

REGENERATION OPENED.

A SERMON BY THE REV. JOHN TENNENT.

“Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” John iii. 3.

THESE words are part of a remarkable dialogue between Christ and Nicodemus, in which Nicodemus's fear, ignorance, and willingness to be taught are principally bewrayed. He was one of the Pharisees, as we are informed from the first verse of this chapter, who in general were stated enemies against Christ and his gospel. These Pharisees were proud separatists, who, upon the opinion of their own righteousness, despised all others.

As to his station, he was a ruler, as the word *archōn* signifies. This man, being in a high and eminent station, through fear of incurring the anger or displeasure of the Jewish Sanhedrim by openly professing Christ, came to him by night, verse 2. Thus we see what clogs, hindrances, and impediments, honour, grandeur, and greatness are in the way of the profession and practice of truth and holiness; yet it is evident from the words of Nicodemus in the second verse, notwithstanding his fears to acknow-

ledge openly the truth of Christ's mission from the Father, that he had a well grounded persuasion of it from the miracles the blessed Jesus had wrought. "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do those miracles that thou doest, except God be with him." But certainly, it is of vast consequence and importance, that the gross ignorance and strange stupidity of this learned man, a teacher in Israel, concerning the vital part of piety, are so perspicuously detected in our text and context. "Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily."—In the words are three things remarkable, I. A proposition. II. An asseveration. III. The implicit occasion of them both.

I. The proposition in these words, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." In it there are two things, 1. The subject, a man. 2. The predicate, or that which is spoken concerning the subject, "be born again."

1. As to the subject, a man. This indefinite expression (the matter so requiring as the present case is) is equipollent, or equivalent to a universal. It is as much as if he had said, every one, of whatsoever order, or character, or age, or nation, great or small, rich or poor, noble or ignoble, learned or unlearned, young or old, Jew or Gentile, bond or free, male or female, must be born again, or they cannot see the kingdom of God. Gal. vi. 15. Heb. xii. 14. 1 Pet. i. 23. 2 John i. 13. John iii. 7. 1 John ii. 29. iii. 9. v. 4.

2. The predicate, which being complex, treats of two

things, viz: 1. Of happiness under that term the "kingdom of God." 2. The qualification universally necessary to obtain it, which is "being born again;" *ean me tis gennethe anothēn*. The Greek word *anothen* is generally rendered *superne*, from above, but the tenor of our context, especially Nicodemus's answer to Christ, "How can a man enter the second time?" (ver. 4.) sufficiently proves that it signifies as much here as *deuteron*, or again, *ouk dunatai idein ten basileian tou Theou*; "he cannot see the kingdom of God." By seeing here, I understand possessing, according to that phrase of the Romans, *Hereditatem cernere*. A proof of this we have in our Lord's sermon on the Mount, (Matt. v. 8,) "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God," *i. e.*, they shall see him to their comfort, see him so as to enjoy him, see him as a Friend and Father, and possess him as a satisfying portion. "Cannot—" an unregenerate man is under a threefold impotency in regard of the enjoyment of God's kingdom.

1. Natural. He must take this kingdom by main force, out of the hands of a just and infinite God, if he gets it at all, while he remains in this state. Now what power has a guilty worm to do this, whose foundation is in the dust, and who is crushed before the moth? Job iv. 19.

2. Moral. He is a subject utterly unqualified for the pure pleasures that kingdom affords, being universally corrupt, and subject to the government of sin and sense.

3. Judicial. He is disseized of, and separated from, this inheritance, by the sentence of Christ, the judge of quick and dead; which no power in heaven or earth can reverse;

for he that liveth and was dead, carries the keys of hell and death at his girdle. Rev. i. 18.

An unregenerate person, as such, neither can, nor shall see the kingdom of heaven, so as to inherit it, if there be power enough in God and Christ to keep him out; for this Christ gives his word in pawn, which he will surely accomplish. Now there is a three-fold kingdom made mention of in the holy scriptures.

1. A kingdom of God's providence, established upon the basis of God's uncontrollable power, and unsearchable wisdom. 1 Chron. xxix. 11. Jacob's God has the reins of government on his shoulders, he wields the eternal sceptre, and sits at the sacred helm.

2. The kingdom of God's grace in the church; built upon Christ, the golden foundation, the chief corner stone; this kingdom is given to the Branch by God the Father, as the inspired evangelist testifies. Luke i. 32.

3. A kingdom of glory and blessedness: "Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you." Matt. xxv. 34. This last mentioned I take to be the kingdom designed by Jesus in the text, viz: that triumphant choir in which the saints and angels sing eternal hallelujahs to the everlasting King. Heaven is called a kingdom, because in it God rules his sons and subjects. God's kingdom is where he reigns: now he reigns in righteousness. "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever! a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom." Heb. i. 8.

II. The asseveration, Verily, verily. This asseveration is a conspicuous confirmation of the truth of the proposi-

tion, tending clearly to manifest the great momentousness and importance of it. There are two things in the asseveration which serve to establish inviolably the veracity or truth of the proposition, viz: 1. The repetition of the particle "amen." 2. The dignity of the speaker. The word "amen," rendered "verily" in the text, is twofold, either prefixed or affixed; when it is prefixed, or put before a proposition, it is the note of a certain and earnest affirmation, as in the words of our text, Verily, verily. When it is affixed, or subsequent to a proposition, it notes two things: either 1. The assent of the mind, will, affections, as at the conclusion of the creed and the Lord's prayer. Or 2. An asseveration, or certain affirmation, as the word amen, at the end of the Lord's prayer, signifies not only our assent to, but assurance of, the reality and certainty of the things therein contained. Now the repetition of this particle in our text, like the redoubling of Pharaoh's dream, (Gen. xli. 32,) shows us at once the undeniable certainty and great weight of the thing spoken of.

2. The dignity of the speaker: who is it that speaks thus? The blessed and holy Jesus, as our text informs us; which name some derive from *iemi*, a word that signifies to send, because the Lord Jesus is the bright angel, the faithful messenger of the everlasting covenant. Mal. iii. 1. Heb. iii. 2. Others, from *iao*, a word that signifies to heal, because the Lord Jesus was the true physician. Matt. ix. 12, Mark ii. 17. Basil and Cyril among the ancients are of this opinion.

