

Monergism



ALIVE OR DEAD?

J.C. RYLE

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We are Spiritually Dead by Nature!

"And He has made you alive, who were once dead in trespasses and sins." Ephesians 2:1

The question which forms the title of this paper deserves a thousand thoughts. I invite every reader of this volume to look at it carefully, and ponder it well. Search your own heart, and do not lay down this book without solemn self-inquiry. Are you among the living, or among the dead?

Listen to me while I try to help you to an answer. Give me your attention, while I unfold this matter, and show you what God has said about it in the Scriptures. If I say hard things, it is not because I do not love you. I write as I do, because I desire your salvation. He is your best friend who tells you the most truth.

I. First then, let me tell you what we all are by nature. We are spiritually Dead!

"Dead" is a strong word—but it is not my own coining and invention. I did not choose it. The Holy Spirit taught Paul to write it down about the Ephesians, ""And He has made you alive, who were once **dead** in trespasses and sins." The Lord Jesus Christ made use of it in the parable of the prodigal son, "This my son was *dead* and is alive again." (Luke 15:24, 32.) You will read it also in the first Epistle to Timothy, "She that lives in pleasure is *dead* while she lives." (1 Tim. 5:6.) Shall a mortal man be wise above that which is written? Must I not take heed to speak that which I find in the Bible, and neither less nor more?

"Dead" is an awful idea, and one that man is most unwilling to receive. He does not like to allow the whole extent of his soul's disease—he shuts his eyes to the real amount of his danger. Many a one will allow us to say, that naturally most people "are not quite what they ought to be—they are thoughtless—they are unsteady—they are mirthful—they are wild—they are not serious enough." But dead? Oh, no! We must not mention it. It is going too far to say that. The idea is a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence."

"This is the reason we are no better, because our disease is not perfectly known—this is the reason we are no better, because we know not how bad we are."—*Usher's Sermons, preached at Oxford, 1650.*

But what we like in religion is of very little consequence. The only question is, What is written? What says the Lord? God's thoughts are

not man's thoughts, and God's words are not man's words. God says of every living person who is not a real, thorough, genuine, decided Christian, be he high or low, rich or poor, old or young—*he is spiritually dead.*

In this, as in everything else, God's words are right. Nothing could be said more correct, nothing more accurate, nothing more faithful, nothing more true. Stay a little, and let me reason this out with you. Come and see.

What would you have said, if you had seen Joseph weeping over his father Jacob? "He fell upon his face, and wept upon him, and kissed him." (Gen. 50:1.) But there was no reply to his affection. All about that aged countenance was unmoved, silent, and still. Doubtless you would have guessed the reason. Jacob was dead.

What would you have said, if you had heard the Levite speaking to his wife, when he found her lying before the door in Gibeah? "Up," he said, "and let us be going. But she did not answer." (Judges 19:28.) His words were thrown away. There she lay, motionless, stiff, and cold. You know the cause. She was dead.

What would you have thought, if you had seen the Amalekite stripping Saul of his royal ornaments in Mount Gilboa? He "took from him the crown that was upon his head, and the bracelet that was on his arm." (2 Sam. 1:10.) There was no resistance. Not a muscle moved in that proud face—not a finger was raised to prevent him. And why? Saul was dead.

What would you have thought, if you had met the widow's son in the gate of Nain, lying in a coffin, wrapped about with grave-clothes, followed by his weeping mother, carried slowly towards the tomb? (Luke 7:12.) Doubtless it would have been all clear to you. It would have needed no explanation. The young man was dead.

Now I say this is just the condition of every man by nature in the matter of his soul. I say this is just the state of the vast majority of

people around us in spiritual things. God calls to them continually—by mercies, by afflictions, by ministers, by His word—but they do not hear His voice. The Lord Jesus Christ mourns over them, pleads with them, sends them gracious invitations, knocks at the door of their hearts—but they do not regard it. The crown and glory of their being, that precious jewel, their immortal soul, is being seized, plundered, and taken away—and they are utterly unconcerned. The devil is carrying them away, day after day, along the broad road that leads to destruction—and they allow him to make them his captives without a struggle. And this is going on everywhere—all around us—among all classes—throughout the length and breadth of the land. You know it in your own conscience while you read this paper—you must be aware of it. You cannot deny it. And what then, I ask, can be said more perfectly true than that which God says—we are all by nature spiritually *dead*?

Yes! when a man's heart is cold and unconcerned about religion—when his hands are never employed in doing God's work—when his feet are not familiar with God's ways—when his tongue is seldom or never used in prayer and praise—when his ears are deaf to the voice of Christ in the Gospel—when his eyes are blind to the beauty of the kingdom of heaven—when his mind is full of the world, and has no room for spiritual things—when these marks are to be found in a man, the word of the Bible is the right word to use about him—and that word is, "Dead."

We may not like this perhaps. We may shut our eyes both to facts in the world, and texts in the Word. But God's truth must be spoken, and to keep it back does positive harm. Truth must be spoken, however condemning it may be. So long as a man does not serve God with body, soul, and spirit, he is not really alive. So long as he puts the first things last and the last first, buries his talent like an unprofitable servant, and brings the Lord no revenue of honor, so long in God's sight he is dead. He is not filling the place in creation for which he was intended; he is not using his powers and faculties as God meant them to be used. The poet's words are strictly true—

"He only lives, who lives to God,
And all are dead beside."

