

Monergism

*Of the Nature of*  
**TRUE CONVERSION**

THE ONLY THING THAT MAKES MEN TRULY HAPPY,  
AND PERFECTLY BLESSED, IN THE WORLD TO COME

**JOHN FLAVEL**

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A vertical photograph of a dirt path winding through a forest. The path leads from the bottom center towards the top of the image, where it disappears into a bright, hazy light. The trees on either side are dark and dense, creating a sense of depth and a journey towards light.

# Of the Nature of True Conversion

by John Flavel

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# I.

## **Conviction Supposed, and Grace Admired**

REASON and conscience having been shaming men out of their profaneness, free grace invites them to the life of holiness, and thereby to the life of blessedness.

There you see what it is to live like beasts; here you may see what it is to live like Christians.

My charity commands me to suppose, that some readers stand, by this time convicted in their own consciences, both of the extreme wickedness, and the immediate danger of that profane course they have hitherto pursued, and persisted in; and that by this time they begin to interrogate them in the apostle's close and cutting language, Rom. 6:21. "What fruit had ye then in those things, whereof ye are now ashamed? For the end of these things is death." It is hard to imagine, that so many close debates and reasonings, as you have heard in the former part, should not leave many of you under conviction and trouble of spirit. You see, your own reasons and consciences have condemned you; "And if our heart condemn us, (saith the apostle) God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things;" 1 John 3:20. It is folly to imagine you shall be acquitted at God's immediate bar, who are already cast and condemned at your own privy sessions.

If this be the happy effect, as I hope it is, of all the former close and solemn debates with your consciences, it will naturally and immediately cast thy soul, reader, into great admiration of, and astonishment at, the patience and long-suffering of God, that hath borne with thee, under a life of prodigious and reiterated

provocations until this day. And his goodness will be as admirable to thee, as his patience; in that he hath not only suffered thee to live till this day, but made it the day of thy conviction, the first necessary step towards thy conversion; and the very first things he entertains thy convinced and troubled soul with, to be the possibility and probability of thy conversion to God.

The greatness of his patience shews his almighty power, Rom 9:22. Nahum 1:3 but his willingness to pass by all the wrongs you have done him, and to be at peace with you, discovers the immense riches of his grace, Tit. 3:3, 4.

That God should be so quick in the executions of his wrath upon your companions in sin, and so patient and long-suffering towards you, that have out-sinned them all; is such a comparative consideration of his bounty, as should even overwhelm the man that beholds it, Rom. 9:22. "Behold the goodness and severity of God! on them that fell severity; but towards thee, goodness."

If thou be that very man, who in the past course of thy life hast been a profane swearer, a beastly drunkard, a lascivious person, an hater and persecutor of good men; and after all this, the Lord hath brought an offer of mercy to thy soul, and shall convince thee it is not come too late, but that the door of hope stands yet open to thee; my advice to thee is, that thou cast thyself down at the feet of mercy, and after this manner pour forth thy laments and desires before the Lord.

"And is there yet a possibility of mercy, O Lord God, for such a vile wretch as I have been! can the arms of free grace yet open themselves to embrace such a monster of wickedness as I am? Who then is a God like unto thee? And what patience, mercy, and goodness, is like thine? I have far exceeded others in sin; I have lived the life of a beast, yea, of a devil. I have dared thy dreadful, and glorious name,

with thousands of horrid blasphemies; trampled all thy glorious attributes under my feet, challenged thee, to thy very face, to do thy worst, even to damn me to the pit of hell: I have yielded up this soul, with all its noble faculties and powers, as instruments of sin unto the devil; and made this body, which should have been the hallowed temple of thy Spirit, to be the noisome sink (or common sewer) for all unclean and abominable lusts to run and settle in. I have hated, reviled, and persecuted those that lived more strictly, soberly, and godly, than myself; because their convincing examples disquieted, checked, and convinced my conscience, in the eager pursuit of my lusts and pleasures.

"I have lived in the profane neglect of prayer, meditation, self-reflection, and all other spiritual Christian duties; thinking to make an atonement for all, by a few hypocritical, external formalities.

"To accommodate my carnal interest in the world, I have come reeking hot out of an ale-house, or whore-house, to the table of the Lord; where, with unhallowed hands, and a more unhallowed heart, I have crucified again the Lord of glory, and given the vilest affront and despite to that most sacred and precious blood, which now must save me, or I am lost for ever. Thus have I done; and "because thou keepest silent, I thought thee to be altogether such an one as myself: but this day hast thou reproved me, and set mine abominations in order before me."