But the angel explains the true derivation of it. "And

thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins." Matt. i. 21. And that not only typically, as Moses and Joshua, and others, but really and truly. Nor 2. only temporally, as those before mentioned, just from bodily miseries, but from spiritual and eternal, from sin and death. Heb. ii. 14. 1 Cor. xv. 55—57. 1 John iii. 8. 3. Neither did he only free his people from misery, as Moses did Israel out of Egypt; no, but as his type Joshua led Israel into Canaan, so does the blessed Jesus, the anti-type, introduce his people into a state of endless, uninterrupted, and unspeakably ravishing delight, in the imperial paradise, of which the earthly Canaan was but a dark figure. Now, I say the dignity of the person speaking in our text, gives great weight and confirmation to the truth spoken. Will he, who is truth itself, lie? Will he, who is the great prophet of his people, co-equal and co-eternal with his Father, the brightness of his glory, the express image of his person, (Heb. xiii. 4, 8,) deceive us? I say unto you: I, who am the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: the King of kings, and Lord of lords, and Prince of the kings of the earth.

As to the third particular, the ground or occasion of the words of our text, implied in that phrase, "Jesus answered:" it is difficult to find out what were the words Nicodemus spake, to which Jesus gave answer; there is a diversity of opinions about it. Some think that Christ's words are a direct answer to those words of Nicodemus mentioned in the second verse, as if Christ had said, Thou lookest upon me as a prophet only, thou canst do no otherwise unless

thou wert regenerated. Others think, and that more probably, that from the good opinion Nicodemus had of Christ, he asked the way to salvation, and that our text is an answer to that question.

From the words thus briefly explained, there arise these two doctrinal observations, the one implied, and the other expressed.

OBSERVATION I. That man from his very birth is depraved.

OBSERVATION II. That regeneration is absolutely necessary in order to obtain eternal salvation.

As to the first of these which is this, That man from his very birth is depraved.

The method I design to follow in prosecuting this doctrine is

1. To prove the truth of it.
2. Explain the nature of it.
3. To improve it. And

1. I am to consider the truth of the doctrine. This is plain from the text, for if the first birth was not vitiated, what need would there be of a second? The royal prophet Isaiah upbraids Israel with this, "And was called a transgressor from the womb." Isa. xlviii. 8. The psalmist gives testimony to the same truth, (Psa. li. 5,) "I was shapen in sin," not only corrupted with sin as soon as born, but before, even in our formation. Job confirms this in the fourteenth chapter of his book, verse 4, "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one." Yea, the blessed Jesus makes this the ground of the necessity

of a change in the seventh verse of our context, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh:" as if Christ should say, You need not wonder, Nicodemus, at my inculcation of the necessity of this inward change or new birth; because men are corrupted from their first birth. This original depravity is conveyed to all the sons of Adam by generation, unless prevented by a miracle, as in Christ. The sickness and death of infants are a plain and unanswerable proof of this; "For the wages of sin is death." Rom. vi. 23. Also the baptismal laver shows this hereditary contagion and infection. But

2. I am to explain the nature of this depravity, which consists chiefly in these three things, viz:

1. In a privation of good.
2. In an antipathy to God.
3. In a propensity to evil.

1. Then, in every unregenerate soul there is a privation of all good. There is no spark or signature of that pristine, beautiful image engraven at first on the soul by God; no relics of man's primitive righteousness, neither in habit or in act, in inclination or motion, that is spiritually good; "In my flesh," *i. e.*, in my nature considered as corrupted, "there dwells no good thing." Rom. vii. 18. The soul is deprived of its ancient ornaments and furniture; it is left poor without spiritual riches, blind without saving knowledge, naked without spiritual raiment. Rev. iii. 17. And

2. There is an antipathy to God, his ways, his people, his image. "The carnal mind is enmity to God." Rom.

viii. 7. This is evident from the speech and practice of wicked people, their embittered jeers, and satirical invectives against God's people. A Cain hated an Abel, and an Ishmael an Isaac, and an Esau a Jacob, and that because of their goodness. 1 John iii. 12. Now, this hellish spite is to be found in all natural, unregenerate people, till removed by the supernatural change, of which I design to speak afterwards. I now proceed to the

3d Particular contained in this depravity, which is the propensity that is in all unconverted people to every evil. "Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child." Prov. xxii. 15. Indeed, there is not an equal propensity in all, to every sin; no, for some by reason of their natural temperament, manner of education, or custom, are inclined to one sin more than some others; yet all men by nature are virtually disposed to every sin; for we are prone to evil, as the sparks fly upward. Job v. 7. Every sin is formed in our nature; they want only time, opportunity, temptation, and the removal of restraining grace, to bring them forth into action.

Use. Hence we are informed 1, of man's miserable and deplorable state by nature, which affords us sufficient matter for the deepest humiliation, and most doleful lamentation. It is on this account that we are rendered obnoxious to the vindictive justice of a terrible and holy God. Eph. ii. 3. This is it, that makes our lives so corrupted, and all our religious services so defective and depraved.

2. This informs us of the absolute necessity of a universal change, of heart as well as practice, in order to ob-

tain fellowship and communion with a holy sin-hating God here, (1 John i. 6,) or the more full enjoyment of him in the life to come. How can there be a sweet communion, and full enjoyment, without love? And how can there be love without likeness? And pray what likeness or resemblance is there between an infinitely pure God, and an unconverted sinner, who is a very mass of pollution and defilement? How can that God who is glorious in holiness, fix his complacential love upon that which is the object of his eternal abhorrence? And how can an unrenewed sinner, who is filled with enmity against God, (Rom. viii. 7,) fix his highest love upon one he hates with an implacable hatred? All which considered, complexly shows us the absolute necessity of a universal change; which naturally leads me to the second observation, which is,

That regeneration is absolutely necessary in order to obtain eternal salvation.

This is evident from the words of our text, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Also from Gal. vi. 15; "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails any thing, but a new creature. Therefore if any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature; old things are passed away, and all things are become new." "Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord." Heb. xii. 14. "And there shall in no wise enter into it, any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie, but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life." Rev. xxi. 27.

In prosecuting this doctrine, I shall endeavour to observe the following method.

- I. Show negatively what regeneration is not.
- II. Positively show what it is
- III. Propose those reasons that urge the necessity of it.
- IV. Improve it.

As to the first proposed, which was to show what regeneration is not. And,

1. It is not what Nicodemus grossly conceived, a re-entry into the womb of our mother. It is surprising that a man of so polite literature as we have reason to believe Nicodemus was: a master, a teacher in Israel; acquainted with the law and word of God, where doubtless he had read frequently such passages as those, (Ezek. xxxvi. 26,) should have such gross conceptions of this work of God; but hereby are these sayings of God verified, (1 Cor. i. 21, & ii. 14,) "For in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God; but the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Such is the inherent hereditary contagion of our apostatized nature, that were we born a thousand times in a natural way, it would not remedy that malady. This the blessed and holy Jesus plainly and clearly confirms in the sixth verse of our context, That which is born of the flesh, is flesh, *i. e.*, it is corrupted and contaminated.