This is the true explanation of sin not felt, and sermons not believed—and good advice not followed—and the Gospel not embraced—and the world not forsaken—and the cross not taken up—and self-will not mortified—and evil habits not laid aside—and the Bible seldom read—and the knee never bent in prayer. Why is all this on every side. The answer is simple—*Men are dead!*

This is the true account of that army of excuses, which so many make "with one consent." Some have no learning, and some have no time. Some are consumed with business and the care of money, and some with poverty. Some have difficulties in their own families, and some in their own health. Some have peculiar obstacles in their calling, which others, we are told, cannot understand; and others have peculiar drawbacks at home, and they wait to have them removed. But God has a shorter word in the Bible, which describes all these people at once. He says, *They are dead*. If spiritual life began in these people's hearts, their excuses would soon vanish away.

This is the true explanation of many things which wring a faithful minister's heart. Many around him never attend a place of worship at all. Many attend so irregularly, that it is clear they think it of no importance. Many attend once on a Sunday who might just as easily attend twice. Many never come to the Lord's table—and never appear at a weekday means of grace of any kind. And why is all this? Often, far too often, there can be only one reply about these people—*They are dead*.

See now how all professing Christians should examine themselves and try their own state. It is not in churchyards alone where the dead are to be found; there are only too many inside our churches, and close to our pulpits—too many on the benches, and too many in the pews. The land is like the valley in Ezekiel's vision, "full of bones, very many, and very dry." (Ezek. 37:2) There are dead souls in all our

parishes, and dead souls in all our streets. There is hardly a family in which all live to God; there is hardly a house in which there is not someone dead. Oh, let us all search and look at home! Let us prove our own selves. Are we *alive or dead*?

See, too, how sad is the condition of all who have gone through no spiritual change, whose hearts are still the same as in the day they were born. There is a mountain of division between them and heaven. They have yet to "pass from death to life." (1 John 3:14.) Oh, that they did but see and know their danger! Alas, it is one fearful mark of spiritual death, that, like natural death—it is not felt! We lay our beloved ones tenderly and gently in their narrow beds—but they feel nothing of what we do. "The dead," says the wise man, "know nothing." (Eccl. 9:5.) And this is just the case with *dead souls*.

See, too, what reason ministers have to be anxious about their congregations. We feel that time is short, and life uncertain. We know that death spiritual is the high road that leads to death eternal. We fear lest any of our hearers should die in their sins, unprepared, unrenewed, impenitent, unchanged. Oh, marvel not if we often speak strongly and plead with you warmly! We dare not give you flattering titles, amuse you with trifles, say smooth things, and cry "Peace, peace," when life and death are at stake, and nothing less. The plague is among you. We feel that we stand between the living and the dead. We must and will "use great plainness of speech." "If the trumpet gives an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself for the battle?" (2 Cor. 3:12; 1 Cor. 14:8.)

We Must Be Quickened or Made Spiritually Alive

II. Let me tell you, in the second place, what every man needs who would be saved. *He must be quickened and made spiritually alive.*

Life is the mightiest of all possessions. From death to life is the mightiest of all changes. And no change short of this will ever avail to fit man's soul for heaven. Yes! it is not a little mending and alteration—a little cleansing and purifying—a little painting and patching—a little whitewashing and varnishing—a little turning over a new leaf and putting on a new outside that is needed. It is the bringing in of something altogether new—the planting within us of a new nature, a new being—a new principle—a new mind. This alone, and nothing less than this, will ever meet the necessities of man's soul. We need not merely a new skin—but a new heart.

"It is not a little reforming will save the man, no, nor all the morality in the world, nor all the common graces of God's spirit, nor the outward change of the life; they will not do, unless we are quickened, and have a new life wrought in us."—*Usher's Sermons.*

To hew a block of marble from the quarry—and carve it into a noble statue; to break up a waste wilderness—and turn it into a garden of flowers; to melt a lump of ironstone—and forgo it into watch-springs—all these are mighty changes. Yet they all come short of the change which every child of Adam requires, for they are merely the same thing in a new form, and the same substance in a new shape. But man requires the grafting in of that which he had not before. He needs a change as great as a resurrection from the dead—he must become a new creature. "Old things must pass away, and all things must become new." He must be "born again, born from above, born of God." The natural birth is not a whit more necessary to the life of the body, than is the spiritual birth to the life of the soul. (2 Cor. 5:17. John 3:3.)

I know well this is a hard saying. I know the children of this world dislike to hear that they must be born again. It pricks their consciences—it makes them feel they are further off from heaven

than they are willing to allow. It seems like a narrow door which they have not yet stooped to enter, and they would gladly make the door wider, or climb in some other way. But I dare not give place by subjection in this matter. I will not foster a delusion, and tell people they only need repent a little, and stir up a gift they have within them, in order to become real Christians. I dare not use any other language than that of the Bible; and I say, in the words which are written for our learning, "We all need to be born again—we are all naturally dead, and must be made alive."