I have tempted and seduced many others into the same impieties with me, of whom, some are already gone down to the dead, and others so fixed, and fully engaged in the pursuit of their lusts, that there appear no signs of repentance, or recovery in them.

"Thy wrath, Lord, soon brake forth against the angels that sinned in heaven; yet hitherto hast thou forborne and spared me, who have

been highly provoking thee ever since I was born, by a life of unparalleled wickedness upon earth. Vile wretch that I am! I have despised the riches of thy goodness, forbearance, and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth me to repentance. And after all, here I am told, that there is yet a possibility of pardon, mercy and salvation for me. The news is so great and so good, that I am zealously concerned to examine the grounds and evidences of it. And if it shall appear to be as true, as it is astonishingly strange, and ravishingly sweet; I hope, it shall effectually lead me to repentance, and dissolve for ever the strongest ties betwixt me and my lusts."

## II.

### **Conversion of the Vilest Sinner Possible**

THAT it is possible for the greatest and most infamous sinner to be recovered by repentance and conversion, and thereupon to find mercy and forgiveness with God; is a truth as sure and firm as it is sweet and comfortable. Three things will give full evidence of it.

1. That their sins do not exceed the power and sufficiency of the causes of remission.
2. That such sinners are within the calls and invitations of the gospel.
3. That such sinners are found among the instances and examples of pardoning mercy, recorded in the scriptures.

And if the causes of pardon be sufficient, and able to produce it; if the gospel invitations do take them in, and such sinners as these, every way as vile and wicked, have not been shut out, but received to

mercy; then it is beyond all doubt that there is (at least) a possibility of mercy for such sinners as you are.

I. It is past rational doubt, that the causes of remission are every way sufficient, and able to produce the forgiveness of such sins as yours are. For consider with yourselves,

**The power of { 1. The impulsive cause. 2. The meritorious cause. 3. The applying cause.**

1. The sufficiency and ability of the impulsive cause of pardon, which is none other but the free grace of God, the immense riches and treasures whereof, do infinitely excel the accompts and computations both of angels and men. Exod. 34:6, 7. "And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth: keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin." Mic. 7:18, 19. "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgressions of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities, and thou wilt cast all our sins into the depths of the sea." Once more, Rom. 5:20. "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." So that whatever thy sins have been, they do not, they cannot exceed the ability and power of the grace of God, the all-sufficient, impulsive cause of remission. That infinite abyss, or sea of mercy, can swallow up, and cover such mountains of guilt, as thine have been.

2. Nor do thy sins exceed the ability and power of the meritorious cause of remission, namely, the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ; for that blood is the blood of God, Acts 20:28. He is the Lamb of God, whose blood is sufficient to take away the sins of the world, John



1:29. There is but one sin in the world exempt from remission by this blood, and if thy heart be now wounded with the sense of sin, (as I here suppose it to be) that is none of thy sin, how heinous soever thy other sins be.

3. Nor do thy sins exceed the ability and power of the applying cause of pardon, namely, the Spirit of God. For though I should suppose thy mind to be clouded, and overshadowed with grossest ignorance, thy heart to be as hard as adamant, or nether-millstone, thy will stiff and obstinate, thy affections enchanted and bewitched with the pleasures of sin; yet this Spirit of God, in a moment, can make a convincing beam of light to dart into thy dark mind, make thy hard heart relent, thy stubborn will to bow, and all the affections of thy soul to comply, and open obediently to Christ, John 16:9, 10. "The Spirit when he cometh, he shall convince the world of sin," &c.

Thus you see, whatever your guilt be, it does not exceed the abilities of the causes of remission. O what an encouragement is this?

II. And there is yet further encouragement in this, that if you will open your bibles, you may find yourselves within the calls and invitations of the gospel. And no man can say, that man is without hope, that is within a gospel-invitation. Consider Isa. 55:7, 8. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon; for my thoughts are not your thoughts," &c. Here you have the nature of conversion described negatively and positively, by forsaking your ways and thoughts, and turning to the Lord. The way notes the external course of the conversation; the thoughts denote the internal frame and temper of the mind; both these must be forsaken. And turning to the Lord, denotes the sincere dedicating of the whole man to God; all

which is possible, and easy for the Spirit of God to do; and this being once done, abundant pardon is assured. If you say, you cannot think it; God tells you in the very next words, that his thoughts are not your thoughts; but as far above them, as the heavens are higher than the earth. Read to the same purpose, Isa. 1:18. Rev. 3:20. John 7:27.