Hence it appears to be a prodigy of incomparable folly for any to boast of, and glory in, the grandeur of their descent and lineage, seeing that whatsoever is born of the

flesh is flesh, and without outward cultivation, and inward renovation, must be the subjects of indelible misery. Neither

2. Is regeneration a change of the essence, or being of the soul (*hæc semper eadem physicè manet*): the soul is not made new as to its being or substance (*aut quoad esse physicum,*) other ways a new soul must be infused, which we read not of; but as to its qualities (*aut quoad esse morale*), new qualities or principles of action are infused into the soul by God, by which it is inclined and swayed after another manner, and to another scope, than formerly. Some do talk strangely of this affair, that the substance of the soul is changed. It is true, the scripture calls this gracious change a participation of the divine nature. 2 Pet. i. 4. But this is only to show 1. the reality and fixedness of this work of grace, that it is no notion or fancy, but a solid reality; 2. the resemblance it bears to the divine perfections. Such persons are renewed after God's image, in knowledge, righteousness and holiness; they have a divine temper and disposition of soul; the principal bias of their hearts is towards God and his service. But though they are thus born after God, and of God, yet they are not thereby made God. That which is by way of substance or essence in him, is only by way of accident in us. Neither

3. Doth it consist in an outward profession of Christ or his ways. The foolish virgins had large lamps, but no oil. Matt. xxv. A man may be reformed from Paganism or Popery to the profession of true Christianity, and yet be a stranger to this work of God. Nor

4. In the enjoyment of outward privileges, such as baptism, the Lord's Supper, and others of the like nature. The Jews of old depended upon these outward privileges and prerogatives. Jer. vii. 4. Rom. x. 3. And so do many of the gospelized world now; but the divinely inspired Jeremiah pungently inculcates the invalidity of outward ordinances, without the thing signified by them, to obtain bliss and glory; therefore, he puts the circumcised Jews, who were uncircumcised in heart, in a parallel case with Edom, Ammon, and Moab, heathenish nations. Jer. ix. 25. Yea, Christ himself had a controversy with the Jews upon the same account; he endeavoured to destroy their fond hopes of heaven, grounded upon their outward privileges, and for his plain dealing he received abusive treatment. John viii. The apostle Paul very plainly sheweth the insufficiency of these things without an inward renovation. Gal. vi. 15. Neither

5. Doth it consist in an external conformity to the law of God: for this is something inward, the workmanship of God in the heart. A man may pray, read, hear outwardly, keep the Sabbath, be faithful to his word, and just in his dealings, and yet be a stranger to this work of God in the soul: for such were some of the Pharisees of old. Phil. iii. 6. Mark x. 20. And yet our ascended Lord and Saviour positively avers, that unless our righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, we shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven. Matt. v. 20. Nor

6. In a restraint of the old man. God restrains many whom he never renews. So he did Abimelech, a heathen.

Gen. xx. 6. One that is not renewed may avoid gross sins, through fear, shame, or the absence of opportunities and temptations, or through the influence of nature's light, the precepts of morality, the doctrines of the gospel, and the civil laws of the land. The apostle Peter speaks of some that had escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord Christ, and yet were again entangled in them. 2 Pet. ii. 20—22. Restraining grace keeps only from the outward acts of sin, through slavish fear, or some selfish motives; but saving grace subdues sin at the root, and raises an irreconcilable hatred in the soul against it. 2 Cor. vii. 11. Nor

7. In common gifts or motions of the Holy Spirit, which are without distinction conferred on both the elect and reprobate. It is not a gift of prayer, tongues, utterance, or a faculty of unfolding scripture difficulties. Judas had all or most of these, yet was he not born again, but a son of perdition. John xvii. 12. "It is not with men as with trees," as one observes, "for every bud, blossom, or leaf, argues some life in the tree; but every ability to preach or to pray, does not prove this supernatural life in us." Neither does it consist in the common motions of the Holy Spirit, such as some sight of sin, some grief for it, and wishes after amendment. Personal afflictions, a prospect of eternity in sickness, or other such alarming occurrences may cause such like workings. Herod delighted to hear John the Baptist. Mark vi. 20. Felix trembled when he heard Paul preach. Acts xxiv. 25. And Agrippa was almost persuaded; *en oligo*, which compared with Paul's

answer, ver. 29, Acts xxvi. 28, may be justly rendered "all to a little." And even wicked Balaam could wish for a happy death, though he did not so well relish a holy life. "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." Num. xxiii. 10. 2 Pet. ii. 15. Nor

8. Does regeneration consist in a partial change of the soul, or of some of its faculties only; but it is a total change of the soul in all its powers. There may be strange changes in some of the faculties, and yet no true conversion to God; as particularly, 1. There may be great light and knowledge of divine truths, with an assent to, and persuasion of, their veracity, in the mind. "And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have no charity (or love, for so the word *agape* signifies), I am nothing." 1 Cor. xiii. 2. Also, "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened," Heb. vi. 4. Rom. ii. 17, 18. Here we see the understanding, the directive power, may be so illuminated by the Spirit of God, as to perceive divine truths with a more clear and affecting view than before, without a saving change. Also the will, which is a cardinal faculty of man's soul, may be much bowed, and almost persuaded in some of the unregenerate. Acts xxvi. 28. Again, the conscience, another power, or as some say, a reflex act of the mind, may be much awakened by the terror of God upon the account of sin. Gen. iv. 13, 14. Acts xxiv. 25. Also the

passions may be in some measure changed in the unregenerate: they may have great sorrow for sin. 1 Kings xxi. 27. Matt. xxvii. 4, 5; joy and delight from divine objects; Heb. vi. 4; Matt. xiii. 20; and in attendance upon divine ordinances; John v. 35. Isa. lviii. 2; desires after Christ; Mal. iii. 2. John vi. 34; after grace; Matt. xxv. 8; after heaven; Num. xxiii. 10; some hatred against sin; Rom. ii. 22. 2 Kings x. 26—28; some purposes to forsake it; Num. xxii. 17, 18; some love to God; Jer. ii. 2. Deut. ix. 6, 24; compared with Christ; Matt. x. 37; to the people of God in general; this, the parable of the wise and foolish virgins proves; Matt. xxv; for it is probable that the foolish would not have associated and dwelt with the wise so as they did, unless they had loved them; Gal. iv. 7; to faithful, soul-searching ministers in particular; Mark vi. 20; some fear of God; James ii. 19; Jonah i. 10, 16; some zeal for God; 2 Kings x. 6. Phil. 3, 6. Rom. x. 2; some faith in God; Acts viii. 13. Job ii. 23, 24; some dependence and reliance upon God; Mic. iii. 11. 2 Chron. xiii. 5—13 & 18, compared with Deut. ix. 6, 24 & 1 Kings xv. 3; some confident persuasion of their interest in his special favour and friendship; Matt. xxv. 7, 11. Job viii. 33. 2 Chron. xiii. 10. Num. xxii. 18. All these things I have mentioned under this head, people may have, and yet want regenerating grace, and so be damned at last. But I proceed to consider the 2d thing proposed, which was to show positively what regeneration is. And