If we had seen Manasseh, King of Judah, at one time filling Jerusalem with idols, and murdering his children in honor of false gods—and then at another time purifying the temple, putting down idolatry, and living a godly life; if we had seen Zacchaeus the publican of Jericho, at one time cheating, plundering, and covetous—at another following Christ, and giving half his goods to the poor; if we had seen the servants of Nero's household, at one time conforming to their master's profligate ways—at another of one heart and mind with the Apostle Paul; if we had seen the ancient father Augustine, at one time living in fornication—at another walking closely with God; if we had seen our own Reformer Latimer, at one time preaching earnestly against the truth as it is in Jesus—at another spending and being spent even to death in Christ's cause; if we had seen the New Zealanders, or Tinnevelly Hindus, at one time blood-thirsty, immoral, or sunk in abominable superstitions—at another holy, pure, and believing Christians; if we had seen these wonderful changes, or any of them, I ask any sensible Christian what we would have said? Would we have been content to call them nothing more than amendments and alterations? would we have been satisfied with saying that Augustine had "reformed his ways," and that Latimer had "turned over a new leaf"? Verily if we said no more than this, the very stones would cry out. I say in all these cases there was nothing less than a new birth, a resurrection of human nature, a quickening of the dead. These are the right words to use. All other language is weak, poor, beggarly, unscriptural, and short of the truth.

Now I will not shrink from saying plainly, we all need the same kind of change, if we are to be saved. The difference between us and any of those I have just named is far less than it appears. Take off the outward crust, and you will find the same nature beneath, in us and them—an evil nature, requiring a complete change. The face of the earth is very different in different climates—but the heart of the earth, I believe, is everywhere the same. Go where you will, from one end to the other, you would always find the granite, or other primitive rocks, beneath your feet, if you only bored down deep enough. And it is just the same with men's hearts. Their customs and their colors, their ways and their laws, may all be utterly unlike; but the inner man is always the same. Their hearts are all alike at the bottom—all stony, all hard, all ungodly, all needing to be thoroughly renewed. The Englishman and the New Zealander stand on the same level in this matter. Both are naturally dead, and both need to be made alive. Both are children of the same father Adam who fell by sin, and both need to be "born again," and made children of God.

Whatever part of the globe we live in, our **eyes** need to be opened—naturally we never see our sinfulness, guilt, and danger. Whatever nation we belong to our **understandings** need to be enlightened—naturally we know little or nothing of the plan of salvation—like the Babel-builders, we think to get to heaven our own way. Whatever church we may belong to, our **wills** need to be bent in the right direction—naturally we would never choose the things which are for our peace; we would never come to Christ. Whatever be our rank in life, our affections need to be turned to things above—naturally we only set them on things below, earthly, sensual, short-lived, and vain. Pride must give place to humility—self-righteousness to self-abasement—carelessness to seriousness—worldliness to holiness—unbelief to faith. Satan's dominion must be put down within us, and the kingdom of God set up. Self must be crucified, and Christ must reign. Until these things come to pass, we are dead as stones. When these things begin to take place, and not until then, we are spiritually alive.

"Man's understanding is so darkened that he can see nothing of God in God, nothing of holiness in holiness, nothing of good in good, nothing of evil in evil, nor anything of sinfulness in sin. Nay, it is so darkened that he fancies himself to see good in evil, and evil in good, happiness in sin, and misery in holiness."—*Berridge*

I dare say this sounds like foolishness to some. But many a living man could stand up this day and testify that it is true. Many an one could tell us that he knows it all by experience, and that he does indeed feel himself a new man. He loves the things that once he hated, and hates the things that once he loved. He has new habits, new companions, new ways, new tastes, new feelings, new opinions, new sorrows, new joys, new anxieties, new pleasures, new hopes, and new fears. In short, the whole bias and current of his being is changed. Ask his nearest relations and friends, and they would bear witness to it. Whether they liked it or not, they would be obliged to confess he was no longer the same.

"How wonderfully does the new born soul differ from his former self. He lives a new life, he walks in a new way, he steers his course by a new compass, and towards a new coast. His principle is new, his pattern is new, his practices are new, his projects are new, all is new. He ravel out all he had wove before, and employs himself wholly about another work."—*George Swinnocke*. 1660.

Many a one could tell you that once he did not think himself such a very great transgressor. At any rate he fancied he was no worse than others. Now he would say with the apostle Paul, he feels himself the "chief of sinners." (1 Tim. 1. 15.)

"I cannot pray—but I sin—I cannot hear or preach a sermon—but I sin—I cannot give an alms, or receive the sacrament—but I sin—nay, I cannot so much as confess my sins—but my confessions are still aggravations of them. My repentance needs to be repented of, my tears want washing, and the very washing of my tears needs still to be washed over again with the blood of my Redeemer."—*Beveridge*.

"Woe is me, that man should think there is anything in me! He is my witness, before whom I am as crystal, that the secret house-devils, that bear me too often company, that the corruption which I find within, make me go with low sails."—*Rutherford's Letters*. 1637.

Once he did not consider he had a bad heart. He might have his faults, and be led away by bad company and temptations—but 'he had a good heart at the bottom'. Now he would tell you, he knows no heart so bad as his own. He finds it "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." (Jer. 17:6.)

Once he did not suppose it was a very hard matter to get to heaven. He thought he had only to repent, and say a few prayers, and do what he could, and Christ would make up what was lacking. Now he believes the way is narrow, and few find it. He is convinced he could never have made his own peace with God. He is persuaded that nothing but the blood of Christ could wash away his sins. His only hope is to be "justified by faith without the deeds of the law." (Rom. 3:28.)

Once he could see no beauty and excellence in the Lord Jesus Christ. He could not understand some ministers speaking so much about Him. Now he would tell you He is the pearl above all price, the chief among ten thousand, his Redeemer, his Advocate, his Priest, his King, his Physician, his Shepherd, his Friend, his All.

Once he thought lightly about sin. He could not see the necessity of being so particular about it. He could not think a man's words, and thoughts, and actions, were of such importance, and required such watchfulness. Now he would tell you sin is the abominable thing which he hates, the sorrow and burden of his life. He longs to be more holy. He can enter thoroughly into Whitefield's desire, "I want to go where I shall neither sin myself, nor see others sin any more."