III. And to make the possibility of remission yet clearer, know, for your encouragement, that as vile, infamous, and prodigious sinners as yourselves, are recorded, and found amongst the instances and examples of forgiven sinners in scripture. Paul was once a fierce and cruel persecutor and blasphemer, yet he obtained mercy, 1 Tim. 1:13, 14. That sinful woman, recorded, Luke 7:37, 38 was an infamous, and a notorious sinner; yet her sins which were many, were forgiven her, ver. 47. Manasseh was a monster of wickedness, as you may read, 2 Chron. 33 yet found mercy. And if you view that catalogue of sinners, given in 1 Cor. 6:9, 10. you will seem to find among them the very forlorn hope of desperate sinners, advanced nearest to hell of any men upon earth; yet see, ver. 11 what is said of some of them: "And such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are justified."

All these things plainly shew (I say not the certainty that you shall be, but) the possibility that you may be pardoned; which is a mercy and encouragement unspeakable.

### **III.**

## **The Conversion of Profane Ones Highly Probable**

AND because Satan labours to discourage them that are gone in sin so far as you are, by cutting off all hopes of mercy from them, and

bringing them to this desperate conclusion; damned we know we shall, and must be; and therefore as good be damned for more, as less. If we had lived sober, and civil lives, we might have had some hope; but because we have no hope, it is as good for us to take our full swing in sin, as to think of returning by repentance and conversion, so late in the day as this is.

To obviate this deadly snare of Satan, I shall here further add, That there is not only a possibility of your recovery, but, in some respect, a strong possibility, that such as you may be converted and saved, than there is for those who have led a smoother, and more civil life in the world, and wholly trust to their own civility for their salvation, instead of the imputed righteousness of Christ.

This plainly appears, by that convictive expression of Christ to the Scribes and Pharisees, Mat. 21:31. "Verily, I say unto you, that the publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of heaven before you." Publicans, the most infamous amongst men; and harlots, the worst of women; yet these are sooner wrought over to Christ by faith and repentance, than the more civil, and self-righteous Scribes and Pharisees.

And indeed, it is far easier to come at the consciences of such sinners by conviction than at the others; they having nothing to ward off the stroke of conviction, it must fall directly, and immediately upon their consciences. The most smooth and civil part of the world, trust to their own righteousness; and this self-confidence, like armour of proof, resists all attempts to bring them to Christ for righteousness. Nothing fixes men in a state of evil, more than a strong conceit that their condition is good.

But such as you are, whose whole lives have been polluted with profaneness, and all impiety, your consciences will more easily

receive convictions of your present danger, and of the necessity of a speedy, thorough change. You cannot think, as others do, that you need no repentance, or reformation. In this respect, therefore, you lie nearer the door of hope and mercy, than other sinners do.

If therefore it shall please the Lord, (whose grace is rich and free to the vilest of sinners) to pluck out such as you, as brands out of the burning, by thorough conversion to Christ; you will not only become real Christians, (as all true converts are) but the most excellent, useful, and zealous amongst all Christians. As you will be most eminent instances of his grace, so you will be the most eminent instruments for his glory. As you have gone beyond other sinners in wickedness, so you will strive to exceed them all in your love to Christ. Luke 7:47. "She loved much for much was forgiven her." You will never think you can do enough for him, who hath done such great things for you.

Who more fierce and vile, before conversion, than Paul, who was a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious? 1 Tim. 1:13 and who, among all the servants of Christ, loved or laboured for him more than he? How did he rather fly, than travel up and down the world, in a flame of zeal for Christ? As you have been ring-leaders in sin, so you will not endure to come behind any in zeal and love to the Lord Jesus: Yet not thinking this way to make him a requital for the injuries you have done him; (that would be the most injurious act of all the rest) but to testify this way the deep sense you have of the riches and transcendency of his goodness and mercy to you, above all others.

#### **IV.**

# Conversion Frequently and Fatally Mistaken

BUT here I must warn you of some common, but most dangerous mistakes, committed in the world, with respect to conversion unto God: Except these be seasonably prevented, or removed, none of you will ever stir, or move further than you are towards Christ. Amongst others, beware especially of these three following fatal mistakes; that of,

1. Baptismal regeneration.
2. Common profession of Christianity.
3. Formality in religious duties.

1. There is a notion spread among men, and almost every where obtaining, that the scriptures mean nothing else by conversion, but to be baptized in our infancy into the visible church; and that this ordinance having passed upon them long ago, they are sufficiently converted already; and that men make but a needless stir and bustle in the world, about any other, or further conversion.