I. More generally, it may be said to be a restoration of

God's defaced image in man, to some degree of its primitive beauty and lustre. Our first parents were made after God's image, in knowledge, righteousness and true holiness, with dominion over the creatures. Ecc. vii. 29. Gen. i. 27. Psal. viii. 5. This image of God consisted in a universal rectitude of the whole soul, with all its faculties, powers and affections; the understanding being the guide and governor of the soul's faculties, had clear perceptions of the mind and will of God; the will was subject to the understanding's directions, having an inherent inclination to will that which the mind by its native light showed to be good. The whole train of passions freely followed the guidance of these superior powers, without the least reluctance. Thus there was a universal harmony at first among all the soul's faculties established by the God of order, but sin has introduced a confusion and chaos among these faculties, it has darkened the understanding, rendered the will obstinate, and misplaced the affections upon diametrically opposite objects, hardened the heart, stupefied the conscience. Now the blind will, which was before a subject, usurps the empire, and hurries the other powers to a compliance with its inordinate dictates. Now regeneration is a renewing that gracious image of God in us, which we have lost; for by it, the blind understanding is in some measure enlightened; Acts xxvi. 18; the stony heart mollified; Ezek. xxxvi. 26; the disordered affections rectified and fixed upon the most suitable and noble objects, God himself as their chief good and last end.

But more particularly,

A law work generally precedes this change ; hence the law is said to be a schoolmaster to lead us to Christ ; Gal. iii. 24 ; which I apprehend is wrought in the following manner.

1. There is a discovery of sin, which the Lord effects by the law and by the Spirit. "I had not known sin, but by the law." Rom. vii. 7. Before this, Christless sinners are secure, like Peter sleeping in his chains. Acts xii. 6. The Spirit of God concurs with the law. This is one of his first works with unconverted sinners ; as is evident from Job xvi. 8. Before he convinces them of righteousness, he convinces them of sin ; their eyes are opened. Acts xxvi. 18. Now they see sin in its loathsome nature, deplorable circumstances, and dreadful consequences ; they begin to see the holiness of God, the spiritual latitude of his law, and their own corrupt nature ; then are they apt to cry out, Who can stand before this great and dreadful God ? Now, though this discovery of sin begins at a particular evil, as with the Jews, (Acts ii. 37,) yet it proceeds to more ; as Ezekiel was led to divers parts of the temple to see greater and greater abominations. Ezek. viii. 6—13.

2. There is an application of the merit of sin. God convinces the sinner that all the threatenings belong to him ; yea, he particularly applies them to himself, as Nathan his parabolical discourse to David, (2 Sam. xii. 7,) I am the man that these curses are directed against. He hears his condemnation sounded by the trumpet of the word ; he sees and feels that he is in the utmost distress, environed with dangers, and can at present see no way of

escape opened. Luke xv. 17. He is in the case of the afflicted, pursued Israelites at the Red Sea. Ex. xiv. 14, 15. This is that spirit of bondage to fear, which ordinarily precedes the spirit of adoption. Rom. viii. 15.

3. Compunction, or sharp anguish for sin. The sight of sin and wrath wounds the soul, as though it were stabbed with a sword. Acts ii. 37. They have such acute pains as if a sharp spear lanced their hearts. It is elsewhere called the "rending of the heart." Joel ii. 14. When we are greatly grieved in soul for sin, so that it even cuts us to the heart to think how we have dishonoured God, and disparaged ourselves by it; when we conceive an aversion to sin, and earnestly desire and endeavour to get clear of the principles of it, and never to return to the practice of it, then we rend our hearts for it, and then will God rend the heavens, and come down to us with mercy. Also, this compunction I am treating of is called breaking up of the fallow ground. "Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns;" (Jer. iv. 3,) which represents both the necessity and difficulty of it. "An unconvinced heart," says one, "is like fallow ground, untilled, unfenced, unfruitful of any thing besides thorns, which is the natural produce of the soil; which we are bound to get ploughed up by the word of God, (Heb. iv. 12,) otherwise they will choke our attempts, and blast our hopes." Hos. x. 11. It is also compared to a taking away the fore-skin of the heart. "Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the fore-skins of your heart, ye men of Judah, and inhabitants of Jerusalem: lest my fury come forth like fire, and

burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings;" (Jer. iv. 4;) *i. e.*, saith Mr. Poole, "take away that brawniness and obstinacy that is upon your hearts, having to do with God that hath respect unto the heart, (Deut. x. 16. Ezek. xlv. 9. Acts vii. 51,) lest you proceed so far in your obstinacy, that I will not be appeased." Jer. xxi. 12. Amos v. 6.

4. *Enquiry.* When the apostle Peter's preaching, accompanied with divine energy, had wounded the Jews, this was the necessary effect of it, "What shall we do?" Acts ii. 37.

Thus I thought it necessary, to prevent mistakes, to speak first of that which is previous and preparatory to this change. Now I come to speak somewhat briefly of the change itself in the several faculties of man's soul. And

1. The understanding is renewed in its several powers or acts; a light from on high shines into it, whereby its natural darkness is in some measure dissipated, so that it hath new apprehensions of things. As natural light was one of the first things produced in the old creation, "And God said, Let there be light, and there was light;" (Gen. i. 3;) so spiritual light is one of the first in the new. 2 Cor. iv. 6. Formerly, the face of Christ was veiled from the soul, as the face of Moses from the Israelites; but now he sees something of his peerless beauty, and transcendent excellency. Christ is to him as the apple tree among the trees of the woods, as the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valley. Cant. ii. 1—3. His very name is as fragrant ointment poured

forth, and aromatic spices. Cant. i. 3. All other enjoyments are as dross in comparison of him, in the enlightened sinner's esteem. Phil. iii. 8. Now he sees the loathsome and abominable nature of sin. Rom. vii. 13. Now he sees, and experience tells him, that there is no true solace, contentment, or satisfaction to be had in any sublunary trifles; he sees that such earthly enjoyments are empty of solid good, transient, unsatisfying, and bewitching; contrary to his former apprehension. Isa. lv. 2. 1 Cor. vii. 31. Ps. vi. 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10. They can find no more nourishment in them for their hungering souls, than a starving man would do in gravel-stones, wind, husks, ashes. Prov. xx. 17. Hos. xii. 1. Luke xv. 16. Isa. xlv. 20. That heart-holiness, and circumspection of life, which he was apt formerly to ridicule and deride, as needless preciseness, affected and foolish singularity, (Cant. v. 9. 1 Pet. iv. 4,) he sees not only necessary, but desirable and lovely. Cant. vi. 1. Zech. viii. 23. Mal. iii. 16, 17. Now he sees clearly that that good heart, those good words, good deeds, good meanings, for which he thought God would spare and reward him, deserve nothing less than the revengeful strokes of God's direful justice. Isa. lxiv. 6. Phil. iii. 7.

