well worth observing, that our savior's greatest trials, were near the end of his process or life, that he then experienced the sharpest part of our redemption. This might sufficiently show us, that our first awakenings have carried us but a little way; that we should not then begin to be self-assured of our own salvation, but remember, that we stand at a great distance from, and in great ignorance of our severest trials

To sum up all in a word: nothing hath separated us from God but our own will, or rather our own will is our separation from God. All the disorder, and corruption, and malady of our nature, lies in a certain fixedness of our own will, imagination, and desire, wherein we live to ourselves, according to our own will, imagination, and desires. There is not the smallest degree of evil in us, but what arises from this selfishness, because we are thus, all in all to ourselves

It is this self, that our savior calls upon us to deny; it is this life of self, that we are to hate and to lose, that the kingdom of God may arise in us, that is, that God's will may be done in us. All other sacrifices that we make, whether of worldly goods, honors, or pleasures, are but small matters, compared to that sacrifice and destruction of all selfishness, as well spiritual, as natural, that must be made, before our regeneration hath its perfect work

There is a denial of our own will, and certain degrees even of self-denying virtues, which yet give no disturbance to this selfishness. To be humble, mortified, devout, patient in a certain degree, and to be persecuted for our virtues, is no hurt to this selfishness; nay, spiritual-self must have all these virtues to subsist upon; and his life consists, in seeing, knowing, and feeling the bulk, strength, and reality of them. But still in all this show, and

glitter of virtue, there is an unpurified bottom on which they stand, there is a selfishness, which can no more enter into the kingdom of heaven, than the grossness of flesh and blood can enter into it

What we are to feel, and undergo in these last purifications, when the deepest root of all selfishness, as well spiritual as natural, is to be plucked up, and torn from us, or how we shall be able to stand in that trial, are both of them equally impossible to be known by us beforehand

It is enough for us to know, that we hunger and thirst after the righteousness which is in Christ Jesus; that by faith we desire, and hope to be in him new creatures; to know, that the greatest humility, the most absolute resignation of our whole selves unto God, is our greatest and highest fitness, to receive our greatest and highest purification, from the hands of God.