But, sirs, I beseech you, consider how dangerous a thing it is, to take your own shadow for a bridge; and venturing upon it, drown yourselves. If baptism be conversion enough, why doth Christ say, Mark 16:16. "He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned?" Baptism without faith, signifies nothing to salvation; but faith, without baptism, (where it cannot be had) secures salvation. And why doth the apostle say, Gal. 6:15. "Neither circumcision, nor uncircumcision availeth any thing, but a new creature?" Or what needed Christ to have pressed and

inculcated the indispensable necessity of regeneration upon Nicodemus, as he doth, John 3:3, 5, 7 who had been many years a circumcised Jew? This your dangerous dependence upon your baptismal regeneration, is what hath given such deep offence, and prejudice to many (though without just cause) against that ordinance. I lament it as much as they, that men should turn it into such a deadly snare to their own souls, yet will still honour Christ's abused ordinance.

2. Some think, the common profession of Christianity makes men Christians enough; they are no Heathens, Mahometans, or idolatrous Papists; but Protestants, within the pale of the true church; that is, professed reformed Christians.

But, friends, I beg you to consider that convictive text, 1 Cor. 4:20. "The kingdom of God is not in word, but in power." Many there be, that in words confess Christ, but in works deny him. And why were the foolish virgins (that is, professed reformed Christians) shut out of the kingdom of God; if the lamp of verbal profession, without the oil of internal godliness, were enough for our salvation? Matth. 25:3, 12. Believe it, sirs, many will claim acquaintance with Christ upon this account, and expect favour from him in the great day, of whom he will profess he never knew them, Matth. 7:22. Christ need not have put men upon striving, as in an agony, to enter in at the strait gate, if baptism in our infancy, or verbal profession of Christianity, were all the difficulties men had to encounter in the way to heaven.

3. Formality in external duties of religion, is another fatal mistake of conversion. Have not these been the inward thoughts of your hearts? As bad as we are, though we take liberty to swear, be drunk, and unclean sometimes; yet we say our prayers, keep our church, and hope for heaven and salvation, as well as those that are more precise.

But tell me, gentlemen, seriously, what do you say, or plead for yourselves more in all this, than those convicted hypocrites did, Isa. 58:2. "Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my way, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinances of their God: They ask of me the ordinances of justice, they take delight in approaching to God." Or to come nearer yet to your case, and cut off, at one stroke, for ever this vain plea of yours, read and ponder God's own censure of it, in Jer. 7:8, 9, 10, 11, 12. "Behold, ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit. Will ye steal, murder, commit adultery, and swear falsely, &c. and come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations? Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen it, saith the Lord; but go ye now to my place, which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it, for the wickedness of my people Israel."

## V.

### **Of the Nature of True Conversion**

YOU have heard, that conversion does not consist in these external things; at your eternal peril be it, if you trust in them: But true conversion is the turning of the whole man to God, Acts 26:18 it is nothing less, than the total change of the inward temper and frame of the heart, and the external course of the life, Isa. 55:8. It is not the cool confession, but the real forsaking of sin, in which we shall find mercy, Prov. 28:13. Thy heart and will, love and delight, must turn sin out, and take Christ in, or thou art no gospel-convert. A true convert loaths every sin, and himself for sin, Ezek. 36:31 but general confessions of sin are consistent with the full dominion of sin.

Moreover, in all true conversion there is a positive turning unto God, a whole heart-choice of him, for your supreme and ultimate happiness and portion, Psal. 73:25 and of the Lord Jesus Christ, as your Prince and Saviour, Acts 5:31. And answerably, it will devote your whole life to his service and glory, Phil. 1:21. And thus it brings forth the new man, and the whole frame of your heart and life is marvellously changed and altered, 2 Cor. 5:17. "Old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new."

