

7. The object to which we turn in conversion is, God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, whom the true convert takes as his all-sufficient and eternal blessedness. A man is never truly sanctified till his heart be truly set upon God above all things, as his portion and chief good. These are the natural breathings of a believer's heart: "*Thou art my portion.*" "*My soul shall make her boast in the Lord.*" "*My expectation is from him; he only is my rock and salvation and my glory, the rock of my strength, and my refuge is in God*" (Ps. cxix. 57; Ps. xxxiv. 2; Ps. lxii).

Would you be certain whether you are converted or not? Now let your soul and all that is within you attend.

Have you taken God for your happiness? Where does the desire of your heart lie? What is the source of your greatest satisfaction? Come, then, and with Abraham lift up your eyes eastward, and westward, and northward, and southward, and look around you; what is it that you would have in heaven or on earth to make you happy? If God should give you your choice, as He did to Solomon, or should say to you, as Ahasuerus to Esther, "*What is thy petition, and what is thy request, and it shall be granted thee?*" what would you ask? Go into the gardens of pleasure, and gather all the fragrant flowers there, would these satisfy you? Go to the treasures of mammon; suppose you may carry away as much as you desire. Go to the towers, to the trophies of honour. What do you think of being a man of renown, and having a name like the name of the great men of the earth? Would any of these, would all of these satisfy you, and make you to count yourself happy? If so, then certainly you are carnal and unconverted. If not, go farther; wade into the divine excellences, the store of His mercies, the hiding of His power, the depths unfathomable of His all-sufficiency. Does this suit you best and please you most? Do you say, "*It is good to be here. Here will I pitch, here will I live and die?*" Will you let all the world go rather than this? Then it is well between God and you: happy art thou, O man — happy art thou that ever thou wast born. If God can make you happy, you must be happy; for you have taken the Lord to be your God. Do you say to Christ as He to us, "*Thy Father shall be my Father, and thy God my God?*" Here is the turning point. An unsound convert never takes up his rest in God; but converting grace does the work, and so cures the fatal misery of the fall, by turning the heart from its idol to the living God. Now the soul says, "*Lord, whither shall I go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.*" Here he centres, here he settles. It is the entrance of heaven to him; he sees his interest in God. When he

discovers this, he says, "*Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee*" (Ps. cxvi. 7). And he is even ready to breathe out Simeon's song, "*Lord, now letteth thou thy servant depart in peace*"; and says with Jacob, when his old heart revived at the welcome tidings, "*It is enough*" (Gen. xlv. 28). When he sees he has a God in covenant to go to, this is all his salvation, and all his desire (2 Sam. xxiii. 5).

Is this the case with you? Have you experienced this? If so, then "*blessed art thou of the Lord.*" God has been at work with you; He has laid hold of your heart by the power of converting grace, or else you could never have done this.

More particularly, in conversion.

(1). We turn to Christ, the only Mediator between God and man (1 Tim. ii. 5). His work is to bring us to God (1 Pet. iii. 18). He is the way to the Father (Jn. xiv. 6), the only plank on which we may escape, the only door by which we may enter (Jn. x. 9). Conversion brings the soul to Christ to accept Him as the only means of life, as the only way, the only name given under heaven. He does not look for salvation in any other but Him; he throws himself on Christ alone.

"Here," says the convinced sinner, "I will venture; and if I perish, I perish; if I die, I will die here. But, Lord do not let me perish under the eye of Thy mercy. Entreat me not to leave Thee, or to return from following after Thee. Here I will throw myself; if Thou slay me, I will not go from Thy door."

Thus the poor soul ventures on Christ and resolutely adheres to Him. Before conversion, the man made light of Christ, minded his farm, friends, merchandise, more than Christ; now, Christ is to him as his necessary food, his daily bread, the life of his heart, the staff of his life. His great desire is, that Christ may be magnified in him. His heart once said, as they to the spouse, "*What is thy beloved more than another?*" (Cant. v. 9). He found more sweetness in his merry company, wicked games, earthly delights, than in Christ. He took religion for a fancy, and the talk of great enjoyments for an idle dream; but now to him to live is Christ. He sets light by all that he accounted precious, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ.