"I am sick of all I do, and stand astonished that the Redeemer still continues to make use of and bless me. Surely I am more foolish than any man—no one receives so much and does so little."—Whitefield's Letters.

Once he found no pleasure in means of grace. The Bible was neglected. His prayers, if he had any, were a mere form. Sunday was a tiresome day. Sermons were a weariness, and often sent him to sleep. Now all is altered. These things are the food, the comfort, the delight of his soul.

Once he disliked earnest-minded Christians. He shunned them as melancholy, low-spirited, weak people. Now they are the excellent of the earth, of whom he cannot see too much. He is never so happy as he is in their company. He feels if all men and women were saints, it would be heaven upon earth.

Once he cared only for this world, its pleasures, its business, its occupations, its rewards. Now he looks upon it as an empty, unsatisfying place; an inn—a lodging—a training-school for the life to come. His treasure is in heaven. His home is beyond the grave.

I ask once more, what is all this but new life? Such a change as I have described is no vision and fancy. It is a real actual thing, which not a few in this world have known or felt. It is not a picture of my own imagining. It is a true thing which some of us could find at this moment hard by our own doors. But wherever such a change does take place, there you see the thing of which I am now speaking—you see the *dead made alive*, a new creature, a soul born again. "So that if any one is in Christ, that one is a new creature; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." (2 Corinthians 5:17)

I would to God that changes such as this were more common! I would to God there were not such multitudes, of whom we must say even weeping, they know nothing about the matter at all. But,

common or not, one thing I say plainly, this is the kind of change we all need. I do not hold that all must have exactly the same experience. I allow most fully that the change is different, in degree, extent, and intensity, in different people. Grace may be weak, and yet true—life may be feeble, and yet real. But I do confidently affirm we must all go through something of this kind, if ever we mean to be saved. Until this sort of change has taken place, there is no life in us at all. We may be living Churchmen—but we are dead Christians.

"If we be still our old selves, no changelings at all, the same man that we came into the world, without mortification of our corruptions, without addition of grace and sanctification, surely we must seek us another Father, we are not yet the sons of God."—Hall, 1652.

"If you have anything less than regeneration, believe me, you can never see heaven. There is no hope of heaven until then—until you are born again."—*Usher's Sermons*.

Take it home, every man or woman that reads this paper, take it home to your own conscience, and look at it well. Some time or other, between the cradle and the grave, all who would be saved must be made alive. The words which good old Berridge had engraved on his tombstone are faithful and true, "Reader! are you born again? Remember! no salvation without a new birth."

See now what an amazing gulf there is between the Christian in name and form—and the Christian in deed and truth. It is not the difference of one being a little better, and the other a little worse than his neighbor—it is the difference between a state of life and a state of death. The smallest blade of grass that grows upon a Highland mountain is a more noble object than the fairest wax flower that was ever formed; for it has that which no science of man can impart—has *life*. The most splendid marble statue in Greece or Italy is nothing by the side of the poor sickly child that crawls over the cottage floor; for with all its beauty it is *dead*. And the weakest member of the family of Christ is far higher and more precious in God's eyes than the most

gifted man of the world. The one lives unto God, and shall live forever—the other, with all his intellect, is still dead in sins.

Oh, you that have passed from death to life, you have reason indeed to be thankful! Remember what you once were by nature—dead. Think what you are now by grace—alive. Look at the dry bones thrown up from the graves. Such were you; and who has made you to differ? Go and fall low before the footstool of your God. Bless Him for His grace, His free distinguishing grace. Say to Him often, "Who am I, Lord, that you have brought me hitherto? Why me? Why have you been merciful unto me?"

By What Means a Dead Soul Can be Made Spiritually Alive?

III. Let me tell you, in the third place—in what way alone this quickening can be brought about—by what means a dead soul can be made spiritually alive.

Surely, if I did not tell you this, it would be cruelty to write what I have written. Surely, it would be leading you into a dreary wilderness, and then leaving you without bread and water. It would be like marching you down to the Red Sea, and then bidding you walk over. It would be commanding you to make brick like Pharaoh, and yet refusing to provide you with straw. It would be like tying your hands and feet, and then desiring you to fight a good warfare, and "so run as to obtain the prize." I will not do so. I will not leave you, until I have pointed out the wicket-gate towards which you must run. By God's help, I will set before you the full provision there is made for dead souls. Listen to me a little longer, and I will once more show you what is written in the Scripture of truth.

One thing is very clear—we cannot work this mighty change ourselves. It is not in us. We have no strength or power to do it. We may change our sins—but we cannot change our hearts. We may take up a new way—but not a new nature. We may make considerable reforms and alterations. We may lay aside many outward bad habits, and begin to do many outward duties. But we cannot create a new principle within us. We cannot bring something out of nothing. The Ethiopian cannot change his skin, nor the leopard his spots. No more can we put life into our own souls. (Jerem. 13:23.)

"There is not one good duty which the natural man can do. If it should be said to him, Think but one good thought, and for it you shall go to heaven, he could not think it. Until God raises him from the sink of sin, as He did Lazarus from the grave, he cannot do anything that is well pleasing to God. He may do the works of a moral man—but to do the works of a man quickened and enlightened, is beyond his power."—*Usher's Sermons*.

"Nature can no more cast out nature, than Satan can cast out Satan."—*Thomas Watson*, 1653.