It may be, you will think such a change as this impossible to be made upon you. And so it is indeed, until the day of God's power come, Psal. 110:3. What! to forsake with loathing your old companions, and courses, which you have so long lived with and delighted in; and to embrace with highest pleasure, strict godliness, which you have so loathed, and ridiculed! This would be a strange alteration indeed: But as strange as it seems to be, it will be effected in a moment, when God fulfils that gracious promise (as I hope he is now doing) to you, Ezek. 36:26. "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you." Operations follow nature: When the heart of a beast was given to that great king Nebuchadnezzar, Dan. 5:21 his dwelling was with the wild asses; they fed him with grass, like oxen. But let the spirit of a man return to him again, and he will blush to think of his brutish company, and way of life; and so will you of yours also. As marvellous a change as this has passed upon as eminent and notorious sinners as yourselves, Gal. 1:22 the God of the spirits of all flesh can with ease and speed produce all this by that Almighty Power, whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself.

## VI.

### **Of the Hazards Attending Conversion**



IF the Lord shall, in his rich grace and mercy to your souls, stir up in them the thoughts and resolutions of a change of your course; great care ought to be taken, in the time of this change, lest they miscarry in their remove from one state to another; multitudes miscarry betwixt a state of profaneness, and true godliness. To continue in the state of profaneness, is to be certainly lost; and so it is to take up short of Christ, in mere civility and formality in religion. This middle state takes up multitudes by the way, who do but change the open road, for a more private way to hell.

Mere civilized nature is unregenerated nature still; "They return, but not to the most High; they are like a deceitful bow," saith the prophet, Hosea 7:16. They seem to aim at Christ, and salvation; but, as an arrow from a weak bow, it goes not home; or, as from a deceitful bow, it slants aside, and misses the mark. It is true, they are not openly profane, as they were before; but they take up and settle in an unregenerate state still: Their condition is the same, though their company be not.

This is excellently set forth by our Saviour, Mat. 12:43, 44, 45. The devil may be cast out as a profane devil, and yet keep his propriety still as a former devil. The sense of that text is well expressed by one, in this note upon it; That a restraint by formality, keeps the devil's propriety, and disposes the soul to final apostasy. You are as far from Christ and salvation, under the power of formality, as you were before. He that is cured of a fever, hath no great cause to rejoice, if his fever has left him under a consumption, which will kill him as surely, though it may be less violently, or speedily.

## VII.

# **Of the Absololute Necessity of a Thorough Change**

WHATEVER the difficulties and hazards are, that attend this change by conversion unto God, the change itself is absolutely and indispensably necessary to every man's salvation. The door of salvation can never be opened, without the key of regeneration. Christ assures civil and formal Nicodemus, "That except he be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God," John 3:3. Think not conversion to be the attainment of some singular and extraordinary Christians, for it is the very point upon which every man's eternal happiness or misery depends. There is one law for all the world; they must be changed or damned: No restitutions or reformations, no common gifts or abilities, no religious duties or services, can save any man from hell, without a change by thorough conversion, Rom. 8:8. "They that are in the flesh, cannot please God."

Satisfy and please not yourselves with this: Though we live in sin, yet God is a merciful God. We will confess our sins to him, say our prayers, keep our church; and no doubt but God will be merciful to us, as well as others. Consider it, man, that this merciful God is also a God of truth; and this God of truth hath plainly assured thee, that all these external things signify nothing to thy salvation, unless thou become a new creature, Gal. 6:15 and that thou must be born again, John 3:3. Say not, without this you will hope in God; If you hope in God, you must hope in his word, Psal. 119:11. Now where will you find that word in the bible, that warrants the hope of salvation in the unregenerate person? All scriptural hope is of a purifying nature, and evermore productive of an holy life, 1 John 3:3.

If you say, Christ died for the greatest of sinners, and you trust to be saved through him; it is true, he did so, but conversion is his only method of salvation, Tit. 2:14 and those that are not washed by sanctification, have no part in him, or in his blood, John 13:8. He came not to save men continuing in their sins, but to save his people from their sins, Mat. 1:21. His way is to lead you through sanctification unto salvation, 2 Thes. 2:13. If you have a mind to see whom, and how he saves; you have it before your eyes, Tit. 1:14. "Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Those only are saved by him, that "denying ungodliness, and worldly lusts, live not only soberly and righteously, but godly in this present world."

And this is the change I am here pressing you to; and until this change be made, you cannot find yourselves within the compass of any covenant-promise, Eph. 2:12 but if you will turn to Heb. 12:14. you may, the very next minute, find yourselves barred out of heaven by a scripture threatening. Let no man, therefore, impose so great a cheat upon his own soul, as once to imagine, that any thing short of sound conversion can ever put him out of the danger of damnation.