2. He has a new assent, his understanding being enlightened to perceive the precious truths of Christ; he assents to them with a kind of plerophory, in a lively, sensible manner. Luke i. 1. His assent is not grounded upon opinion, conjecture, or historical credit, as formerly; and therefore, is not light and superficial, but firm and real. The natural atheism of his heart is in some measure cured,

so that he does not so staggeringly assent to divine truths as before.

3. His judgment is changed. Formerly it was an absurd paradox to him, if he had all the honours, profits, and pleasures his heart could desire, that he should not be happy then; but now he judges by experience, that these things can no more satisfy an enlightened soul, than an adamant stone, or a puff of wind, would satisfy a hungry person. Formerly he used to think that the new birth was but a fancy, a whim, a fiction, introduced by some hypochondriac, silly, precise people, that imposed upon themselves and others, with dreams and notions, the effects of melancholy blood, a sickly constitution, or a disordered brain; but now he sees and feels an absolute necessity of it, and that he must be damned unless he obtains it, according to the solemn, redoubled asseveration of the Lord Christ, in our text. In short, he used to judge of things by their appearance, but now he judges of them according to what they are in reality.

4. His estimate of things is changed. He was wont to think highly of the world and the things of it, however contrarily he might speak, these had the throne of his heart; but now he prefers even the reproach of Christ before them. Heb. xi. 26. Thus his estimate is changed in respect of honours, pleasures, companions, gifts, parts, privileges, performances, which would take up more time than can be well spared at present to explain and illustrate. I proceed therefore to another particular.

5. His purposes are changed, he has vastly different

designs from those he was wont to entertain and indulge before his new birth. While he was in a state of security, his principal scope was to get the world, if possible; to this end, he would be frequently, almost continually, framing the most artful and suitable schemes, and if these did not answer as he would have them, then perhaps his sleep would be broken, and his thoughts disturbed, and he put upon a rack of impatient pain. In short, his purposes were for sin and self, but now they are for God and his soul, now he strives as much daily to get his heart and affections deadened to the world, as he did before to secure and advance his interest in it. Now his anxious mind is often contriving, what measures he should take to glorify the blessed God, to subdue abominable sin, and advance the despised interest of his dear Lord Jesus.

6. His reasonings are changed. He was wont in his state of sin and security, to argue for sin and the world, against Christ and holiness; from the mercy and goodness of God, to liberty (so called, but it is really the basest bondage), in sinning against him, but now it is the greatest motive to holiness, and circumspection.

7. The will is changed. It has got a new bias and centre of its actings; in his unconverted state, himself or the world was the centre, in reality (notwithstanding his fair and false flams and flourishes of empty talk to the contrary), to which he moved, for which he acted with a furious natural proneness. *Psa. iv. 6. 2 Tim. iii. 2.* But now God in Christ is the centre to which all his actions, whether natural, civil, or sacred, do bend and terminate.

He aims at God's glory in all his actions universally, and singly, the inclinations of his will bend towards God freely from an inward and powerful principle of life. 1 Cor. x. 31. Grace is in him as a well of water springing up to eternal life. John iv. 14. His will has an unconstrained motion. Some, under the views of a vast eternity, or some afflictive dispensation, have weak motions of heart towards God. Psa. lxxviii. 34. But when the prospect of danger is removed, the motions cease, (Psa. lxxviii. 57,) like the motion of a clock when the spring is removed; but the motions of a believer's heart are constant, even when outward enforcements are taken away, (Psa. cxix. 112,) because they flow from an inward and vital cause.

Furthermore, his will has new enjoyments. In his state of unregeneracy, his life was only a vexatious wandering from vanity to vanity; all the contentment he had, was in some worldly accommodations, or outward performances, Psa. xlv. Amos. vi. 1, 3—6. Rom. x. 3. But now they are as husks to him, he cannot be satisfied without the children's bread. Psa. cxix. 37. & cvi. 4. It was an observable saying of Augustine, "*Tu fecisti cor nostrum, et irrequietum est donec ad te revertatur*," i. e., "Thou hast made our heart, and it is restless till it returns to thee." The sinner in his security would be contented with the husk and shell of duties, but now nothing will satisfy him but the presence of Jesus in them; a sight of the king's face, a sense of his special love. But the cardinal acts of the will are assent and dissent, these are the very hinges upon which it exerts its receptive and exclusive faculties, suitable

to its love or dislike to the object proposed. John i. 12 & v. 40. When Christ is offered to the soul appended to the pole of the gospel, on his own terms of self denial, and taking up the cross, the new-born person is willing to want all, that he may have Him, to lose all, that he may gain Him.

8. The affections of the soul are changed, such as desire, delight, fear, hatred, joy, and love. New-born persons have frequent and vehement desires after communion with, and conformity to, God in Christ here, and the full enjoyment of him hereafter, arising from a sight of his beauty and excellency. "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God?" Psal. xlii. 1, 2. "My flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land where no water is; to see thy power and thy glory—because thy loving kindness is better than life—my soul followeth hard after thee." Psal. lxxiii. 1—3, 8. "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God." Psal. lxxxiv. 1, 2. "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine." Cant. i. 2. "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee." Psal. lxxiii. 25. "O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes! I have longed for thy salvation, O Lord, and thy law is my delight." Psal. cxix. 5, 174. "He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen, even so, come Lord Jesus." Rev.