"Nature cannot raise itself to this, any more than a man can give natural being to himself."—*Leighton*.

Another thing is equally clear; no other man can do it for us. Ministers may preach to us, and pray with us—receive us at the font in baptism, admit us at the Lord's Table, and give us the bread and wine—but they cannot bestow spiritual life. They may bring in regularity in the place of disorder, and outward decency in the place of open sin. But they cannot go below the surface. They cannot reach our hearts. Paul may plant and Apollos water—but God alone can give the increase. (1 Cor. 3:6.) Who then can make a dead soul alive? No one can do it but God. He only who breathed into Adam's nostrils the breath of life, can ever make a dead sinner—a living Christian. He only who formed the world out of nothing in the day of creation, can make man a new creature. He only who said, "Let there be light, and

there was light," can cause spiritual light to shine into man's heart. He only who formed man out of the dust and gave life to his body can ever give life to his soul. His is the special office to do it by His Spirit, and His also is the power. (Gen. 1:2, 3.)

"To create or bring something out of nothing, is beyond the power of the strongest creature. It is above the strength of all people and angels to create the least blade of grass; God challenges this as His prerogative royal. (Isaiah 40:26.) Augustine said truly, To convert the little world 'man' is more than to create the great world."—*George Swinnocke, 1660.*

The glorious Gospel contains provision for our spiritual, as well as our eternal life. The Lord Jesus is a complete Savior. That mighty living Head has no dead members. His people are not only justified and pardoned—but quickened together with Him, and made partakers of His resurrection. To Him the Spirit joins the sinner, and raises him by that union from death to life. In Him the sinner lives after he has believed. The spring of all his vitality is the union between Christ and his soul, which the Spirit begins and keeps up. Christ is the appointed fountain of all spiritual life, and the Holy Spirit the appointed agent who conveys that life to our souls.

"Then do we begin to live, when we begin to have union with Christ the Fountain of Life, by His Spirit communicated to us—from this time we are to reckon our life."—*Flavel.*

"Christ is an universal principle of all life."—*Sibbes. 1635.*

Come to the Lord Jesus Christ, if you would have life. He will not cast you out. He has gifts, even for the rebellious. The moment the dead man touched the body of Elisha, he revived and stood upon his feet. (2 Kings 13:21.)—The moment you touch the Lord Jesus with the hand of faith, you are alive unto God, as well as forgiven all trespasses. Come, and your soul shall live.

I never despair of anyone becoming a decided Christian, whatever he may have been in days gone by. I know how great the change is from death to life. I know the mountains of division that seem to stand between some of us and heaven. I know the hardness, the prejudices, the desperate sinfulness of the natural heart. But I remember that God the Father made this beautiful and well-ordered world out of nothing. I remember the voice of the Lord Jesus could reach Lazarus when four days dead, and recall him even from the grave. I remember the amazing victories the Spirit of God has won in every nation under heaven. I remember all this, and feel that I never need despair. Yes! those among us who now seem most utterly dead in sins, may yet be raised to a new being, and walk before God in newness of life.

Why should it not be so? The Holy Spirit is a merciful and loving Spirit. He turns away from no man because of his vileness. He passes by no one because his sins are black and scarlet. There was nothing in the Corinthians that He should come down and quicken them. Paul reports of them that they were "fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, extortioners." "Such," he says, "were some of you." Yet even them the Spirit made alive. "You are washed," he writes, "you are sanctified, you are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Cor. 6:9-11.)

There was nothing in the Colossians, that He should visit their hearts. Paul tells us that "they walked in sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry." Yet them also the Spirit quickened. He made them "put off the old man with his deeds, and put on the new man which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him." (Coloss. 3:5-10.)

There was nothing in Mary Magdalene that the Spirit should make her soul alive. Once she had been "possessed with seven devils." There was once a time, if report be true, when she was a woman proverbial for vileness and iniquity. Yet even her the Spirit made a

new creature, separated her from her sins, brought her to Christ, made her "last at the cross, and first at the tomb."

Never, never will the Spirit turn away from a soul because of its corruption. He never has done so—He never will. It is His glory that He has purified the minds of the most impure, and made them temples for His own abode. He may yet take the worst of us, and make him a vessel of grace.

Why indeed should it not be so? The Spirit is an Almighty Spirit. He can change the stony heart into a heart of flesh. He can break up and destroy the strongest bad habits, like string in the fire. He can make the most difficult things seem easy, and the mightiest objections melt away like snow in spring. He can cut the bars of brass, and throw the gates of prejudice wide open. He can fill up every valley, and make every rough place smooth. He has done it often, and He can do it again.

"Such is the power of the Holy Spirit to regenerate people, and as it were to bring them forth anew, so that they shall be nothing like the people they were before."

The Spirit can take a Jew—the bitterest enemy of Christianity, the fiercest persecutor of true believers—the strongest stickler for Pharisaical notions, the most prejudiced opposer of Gospel doctrine—and turn that man into an earnest preacher of the very faith he once destroyed. He has done it already. He did it with the Apostle Paul.

The Spirit can take a Roman Catholic monk, brought up in the midst of Romish superstition—trained from his infancy to believe false doctrine, and obey the Pope—steeped to the eyes in error, and make that man the clearest upholder of justification by faith the world ever saw. He has done so already. He did it with Martin Luther.