## VIII.

### **Every Man Might do More than He Doth, Towards His Own Conversion**

IT is not in any man's power to convert himself; but yet because every man might do more towards it than he doth do, and doth it not, he is justly chargeable with his own damnation. We are bid, and bound to strive to enter in at the strait gate, Luke 13:24. It is true, a

man in his natural state, can do nothing that is spiritually, or supernaturally good; yet he can do, and forbear to do many things, the doing or forbearing of which, have a true (though remoter) tendency to his conversion; and not doing, or forbearing of them, his destruction is of and from himself.

You can, if you will, forbear to swear, and blaspheme the name of God. Who can, or does compel, or force your tongues to it? The devil can tempt, but not compel them: you can, if you will, stop, when nature is duly refreshed. Your wicked companions can provoke, but not force you. You can, if you please, shun lascivious books, and company, and keep your bodies chaste, at least from the external acts of uncleanness.

And why cannot you (if you please) perform, as well as neglect, the external acts of religious duties? The same feet that carry you to a tavern, can carry you to your closets, if you please to have them do so. Nor do I know any reason why you cannot compose yourselves, when engaged in God's public or private worship, to a close and serious attendance to those duties. The application of the mind to what is spoken is of great concernment to you; and if an unsanctified minister can apply his thoughts to compose a sermon, and preach it: I see no reason why an unsanctified hearer may not also compose, and apply his mind to hear it. And I am past all doubt, that something may be done beyond all this. You have some power certainly to reflect upon, and consider what concernment you have in the things you read or hear; and how they agree, or disagree with your experience.

Now, if men would but do this, (which certainly they have a power to do) though they cannot convert themselves, yet hereby they would lie in the hopeful way of converting grace; which is more than they

could ever yet be persuaded to do. And though there be no positive certainty, or assurance, that conversion and salvation shall follow these acts; yet hope and probability are engagements enough. Hope sets all the world on work, without assurance. The ploughman ploughs in hope, and the merchant ventures in hope. Do but as much for your souls, as these do for their bodies.

## **IX.**

### **Temptation and Discouragements in the Way of cConversion**

BUT here I expect to be encountered by all the policy and power of hell. Satan, and your own lusts, are in confederacy, to turn away your minds from such counsel and persuasions as these. They will tell you, this is no proper season to mind your conversion; it is either too soon, or too late; you have not yet had pleasure enough in sin, or so much as hath put you beyond all hopes of mercy: That religion is a melancholy thing, and if once you look that way, you will never have a merry day, or hour more; with a thousand such damps and discouragements.

But pray, gentlemen, do so much, at least for your souls, before you turn away your ear from the instructions of life, as to hear these matters examined: If they are not worth that, they are worth nothing.

I will suppose you in the flower and vigour of your youth, and this dangerous season now nicked with a more dangerous temptation; that it is too soon to mind such serious matters now: You have not yet had your full pleasure out of sin.

Need I to spend a word, to refute and baffle such a temptation as this? I doubt not, but you yourselves can easily do it. Ask yourselves, Sirs, if sentence of death were passed upon you by men, (as it is by God, John 3:18. "He that believeth not, is condemned already,") would you think a pardon could come too soon? Be assured, every bit of bread you eat, is the bread of the condemned; you are in danger of hell every day, and hour: There wants nothing but a sword, a bullet, a shipwreck, or disease, (of which multitudes wait on you every day) to put you beyond mercy, and all hopes of mercy. And can you get too soon (think you) out of this danger and misery? O why do you linger any longer? The danger is too great and imminent, to admit one hour's longer delay.

And it is as strange and strong a delusion on the other side, to fancy it is now too late: The vanity and groundlessness of this, hath been evinced in the second section, to which I refer you for full satisfaction.

And for the loss of your pleasures, by conversion to God, that is the thinnest and silliest pretence of all the rest: That is the same thing, as to imagine it is to a thirsty man's loss, to leave the puddle waters of a broken cistern, to enjoy the crystal streams of a flowing fountain; for the pleasures of an ale-house, play-house, or whore-house, to be sweeter than the light of God's countenance, the comforts of his pardon, or the lively hopes of glory with him in heaven; of which you read, 1 Pet. 1:8.

Poor men! O that you did but once know what the life of holiness, and dedication to God is! what the seals, earnest, and first-fruits of his Spirit are! How willingly and joyfully would you trample all the sordid pleasures of sin under your feet, to enjoy them!