All of Christ is accepted by the sincere convert. He loves not only the wages but the work of Christ, not only the benefits but the burden of Christ. He is willing not only to tread out the corn, but to draw under the yoke. He takes up the commands of Christ, yes, the cross of Christ.

The unsound convert takes Christ by halves. He is all for the salvation of Christ, but he is not for sanctification. He is for the privileges, but does not appropriate the person of Christ. He divides the offices and benefits of Christ. This is an error in the foundation. Whoever loves life, let him beware here. It is an undoing mistake, of which you have been often warned, and yet none is more common. Jesus is a sweet Name, but men do not love the Lord Jesus in sincerity. They will not have Him as God offers, "to be a Prince and a Saviour" (Acts v. 31). They divide what God has joined, the King and the Priest. They will not accept the salvation of Christ as He intends it; they divide it here. Every man's vote is for salvation from suffering, but they do not desire to be saved from sinning. They would have their lives saved, but still would have their lusts. Indeed, many divide here again; they would be content to have some of their sins destroyed, but they cannot leave the lap of Delilah, or divorce the beloved Herodias. They cannot be cruel to the right eye or right hand. O be infinitely careful here; your soul depends upon it. The sound convert takes a whole Christ, and takes Him for all intents and purposes, without exceptions, without limitations, without reserve. He is willing to have Christ upon any terms; he is willing to have the dominion of Christ as well as deliverance by Christ. He says with Paul, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Anything, Lord. He sends the blank for Christ to set down His own conditions.

(2). We turn to the laws, ordinances, and ways of Christ.

The heart that once was set against these, and could not endure the strictness of these bonds, the severity of these ways, now falls in love with them, and chooses them as its rule and guide for ever.

Four things, I observe, God works in every sound convert, with reference to the laws and ways of Christ, by which you may come to know your state, if you will be faithful to your own souls. Therefore, keep your eyes upon your hearts as you go along.

(i.) The judgment is brought to approve of them and to subscribe to them as most righteous and most reasonable. The mind is brought to like the ways of God, and the corrupt prejudices that were once against them as unreasonable and intolerable, are now removed. The understanding assents to them all as holy, just, and good (Rom. vii. 12). How is David taken up with the excellences of God's laws! How does he expatiate on their praises, both from their inherent qualities and admirable effects! (Ps. xix. 8-10, etc.).

There is a two-fold judgment of the understanding, the absolute and the comparative. The absolute judgment is when a man thinks such a course best in general, but not for him, or not under his present circumstances. Now, a godly man's judgment is for the ways of God, and that not only the absolute, but comparative judgment. He thinks them not only the best in general, but best for him. He looks upon the rules of religion not only as tolerable, but desirable; yea, more desirable than gold, fine gold; yea, much fine gold.

His judgment is fully determined that it is best to be holy, that it is best to be strict, that it is in itself the most eligible course, and that it is for him the wisest and most rational and desirable choice. Hear the godly man's judgment; "*I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right; I love thy commandments above gold, yea, above fine gold; I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way*" (Ps. cxix. 127-128). Mark, he approves of all that God requires, and disapproves of all that He forbids. "*Righteous, O Lord, and upright are thy judgments. Thy testimonies that thou hast commanded are righteous and very faithful. Thy word is true from the beginning, and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever*" (Ps. cxix). See how readily and fully he subscribes; he declares his assent and consent to it, and all and every thing contained therein.

(ii.) The desire of the heart is to know the whole mind of Christ. He would not have one sin undiscovered, nor be ignorant of one duty required. It is the natural and earnest breathing of a sanctified heart: "Lord, if there be any way of wickedness in me, do Thou reveal it. What I know not, teach Thou me; and if I have done iniquity, I will do it no more." The unsound convert is willingly ignorant, he does not love to come to the light. He is willing to keep such and such a sin, and therefore is loath to know it to be a sin, and will not let in the light at that window. Now, the gracious heart is willing to know the whole latitude and compass of his Maker's law. He receives with all acceptance the Word which convinces him of any duty that he knew not, or minded not before, or which uncovers any sin that lay hid before.