The Spirit can take an English tinker, without learning, patronage, or money—a man at one time notorious for nothing so much as

blasphemy and swearing—and make that man write a pious book, which shall stand unrivaled and unequalled, in its way, by any book since the time of the Apostles. He has done so already. He did it with John Bunyan, the author of "Pilgrim's Progress."

The Spirit can take a sailor drenched in worldliness and sin—a profligate captain of a slave ship, and make that man a most successful minister of the Gospel—a writer of godly letters, which are a storehouse of experimental religion—and of hymns which are known and sung wherever English is spoken. He has done it already. He did it with John Newton.

All this the Spirit has done, and much more, of which I cannot speak particularly. And the arm of the Spirit is not shortened. His power is not decayed. He is like the Lord Jesus, the same yesterday, today, and forever." (Heb. 13:8.) He is still doing wonders, and will do to the very end.

Once more then, I say, I never despair of any man's soul being made alive. I would despair—if it depended on man himself. Some seem so hardened, I would have no hope. I would despair if it depended on the work of ministers. Alas, the very best of us are poor, weak creatures! But I cannot despair when I remember that God the Spirit is the agent who conveys life to the soul—for I know and am persuaded that with Him nothing is impossible.

I would not be surprised to hear, even in this life, that the hardest man in the list of my acquaintances has become softened, and the proudest has taken his place at the feet of Jesus as a weaned child.

I shall not be surprised to meet many on the right hand, in the day of judgment, whom I shall leave, when I die, traveling in the broad way to destruction. I shall be startled, and say, "What! you here!" I shall only remind them, "Was not this my word, when I was yet among you—Nothing is impossible with Him who quickens the dead."

Does anyone of us desire to help the Church of Christ? Then let him pray for a great outpouring of the Spirit. Only the Holy Spirit can give edge to sermons, and point to advice, and power to rebukes, and can cast down the high walls of sinful hearts. It is not better preaching, and finer writing that is needed in this day—but more of the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Does anyone feel the slightest drawing towards God—the smallest concern about his immortal soul? Then flee to that open fountain of living waters, the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall receive the Holy Spirit. (John 7:39.) Begin at once to pray for the Holy Spirit. Think not that you are shut up and cut off from hope. The Holy Spirit is promised to "those who ask Him." (Luke 11:13.) His very name is the Spirit of promise and the Spirit of life. Give Him no rest until He comes down and makes you a new heart. Cry mightily unto the Lord—say unto Him, "Bless me, even me also—quicken me, and make me alive."

And now let me wind up all I have said with a few words of **SPECIAL APPLICATION**. I have shown what I believe to be the truth as it is in Jesus. Let me try, by God's blessing, to bring it home to the hearts and consciences of all into whose hands this volume may fall.

Are You Dead or Alive?

1. First, let me put this question to every soul who reads this paper, "Are you dead, or are you alive?"

Allow me, as an ambassador for Christ, to press the inquiry on every conscience. There are only two **ways** to walk in, the narrow way and the broad way. There are only two **companies** in the day of

judgment, those on the right hand, and those on the left. There are only two **classes** of people in the professing Church of Christ, and to one of them you must belong. Where are you? What are you? Are you among the living, or among the dead?

I speak to you yourself, and to none else—not to your neighbor—but to you, not to Africans or New Zealanders—but to you. I do not ask whether you are an angel, or whether you have the mind of David or Paul—but I do ask whether you have a well-founded hope that you are a new creature in Christ Jesus, I do ask whether you have reason to believe you have put off the old man and put on the new—whether you are conscious of ever having gone through a real spiritual change of heart—whether, in one word, you are dead or alive.

"All hangs upon this hinge. If this be not done, you are undone—undone eternally. All your profession, civility, privileges, gifts, duties, are ciphers, and signify nothing, unless regeneration be the figure put before them."—*Swinnocke*. 1660.

"Believe me, whatever you are, you shall never be saved for being a Lord or a knight, a gentleman or a rich man, a learned man or a well-spoken, eloquent man; nor yet for being a Calvinist, or a Lutheran, an Arminian, an Anabaptist, a Presbyterian, an Independent, or a Protestant, formally and merely as such; much less for being a Papist, or of any such grossly deluded sect—but as a regenerate Christian it is that you must be saved—or you can have no hope."—*Richard Baxter*. 1659.

(a) Think not to put me off by saying, "you were admitted into the Church by baptism, you received grace and the Spirit in that sacrament, you are alive." It shall not avail you. Paul himself says of the baptized widow who lives in pleasure, "She is *dead* while she lives." (1 Tim. 5:6.) The Lord Jesus Christ Himself tells the chief officer of the Church in Sardis, "You have a name that you live, and are *dead*." (Rev. 3:1.) The life you talk of is nothing if it cannot be seen. Show it to me, if I am to believe its existence. Grace is light, and

light will always be discerned. Grace is salt, and salt will always be tasted. An indwelling of the Spirit which does not show itself by outward fruits, and a grace which men's eyes cannot discover, are both to be viewed with the utmost suspicion. Believe me, if you have no other proof of spiritual life but your baptism, you are yet a dead soul.

(b) Think not to tell me "It is a question that cannot be decided, and you call it presumptuous to give an opinion in such a matter." This is a vain refuge, and a false humility. Spiritual life is no such dim and doubtful thing as you seem to fancy. There are marks and evidences by which its presence may be discerned by those who know the Bible. "We know," says John, "that we have passed from death unto life." (1 John 3:14.) The exact time and season of that passage may often be hidden from a man. The fact and reality of it will seldom be entirely an uncertain thing. It was a true and beautiful saying of a Scotch girl, to Whitefield, when asked if her heart was changed, "Something was changed, she knew, it might be the world, it might be her own heart—but there was a great change somewhere, she was quite sure, for everything seemed different to what it once did." Oh, cease to evade the inquiry! "Anoint your eyes with eye-salve that you may see." (Rev. 3:18.) Are you dead or alive?