xxii. 20. And as their desires are after Christ, so their delight is in him. "The king hath brought me into his chambers: we will be glad and rejoice in thee, we will remember thy love more than wine." Cant. i. 4. "A bundle of myrrh is my well beloved unto me; he shall lie all night betwixt my breasts." Cant. i. 13. "As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste." Cant. ii. 3. "His mouth is most sweet; (*i. e.*, the communications of his love by his word are most delightful,) yea, he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem." Cant. v. 16. And as they delight in him, so they fear to offend him, and that even in the least things. 1 Thess. v. 22. They are apt to cry out when they are tempted, as Joseph, "How shall I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" Gen. xxxix. 9. They see the baseness and feel the bitterness of sin, and, therefore, fear it. Lam. iii. Having in remembrance the wormwood and the gall, they feel a sense of the divine goodness, and, therefore, fear sinning against it. "Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days." Hos. iii. 5. Rom. ii. 4. And as they fear sin, so they hate it universally and irreconcilably, (Psa. cxix. 104,) and cannot at any time fall in love with it as formerly. 1 John iii. 3—10. Again, the objects of their love are changed. God's people, his laws, his image, his ordinances are the objects to which their affections freely

flow. Now, the new born person loves sincerely and fervently those whom he once despised, and pities those whom he once loved and admired, and disdains their society, their scoffs and threatenings, as well as their destructive gains, and perishing, insipid pleasures. *Psa. xv. 4 & cxix. 115. 2 Kings iii. 14. Psa. ii. 1, 4 & lii. 6, 7. Isa. xxxiii. 15. Psa. cxli. 4. Heb. xi. 24.* Now he sees that the people of God are the most excellent persons on earth, as much preferable to others as jewels, the stones of a crown, refined gold, a royal diadem, are to common pebbles, dross, and rubbish. *Mal. iii. 17. Zech. ix. 16. Lam. iv. 2. Isa. lxii. 3. Psa. xvi. 3.* As much excelling others, as wheat does chaff (*Matt. xiii. 30. Psa. i. 4*); light, darkness (*Matt. v. 14. Eph. v. 8*); cedars and myrtle trees, the tares and thorns. *Psa. xcii. 12. Isa. lv. 13. Matt. xiii. 38. Cant. ii. 2.* As much as the most potent kings, the basest slaves, *Rev. i. 6. Acts viii. 23. Isa. lxi. 1.* As much as lambs and doves are preferable in their qualities to goats, swine, dogs, and foxes (*Hos. iv. 14. Matt. x. 16 & xxv. 33 & vii. 6. 2 Pet. ii. 22. Luke xiii. 32*); and vipers. *Matt. iii. 7.* Therefore, the new born person resorts to God's people, covets their company, (which he before shunned,) that with them he may seek Jesus. *Acts iv. 23. Cant. i. 7 & vi. 1.* When the blinded jailor came to have his eyes opened, he soon washed the wounds he had made before by many and cruel stripes. *Acts xvi. 23, 33.* Their love is fixed on God in Jesus, as their highest good and last end, as their complete, satisfying and everlasting portion; (*Lam. iii. 24. Psa. xvi. 5. & lxxiii. 26*); which shows it in lively, warm, vigorous

actings, so that the whole soul feels sometimes the sweet pains, and refreshful qualms of a love-sickness after Christ. Cant. v. 8. All the waters of affliction cannot quench this love, but make it burn more brightly, as oil cast into the fire. "Set me as a seal upon thy heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death." Cant. viii. 6. Their sorrow is also changed as to its objects; they were wont, in their carnal and secure state, to mourn principally about worldly losses and disappointments, (Psa. iv. 6. 2 Cor. vii. 10,) that either they could not amass and obtain, or retain such a quantity of worldly pelf, as their greedy desires longed for; or their trouble principally centred upon the loss of their relations or friends, or their credit and worldly comfort. Gen. xxvii. 38. 1 Sam. xv. 30. But now they mourn chiefly over their sins against God, (Psa. li. 4,) that they are so many, so heinous, that they have continued in sin so long; (Rom. vi. 21); that they are so inwardly and universally corrupted by it; (Rom. vii. 24); and they do not only grieve that they themselves have sinned against such a good God, but that others, also, do grievously reproach the Almighty, and affront his majesty, by contemning his authority, profaning his sacred name, violating his sabbath, slighting his word and ordinances, opposing his truths, and abusing his people. Ezek. ix. 4. 2 Pet. ii. 7, 8. Psa. cxix. 136. Lam. iv. 2. They also mourn an absent God! The withdrawing of his comfortable presence from them distresses their spirits. Psa. xlii. 5. Cant. iii. 1—3. & v. 6, 8. The numerous crowds of wicked people, the smallness of the number of-

those that are truly godly, and the little success of the gospel of Christ, affords matter of great sorrow to new born persons. Matt. vii. 13 & xx. 16 & xxii. 14. Nahum vii. 1, 2. Psa. iii. 1. Isa. liii. 1.

9. The conscience is changed. As before it was not able to perform its offices, or functions, viz: to apply, convince, or tremble at the word, but now, when the soul feels the regenerating influences of the Holy Spirit, what a tender sense fills the renewed conscience! For what small things will it smite, rebuke and check the sinner! How strongly will it bind to duty, and bar against sin! The consciences of the most of ungodly people are large, secure, and mostly silent; if it be not when they commit gross and notorious crimes. Tit. i. 15. But the consciences of regenerate persons, being purged from dead works, (Heb. ix. 14,) do wake and rebuke sharply for small offences, (1 Sam. xxiv. 5,) and put the sinner into distress and anguish. Gen. xliii. 21. Now it is the continued labour of the new born person to get and keep a good conscience. 2 Cor. i. 12. Acts xxiv. 16.

10. The memory; now it is more apt to embrace and retain divine things than formerly. Cant. i. 4. Psa. ciii. 18 & cxix. 11. The regenerate person endeavours to lay up the sayings of Jesus in the cabinet of his memory. Matt. xxvi. 75. I confess that regenerating grace does not change the natural imperfections of the human constitution, only the moral. If a person has naturally a weak memory, it cannot be reasonably expected that grace will strengthen the natural faculty, for its design is not to heal

the body but the soul, it only turns the vein of the thoughts and affections on divine subjects, and helps to perceive better, fundamental truths, (1 John ii. 20, 27,) and makes a person the more desirous to retain them, but it does not enlarge or strengthen the faculty itself ordinarily; a person may be a strong Christian, have an affectionate heart, and a holy humble practice, and yet have but a weak memory; but, in the meantime, it is surely the practice of new-born persons to pore much upon divine things. *Psa. i. 2 & civ. 34 & cxix. 97, 99.* Therefore when they forget precious truths they have heard explained, (their affections being fixed upon them,) they are grieved. But

11. Their conversation is changed. They were wont to be like moles grovelling in the earth, now their mind and conversation are in heaven; *Phil. iii. 20. Heb. xiii. 14;* they are ashamed and blush at their former conversation. *Rom. vi. 21.* They have changed their former masters, sin, Satan, and the world, and broken their detestable league with them and death. *Rom. vi. 14, 16—23. Isa. xxviii. 15, 18.* “And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts.” *Gal. v. 24.* The new born person maintains a continual conflict with sin. *Gal. v. 17. Rom. vii. 23.* Now he does not only endeavour to restrain the outward act, but to crucify the root of his inward corruption. *Psa. li.* Not only to cut off some branches, but all; even that sin which has the strongest seat in his constitution. *Psa. xviii. 23.* He endeavours to repress the first motions of sin, and to flee the appearance of evil, being diffident of his own strength, and afraid to offend his God. *1 Thess. v. 22.*

But I proceed to the third thing proposed.