## X.

### **Motives and Considerations Persuading to Conversion**

THIS short discourse shall wind up itself in motives and considerations, to prevail with you, not only to make the first step out of profaneness to civility; but the other necessary and happy step too, for the Lord's sake, gentlemen, that blessed step beyond mere civility, to serious godliness.

O that I knew what words to choose, and what arguments to urge, that might possibly prevail with you! My witness is in heaven, I would do any thing within my power, to procure your temporal and eternal happiness. I beg you, in the bowels of Christ Jesus, as if I were upon my bended knees before your feet, turn not away your eye nor ear from these discourses: Ponder and consider, once and again, what hath been rationally debated in the first part, about your reformation, and what hath, and shall be offered, in this second part.

O my God! thou that hast counted me faithful, and put me into the ministry; thou that hast inclined my heart to make this attempt, and encouraged me with hope, that it shall not be in vain to all them that read it, if it must be so to some; I beseech thee, lay the hand of thy Spirit upon the heart and hand of thy servant; strengthen and guide him in drawing the bow of the gospel, and directing the arrows, that they may strike the mark he aims at, even the conviction and conversion of lewd and dissolute sinners. Command these considerations to stay and settle in their hearts, till they bring them fully over to thyself in Christ."

## Considerations

Consideration 1. And first, O that you would consider how the whole of your life past hath been cast away in vain, as to the great end and business you came into the world for. You have breathed many years, but not lived one day to God. Your consciences could never yet prevail with you to get out of the noise and hurry of the world, and go along with it into some private retiring-place, to debate the state of your souls, and think close (but for one hour) on such awful subjects as God, soul, Christ, and eternity, heaven, hell, death, and judgment. Do you think, gentlemen, that you came into this world to do nothing else but to eat and drink, sport and play, sleep and die? Ask yourselves, I beseech you, whether the life you have hitherto lived, has looked to your own eyes like an earnest flight from hell, and a serious pursuit of heaven and salvation? How much nearer you are got to Christ now, than you were when in your cradles? The sweetest, and fittest part of your life, is passed away in vanity, and there is no calling one day, or hour of it, back again.

Consideration 2. Consider, gentlemen, for Christ Jesus sake, you have yet an opportunity to be eternally happy, if you will slight and neglect opportunities of salvation no longer; the door of mercy is not yet finally shut up: The Lord Jesus yet waits to be gracious to you. Such is his astonishing grace and mercy, he will pardon and pass by all that you have done against him, if now, after all, you will but come unto him that you may have life. Turn ye, turn ye; for why will ye die? Your swearing and blaspheming, your drunkenness, uncleanness, and enmity of godliness, shall never be mentioned, if you will yet repent and return. Ezek. 18:21, 22. "If the wicked will



turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right; he shall surely live, he shall not die. All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him."

If you say, these are hard and impossible terms to nature, it is true, they are so, and God's end in urging them here upon you, is to convince you of your natural impotence, and drive you to Christ; that by union with him, the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in you.

Consideration 3. Let it be thoroughly considered, it is no less than salvation, and your own salvation too, which depends upon your conversion. How diligent was Christ in purchasing salvation! how negligent and remiss are we in applying it! O what compositions of sloth and stupidity are unconverted sinners! how do they sit with folded arms, as if it were easy to perish? Is this your running and striving to obtain the palms and crowns of immortal glory? Work-out (saith the apostle, Phil. 2:12, 13) your own salvation with fear and trembling It is for salvation, and nothing less, you are here pressed to strive: And what care, pains, or solicitude of ours, can be equal and proportionate to so great a thing as salvation? If every thought of the heart were rescued from all other concerns, and the mind stand continually fixed with utmost intention upon this subject, surely such a subject deserves it all, and much more.

But when you consider it is not another's, but your own salvation you are striving for; how powerful should the principle of self-preservation awaken and invigorate your utmost endeavours after it! The law of charity, and bowels of mercy, would compel us to do much to save the body, and much more the soul of another: And will they move us to do nothing for our salvation?

Say not, If I should be careless and neglective, yet God is good and gracious; if this season be neglected, there are more to come: Alas! that is more than you know. It is possible your eternal happiness may depend upon the improvement of this present opportunity; there is much of time in a short opportunity.

Consideration 4. Do you think your hearts would be in such a dead, careless, and unconcerned frame, about this great and awful matter of your conversion and salvation; if those things were now before your eyes, which certainly and shortly must be before them!

How rational and necessary is it, for you now to suppose those very things as present before you, which you know to be near you, and a few days or hours will make present? Here let me make a few suppositions, so rational, because certainly future and near, that no wise man will, or dare to slight them as fictions or chimeras.