(c) Think not to reply, "You do not know—you allow it is a matter of importance—you hope to know some time before you die—you mean to give your mind to it when you have a convenient season—but at present you do not know." You do not know! Yet heaven or hell is wrapped up in this question. An eternity of happiness or misery hinges upon your answer. You do not leave your worldly affairs so unsettled. You do not manage your earthly business so loosely. You look far forward. You provide against every possible contingency. You insure life and property. Oh, why not deal in the same way with your immortal soul?

You do not know! Yet all around you is uncertainty. You are a poor frail worm—your body fearfully and wonderfully made—your health

liable to be put out of order in a thousand ways. **The next time the daisies bloom, it may be over your grave!** All before you is dark. You know not what a day might bring forth, much less a year. Oh! why not bring your soul's business to a point without delay?

Let every reader of this paper begin the great business of self-examination. Rest not until you know the length and breadth of your own state in God's sight. Backwardness in this matter is an evil sign. It springs from an uneasy conscience. It shows that a man thinks ill of his own case. He feels, like a dishonest tradesman, that his accounts will not bear inquiry. He dreads the light.

In spiritual things, as in everything else, it is the highest wisdom to make sure work. Take nothing for granted. Do not measure your condition by that of others. Bring everything to the measure of God's Word. **A mistake about your soul is a mistake for eternity!** "Surely," says Leighton, "they that are not born again, shall one day wish they had never been born."

Sit down this day and think. Commune with your own heart and be still. Go to your own room and consider. Enter into your own closet, or at any rate contrive to be alone with God. Look the question fairly, fully, honestly in the face. How does it touch you? Are you among the living or among the dead?

"If your state be good, searching into it will give you the comfort of it. If your state be bad, searching into it cannot make it worse; nay, it is the only way to make it better—for conversion begins with conviction."—*Hopkins*. 1680.

To Those Who are Dead

2. In the second place, let me speak in all affection to those who are DEAD.

What shall I say to you? What can I say? What words of mine are likely to have any effect on your hearts? This I will say—I mourn over your souls. I do most sincerely mourn. You may be thoughtless and unconcerned. You may care little for what I am saying. You may scarcely run your eye over this paper, and after reading it you may despise it and return to the world; but you cannot prevent my feeling for you, however little you may feel for yourselves.

Do I mourn when I see a young man sapping the foundation of his bodily health by indulging his lusts and passions, sowing bitterness for himself in his old age? Much more then will I mourn over your souls.

Do I mourn when I see people squandering away their inheritance, and wasting their property on trifles and follies? Much more then will I mourn over your souls.

Do I mourn when I hear of one drinking slow poisons, because they are pleasant, as the drunkard or the opium-eater—inch by inch digging his own grave? Much more then will I mourn over your souls.

I mourn to think of golden opportunities thrown away—of Christ rejected, of the blood of atonement trampled under foot—of the Spirit resisted; the Bible neglected—heaven despised, and the world put in the place of God.

I mourn to think of the present happiness you are missing, the peace and consolation you are thrusting from you, the misery you are laying up in store for yourselves—and the bitter waking up which is yet to come!

Yes! I must mourn. I cannot help it. Others may think it enough to mourn over dead bodies. For my part, I think there is far more cause

to mourn over dead souls. The children of this world find fault with us sometimes for being so serious and grave. Truly, when I look at the world, I marvel we can ever smile at all.

To everyone who is dead in sins I say this day—Why will you die? Are the wages of sin so sweet and good, that you cannot give them up? Is the world so satisfying that you cannot forsake it? Is the service of Satan so pleasant that you and he are never to be parted? Is heaven so poor a thing that it is not worth seeking? Is your soul of so little consequence, that it is not worth a struggle to have it saved? Oh, turn! turn before it be too late! God is not willing that you should perish. "As I live," He says, "I have no pleasure in the death of him who dies." Jesus loves you, and grieves to see your folly. He wept over wicked Jerusalem, saying, "I would have gathered you—but you would not be gathered." Surely if lost, your blood will be upon your own heads. "Awake, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light." (Ezek. 18:32; Matt. 23:37; Eph. 5:14.)

Believe me, believe me, true repentance is that one step that no man ever repented of. Thousands have said at their latter end, they had "served God too little." But no person ever said, as he left this world, that he had cared for his soul too much. The way of life is a narrow path—but the footsteps in it are all in one direction—not one child of Adam has ever come back and said it was a delusion. The way of the world is a broad way—but millions on millions have forsaken it, and borne their testimony that it was a way of sorrow and disappointment.

To Those Who are Living

3. Let me, in the third place, speak to those who are LIVING.

Are you indeed alive unto God? Can you say with truth, "I was dead, and am alive again. I was blind—but now I see"? Then allow the word of exhortation, and incline your hearts unto wisdom.