III. To offer reasons urging the necessity of regeneration. And

1. The universal corruption of our nature shows the indispensable necessity of renewing grace, as in the sixth verse of our context. "For without holiness no man shall see the Lord." Heb. xii. 14. Rom. viii. 13. Is it reasonable to suppose that such a holy God as Jehovah is, who cannot look on sin but with abhorrence, should receive such polluted wretches as unconverted sinners are, into his complacential embraces?

2. Because while unconverted the law condemns us; Gal. iii. 10. Rom. iii. 19; which sentence cannot be removed any other ways but by faith in Christ (Mark xvi. 16. John iii. 18), which no unconverted person has; for if he had, it would change his heart and practice. Gal. v. 6. 2 Thess. i. 11. James ii. 14. He may, indeed, have a historical or temporary faith, but that will not do for salvation. James ii. 19, 20.

3. Because of the stability and firmness of God's word. He who cannot lie hath spoken it, and heaven and earth may, and shall pass away, but not one tittle that God hath spoken, shall pass away unaccomplished. Matt, xxiv. 35. Therefore regeneration is necessary to salvation.

4. The consideration of the nature of the happiness of heaven, with the respect that regeneration hath to it, plainly manifests the necessity of it. Surely the nature of future happiness is pure and spiritual, consisting in the vision and fruition of a holy God, who is a Spirit, (1 Cor.

xiii. 12,) and in the society and social worship of saints and angels, and such pleasures and employments as the beauty of the objects and other circumstances of the place, may be supposed to imply. Now what suitableness is there between a carnal, unrenewed mind, and the spiritual and pure pleasures of heaven? Does not pleasure spring from the suitableness between the object and the faculty? What pleasure then can be expected by the unregenerate in heaven itself, if they were carried there in their present condition (though they may be sure, in the meantime, that while such, they will never have the trial. Rev. xxi. 27 & xxii. 15)? There is such a discord between their present dispositions and the temper, and entertainments, and employments of heaven, for these are holy and spiritual, but they are carnal and sensual. This Dr. Scott expresses beautifully, "For alas (if we consider the matter rightly), how could souls of their relish and complexion find a proper employment for themselves in the regions of bliss? There are no wanton amours among those heavenly lovers; no rivers of wine, among their rivers of pleasure, to gratify their boundless sensuality; no parasite to flatter their lofty pride; no miseries to feed their meagre envy; no mischiefs to tickle their devilish revenge; but all the felicities with which that state abounds (viz: praise, love, contemplation), are such that they would loath and nauseate them, as too pure and refined for their depraved appetites; and not improbably (if they had their own option), desire to fly to hell for shelter, to spirits of their own depravity, rather than stay to be tormented in a heaven so incongruous to

their nature." So that if these men would be happy, they must either find out a new heaven, or get new hearts.

Bishop Beveridge expresses himself thus upon this head: "Supposing it should please God to take us all up immediately into the highest heavens, and there place us around our blessed Saviour; all such as are real saints among us, as love God above all things, and have prepared their minds for spiritual enjoyments, how glad would they be to see their Redeemer, shining in all his glory! How suddenly would they strike up with the choir of heaven, in singing the praises of Him that brought them thither! What infinite pleasure would they take in the place, employment, company, and every thing they see there! But as for others who are still in their sins, and mind only earthly things, how sad and disconsolate would they be! They would wonder to see the saints so pleasant and joyful; for, as for their parts, they would see nothing there to take delight in; in the midst of light they would be still in darkness, and in sorrow in the midst of joys, they would not hear the heavenly music, or if they did, it would sound harsh, and be all discords to them; they could not taste these spiritual dainties, or if they did, they could not relish or find any sweetness in them; they could not see the face of God, or if they did, they would not be pleased, but terrified and confounded at it; and all this for the want of a true principle of grace and holiness, without which a blind man may as well delight in pictures, the deaf man in music, or a brute beast in metaphysics, as men of such tempers either in heaven, or God himself."

Again, regeneration hath such a relation to our salvation, that it is indeed a part and beginning of it. *Gratia est aurora gloriæ*, grace is the very dawn of glory, differing only in degree and duration from the happiness of heaven. "The truth is," saith Stanhope, "God in his wisdom hath so ordered the matter, so admirably contrived our nature and our duty, that virtue and happiness, grace and glory, are one and the same thing, differing only in the circumstances and several prospects we view them under. The good man begins his heaven upon earth, and finishes there what is imperfect here; for the more he masters his sensual appetites, and gets above the world, the more he is spiritualized, and made meet to be a partaker with the saints in light."

Pray consider seriously that precious, but awful place of holy scripture, Gal. vi. 15. It is observable here, that the apostle was speaking of some who desired to make a fair show in the flesh, and, therefore, urged the necessity of circumcision, whom the apostle informed and assured that in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision availed anything, *i. e.*, to salvation, but the new creature. Circumcision was certainly an ordinance of God's own appointment, a seal of the covenant between God and his people, (Rom. iv. 11,) a badge of distinction between them and the infidel nations, (Rom. iii. 2,) a sign of their original pravity, and of the necessity of inward sanctity. Jer. iv. 4. Col. ii. 13. Yet the apostle informs those who thought they were bound to observe it, that without an internal change, these supposed privileges

would avail nothing, and by a parity of reason, (as Dr. Edwards justly observes,) “he must be interpreted to speak to us, that our sacramental washing in baptism, our spiritual gifts and endowments, our profound knowledge and learning, our observation of the ordinances of Christ, and our outward acts of religious worship, will all avail us nothing, unless we have a new principle implanted in us, such as influences our lives and produces evangelical obedience.” But I proceed to the

IVth thing proposed, which was to improve the doctrine. And

Use 1. It informs us that the way to be made a member of the invisible church is by regeneration; “For there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb’s book of life.” Rev. xxi. 27.

2. It informs us of the love of God in revealing that way to us (Hos. viii. 12); which should strike our admiration and awake our gratitude.

3. It informs us of the love of Christ in purchasing, after such a painful manner, that life for his people, to which this way leads. “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.” 2 Cor. viii. 9. “Who hath abolished death and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” 2 Tim. i. 10. That having your affections dead to, and weaned from, all enjoyments here, “your life may be hid with Christ in

God; that when he who is your life appears, you may appear with him." Col. iii. 4.