## **Suppositions**

Supposition 1. Suppose yourselves now upon your death-beds, your hearts and breaths failing, your eyes and heart-strings breaking, all earthly comforts failing, and shrinking from you; these things you know, are unavoidable, and must shortly befall you, Eccl. 8:8. suppose also, in these your last extremities, your consciences should awake (as probably they will, there being now no more charms of pleasure, and sinful companions, to divert or stupify them) what a case will you find yourselves in! what a cold sweat will then lie upon your panting bosoms! what a pale horror will appear in your countenances? Will you not then wish, O that the time I have spent

in vanity had been spent in the duties of serious piety! O that I had been as careful of my soul, as I was of my body! What are the pains of mortification, which I was so afraid of, to the pains of damnation, which I begin to scent, and apprehend! I thought it hard to pray, mourn, and deny myself; but I shall find it harder to grapple with the wrath of an incensed God to all eternity.

Supposition 2. Suppose yourselves now to be at the judgment seat of God, where you know you must be immediately after death; or, that you did behold the process, and awful solemnity of the general judgment of the great day! both which appearances are indisputably sure, and certain, Heb. 9:27. 2 Cor. 5:10. Suppose you saw all Adam's posterity there assembled, and convened, even multitudes, multitudes which no man can number; all these separated into two grand divisions; Christ, the supreme and final Judge, upon the judgment-seat; the Christless and unregenerate world, quivering at the bar; the last sentence pronouncing on them; the executioners standing ready to take them away: Will you not then (think you) be ready to tear yourselves with indignation, for this your supine and sottish carelessness? A voice from the throne, like the voice of a trumpet, sounds a loud alarm to all careless, negligent, and trifling sinners: And this is the voice, if you will not be in the same case with the miserable, condemned world. Put to it heartily, then, in the use of all means with God and men, for converting and regenerating grace now, which is the only thing that differences your state from those miserable wretches then.

Supposition 3. Suppose God did but give you a foresight, or foretaste in the terrors of your consciences, of that damnation you have jested at, and so often imprecated upon yourselves: Did you but lie one night in that plight poor Spira, and many others besides him have done, with the terrors of the Lord upon your spirits, under horror

and remorse of conscience, which are the first nibblings and bitings of that worm which shall never die:

—Tum pallida mens est

Criminibus, tacita sudant præcordia culpa.\*

Paleness and horror, fear and trembling, upon the outward and inward man, whilst God is making the immediate impressions of his wrath upon the conscience; seeming to want some one to let out that miserable, wretched soul, that is weary to stay any longer in the body, and yet afraid to be dislodged, lest its condition be made worse by the exchange: do you think you would ever imprecate damnation any more? And yet all these terrors and horrors upon the conscience, are but as the sweating of marble-stone before the great rains fall.

But what if God should give you a vision of hell itself, and of the inconceivable and inexpressible misery of those desperate and forlorn wretches, that lie there sweltering, and groaning under the heavy pressures of the wrath of a great and terrible God, immediately and everlastingly transacted upon their souls? Would you ever jest with damnation any more, as with an harmless thing? Nay, would you not strive to the uttermost, to flee from this wrath to come? Do you not seem to hear, in this rational and just opposition, and doleful cry coming from hell, and the state of the damned, with this very sound and sense? 'Good souls, if ever you expect to be delivered from this state, and place of torments, strive, to the utmost, strive while you have opportunity, strive whilst breath and strength do last, to flee from, and escape, by a sound conversion, this doleful state of eternal damnation.'

Supposition 4. Lastly, and in a word, suppose you had a vision of heaven, as Stephen and Paul had in the body; suppose you saw the

glory of God, and Jesus standing at his right hand, surrounded with the triumphant myriads of palm-bearing saints, singing Hosanna's and Hallelujahs to God, and the Lamb for ever; and blessing, praising, and admiring him that gave them another spirit, vastly different from that which governs such as you: Blessing the Lord, that enabled them to be praying and praising, whilst others were cursing and swearing; to be sighing and groaning for sin in secret, whilst others were shouting and singing in taverns and ale-houses: to beat down their bodies, and keep them under, whilst others were pleasing and gratifying their lusts; would you still drive that course you do? Well, sirs, if ever you expect to come where these blessed ones are, you must take the course they did. Let this be your endeavour, and it shall be my fervent and hearty prayer.

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## MONERGISM BOOKS

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