Are you alive? Then see that you *prove* it *by your actions*. Be a consistent witness. Let your words, and works, and ways, and tempers all tell the same story. Let not your life be a poor torpid life, like that of a tortoise or a sloth—let it rather be an energetic stirring life, like that of a deer or bird. Let your graces shine forth from all the windows of your life, that those who live near you may see that the Spirit is abiding in your hearts. Let your light not be a dim, flickering, uncertain flame; let it burn steadily, like the eternal fire on the altar, and never become low. Let the savor of your religion, like Mary's precious ointment, fill all the houses where you dwell. Be an epistle of Christ so clearly written, penned in such large bold characters—that he who runs may read it. Let your Christianity be so unmistakable, your eye so single, your heart so whole, your walk so straightforward that all who see you may have no doubt whose you are, and whom you serve. If we are quickened by the Spirit, no one ought to be able to doubt it. Our conversation should declare plainly that we "seek a country." (Heb 11:14.) It ought not to be necessary to tell people, as in the case of a badly painted picture, "This is a Christian." We ought not to be so sluggish and still, that people shall be obliged to come close and look hard, and say, "Is he dead or alive?"

Are you alive? Then see that you *prove* it *by your growth*. Let the great change within become every year more evident. Let your light be an increasing light, not like Joshua's sun in the valley of Ajalon, standing still—nor like Hezekiah's sun, going backwards—but ever shining more and more to the very end of your days. Let the image of your Lord, wherein you are renewed, grow clearer and sharper every month. Let it not be like the image and superscription on a coin, more indistinct and defaced the longer it is used. Let it rather become more plain the older it is, and let the likeness of your King stand out more fully and sharply.

I have no confidence in a standing-still religion. I do not think a Christian was meant to be like an animal, to grow to a certain age, and then stop growing. I believe rather he was meant to be like a tree, and to increase more and more in strength and vigor all his days. Remember the words of the Apostle Peter, "*Add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity.*" (2 Peter 1:5, 6, 7.) This is the way to be a useful Christian. People will believe you are in earnest when they see constant improvement, and perhaps be drawn to go with you. This is one way to obtain comfortable assurance. "So an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly." (2 Peter 1:11.) Oh, as ever you would be useful and happy in your religion, let your motto be, "Forward, forward!" to your very last day.

"People observe *actions*, a great deal more than *words*."—*Leighton*.

I entreat all believing readers to remember that I speak to myself as well as to them. I say the spiritual life there is in Christians ought to be more evident. Our lamps need trimming—they ought not to burn so dim. Our separation from the world should be more distinct—our walk with God more decided. Too many of us are like Lot—lingerers; or like Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh—borderers; or like the Jews in Ezra's time—so mixed up with strangers, that our spiritual pedigree cannot be made out. It ought not so to be. Let us be up and doing. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. If we really have life, let us make it known.

The state of the world demands it. The latter days have fallen upon us. The kingdoms of the earth are shaking, falling, crashing, and crumbling away. (Isaiah 24:1, etc.) The glorious kingdom that will never be removed is drawing near. The King Himself is close at hand. The children of this world are looking round to see what the saints are doing. God, in His wonderful providences, is calling to us, "Who

is on my side? Who?"—Surely we ought to be, like Abraham, very ready with our answer, "Here am I!" (Gen. 22:1.)

"Ah!" you may say, "These are ancient things—these are brave words. We know it all. But we are weak, we have no power to think a good thought, we can do nothing, we must sit still." Hearken, my believing reader. What is the cause of your weakness? Is it not because the fountain of life is little used? Is it not because you are resting on old experiences, and not daily gathering new manna—daily drawing new strength from Christ? He has left you the promise of the Comforter. "He gives more grace"—grace upon grace to all who ask it. He came "that you might have life, and have it more abundantly." "Open your mouths wide," He says this day, "and they shall be filled." (James 4:6; John 10:10; Ps. 81:10.)

I say to all believers who read this paper, if you want your spiritual life to be more healthy and vigorous, you must just come more boldly to the throne of grace. You must give up this hanging-back spirit—this hesitation about taking the Lord at His own word. Doubtless you are poor sinners, and nothing at all. The Lord knows it, and has provided a store of strength for you. But you do not draw upon the store He has provided—you have not, because you ask not. The secret of your weakness is your little faith—and little prayer. The fountain is unsealed—but you only sip a few drops. The bread of life is before you—yet you only eat a few crumbs. The treasury of heaven is open—but you only take a few pennies. "O you of little faith, why do you doubt?" (Matt. 14:31.)

Awake to know your privileges—awake, and sleep no longer. Tell me not of spiritual hunger, and thirst, and poverty—so long as the throne of grace is before you. Say rather, that you are proud—and will not come to it as poor sinners. Say rather, you are slothful—and will not take pains to get more.

Cast aside the grave-clothes of pride—which still hang around you. Throw off that Egyptian garment of indolence—which ought not to

have been brought through the Red Sea. Away with that unbelief, which ties and paralyzes your tongue. You are not straitened in God—but in yourselves. "Come boldly to the throne of grace," where the Father is ever waiting to give, and Jesus ever sits by Him to intercede. (Heb. 4:16.) Come boldly, for you may, all sinful as you are—if you come in the name of the Great High Priest. Come boldly, and ask largely, and you shall have abundant answers—mercy like a river, and grace and strength like a mighty stream. Come boldly, and you shall have supplies exceeding all you can ask or think. "Hitherto you have asked nothing. Ask and receive, that your joy may be full." (John 16:24.)

If we really are *alive and not dead*, let us strive so to carry ourselves that people may know whose we are. While we live, may we live unto the Lord. When we die, may we die the death of the righteous. And when the Lord Jesus comes, may we be found ready, and "not be ashamed before Him at His coming." (1 John 2:28.)

But, after all, are we alive or dead? That is the great question!

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