(iii.) The free and resolved choice of the will is for the ways of Christ, before all the pleasures of sin and prosperities of the world. His consent is not extorted by some extremity of anguish, nor is it only a sudden and hasty resolve, but he is deliberately purposed, and comes freely to the choice. True, the flesh will rebel, yet the prevailing part of his will is for Christ's laws and government, so that he takes them up not as his toil or burden, but

as his bliss. While the unsanctified goes in Christ's ways as in chains and fetters, the true convert does it heartily, and counts Christ's laws his liberty. He delights in the beauties of holiness, and has this inseparable mark. He had rather, if he might have his choice, live a strict and holy life, than the most prosperous and flourishing worldly life. "*There went with Saul a band of men whose hearts God had touched*" (1 Sam. x. 26). When God touches the hearts of His chosen, they presently follow Christ, and, though drawn, do freely run after Him, and willingly devote themselves to the service of the Lord, seeking Him with their whole desire. Fear has its uses; but this is not the main-spring of motion with a sanctified heart. Christ does not control His subjects by force, but is King of a willing people. They are, through His grace, freely devoted to His service. They serve out of choice, not as slaves, but as the son or spouse, from a spring of love and a loyal mind. In a word, the laws of Christ are the convert's love, delight, and continual study.

(iv). The bent of his course is directed to keep God's statutes. It is the daily care of his life to walk with God. He seeks great things, he has noble designs, though he fall too short. He aims at nothing less than perfection; he desires it, he reaches after it; he would not rest in any degree of grace, till he were quite rid of sin, and perfected in holiness (Phil. iii. 11-14).

Here the hypocrite's rottenness may be discovered. He desires holiness, as one well said, only as a bridge to heaven, and inquires earnestly what is the least that will serve his turn; and if he can get but so much as may bring him to heaven, this is all he cares for. But the sound convert desires holiness for holiness' sake, and not merely for heaven's sake. He would not be satisfied with so much as might save him from hell, but desires the highest degree. Yet desires are not enough. What is your way and your course? Are the drift and scope of your life altered? Is holiness your pursuit, and religion your business? If not, you fall short of sound conversion.

And is this which we have described, the conversion that is of absolute necessity to salvation? Then be informed, that strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life — that there are few that find it — that there is need of divine power to savingly convert a sinner to Jesus Christ.

Again, be exhorted, O man, to examine yourself. What does conscience say? Does it begin to accuse? Does it not pierce you as you go? Is this your judgment, and this your choice, and this your way, that we have described? If so, then it is well. But does

your heart condemn you, and tell you of a certain sin you are living in against your conscience? Does it not tell you there is such and such a secret way of wickedness that you wish to pursue; such and such a duty that you make no conscience of?

Does not conscience carry you to your closet, and tell you how seldom prayer and reading are performed there? Does it not carry you to your family, and show you the charge of God, and the souls of your children that are neglected there? Does not conscience lead you to your shop, your trade, and tell you of some iniquity there? Does it not carry you to the public-house, or the private club, and blame you for the loose company you keep there, the precious time which you misspend there, the talents which you waste there? Does it not carry you into your secret chamber, and read there your condemnation?

O conscience! do your duty. In the name of the living God, I command you, discharge your office. Lay hold upon this sinner, fall upon him, arrest him, apprehend him, undeceive him. What! will you flatter and soothe him while he lives in his sins? Awake, O conscience! What meanest thou, O sleeper? What! have you no reproof in your mouth? What! shall this soul die in his careless neglect of God and of eternity, and you altogether hold your peace? What! shall he go on still in his trespasses, and yet have peace? Oh, rouse yourself, and do your work. Now let the preacher in your bosom speak. Cry aloud, and spare not; lift up thy voice like a trumpet. Let not the blood of his soul be required at your hands.