4. It informs us of the emptiness and insufficiency of all outward and legal performances to obtain an actual interest in the purchased happiness, without good principles of action, such as a new heart, and transcendent love to the divine majesty. "For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit: neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit." Luke vi. 43. Therefore, according to the words of Jesus, "If you would have the fruit good, you must make the tree good." Matt. xii. 33. For God is a Spirit, and, therefore, will not accept of, or be pleased with, any worship but that which is agreeable to his nature. John iv. 24.

Use 2. Of examination. Now that you may know your present state and condition, I shall propose some characters of regeneration.

Now, the first property of regeneration is divine life. As natural life is the natural product of generation, so is a spiritual life, of regeneration. Gal. ii. 20. 2 Cor. iv. 10. Now, this divine life has these following properties, by which it may be known, analogous or agreeable to the properties of a natural life.

1. Food. Without this a natural life would soon expire. Psa. civ. 29. Thus it is with the spiritual, "As new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word." 1 Pet. ii. 2. Some render the original words (*logicon gala*) rational milk, such as is fit for the nourishment, not of the body, but of the mind. A true convert desires the sincere milk,

the pure word of God, not blended or diluted with adulterating, depraving, and debasing mixtures. It is the natural property of every kind of life to desire food suited to its nature, without which it cannot subsist. Now, as the natural man chiefly longs after the enjoyments of this world, (Psa. iv. 6,) so does the new born person after heavenly enjoyments. Col. iii. 1.

2. Sense. As a natural life feels what opposeth it, grapples with its enemy, and if stronger, proves victorious, so it is eminently in the divine life, which having such supernatural assistances, proves too hard for its opponents. Gal. v. 17. 1 John v. 4, 18 & iii. 9.

3. Growth. It is natural for children to grow fast, if some uncommon accident does not prevent it, and that not in the head only, for indeed such are distempered with the rickets, but in all other parts proportionally; so do babes in Christ grow fast, if not distempered (2 Thess. i. 3), and that not only in knowledge, but in faith, love, holiness. 2 Pet. iii. 18. "When I was a child I spake as a child, I thought as a child, when I became a man, I put away childish things." 1 Cor. xiii. 11. So it is with a growing Christian, he puts away childish things; and this among the rest, viz: entertaining a fond imagination, that he shall be always dandled on his Father's knee, or in his Lord's lap, or always embraced in his Husband's arms: when he was but a babe in Jesus, he was apt to conclude his Father had quite abandoned him, if he lost sight of his face but for a little; if he wanted the sweet sense of his love he was peevish and dejected; but now he knows

better, that he is not to live by sense but by faith. Gal. ii. 20. Though he retains still an earnest desire after communion with God, yet it is more discreet, believing and submissive; and when they cannot perceive any growth in themselves after some time, they grieve and mourn. A child of God not only weeps at its birth but afterwards. Mr. Burkett has a very good observation upon this: "that as natural children come crying into the world, so no spiritual child is still-born," or born dumb. Acts ix. 11. We may justly reckon those graceless and unrenewed persons, who do not earnestly long and labour after growth, or mourn not for their little proficiency. Heb. vi. 1. Phil. iii. 14. They that are contented with stunted measures of supposed grace, in reality have no saving grace at all. 1 Cor. xv. 8. Eph. iii. 18.

4. Motion. This is an inseparable property of a natural life. Acts xvii. 28. When we see any thing stand stock still for a considerable time without the least motion, we know it is dead; *e. g.*, when we observe a statue void of motion, with its eyes fixed for some space of time, we are soon convinced, for all its fair face, that it has no life; so when we behold professors of Christianity having but an empty form, without the powerful and progressive practice of piety, (2 Tim. iii. 5,) may not we judge them, and should not they judge themselves to be (notwithstanding of their fair pretences) dead idols in a spiritual sense, void of the life of Jesus?

5. A generative faculty, when grown to maturity: so those that have a divine life labour to communicate it to

others. John iv. 28, 29. Luke xxii. 32. Here we may apply justly that of the poet: *Nascitur indigne, per quem non nascitur alter*. "He is unworthy of life himself, who is not the cause of it to another."

6. Likeness. The father begets a son in his own likeness; so did the first Adam, (Gen. v. 3,) and so does the second. John iii. 6. The image of the first is of the earth earthy. 1 Cor. xv. 47—49. "For that which is born of the flesh is flesh;" (John iii. 6;) *i. e.*, exceedingly corrupt and sinful; not only fleshly but flesh; abstracts denote great degrees of what is spoken. Eph. v. 8. Man, by a sinful indulgence of his appetite, (Gen. iii. 6,) prostituted the dominion of his soul to the tyranny of sense; so that now before conversion he is quite sunk in sensuality; instead of deserving the honourable character of a living soul as formerly, (Gen. ii. 7,) he now incurs that just, but sarcastical one of flesh! His reason and all his noble powers are so degraded, unhinged and corrupted; he acts with such indifferency about eternal, and with such vigour about temporal things, as if he had no soul, but was wholly flesh: a mere master-beast. But the image of the second Adam is heavenly and spiritual. 1 Cor. xv. 47—49. "For that which is born of the Spirit is spirit;" (John iii. 6;) *i. e.*, his soul has recovered its just, though lost, empire over the senses and brutish appetites, and is now guided and governed by the influence and direction of the Holy Spirit. Rom. viii. 1, 4. As the natural parent communicates of his nature to the child, so those that are born of God are said to partake of the divine nature; (2 Pet. i. 4;) *i. e.*, they have a certain resemblance

of the moral, communicable perfections of the Deity, wrought in them: "They are holy as he is holy." 1 Pet. i. 15, 16. "Merciful as their Father is merciful." Luke vi. 36. "Perfect as their Father in heaven is perfect;" (Matt. v. 48;) *i. e.*, they endeavour earnestly after perfection of degrees as well as of parts. Phil. iii. 13, 14. Eph. v. 1, 2. So long as men are contrary to God in their generally prevailing dispositions, and course of action, we may tell them as our Lord the perverse Jews: "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do." John viii. 44.

7. Love. A child hath a love to his father and brethren, which the law of nature teaches, and the likeness that is between them confirms. He is a very monster in nature that is void of this affection! Thus the new-born Christian hath

1. A predominant love to God in Christ. Psal. lxxv. 25. Matt. x. 37.

2. A permanent love. John xv. 9, 10.

3. A panting, longing love. Psal. lxxxiv. 1, 2.

4. An operative and efficacious love. 2 Cor. v. 14. John xiv. 21. Rom. vi. 4, 5. And so he has a real, effectual, universal, and well grounded affection to the children of God, as his brethren in Christ. His affection does not consist in windy words (1 John iii. 17, 18); neither is his love limited to a party of his own denomination, temper, or sentiments. No, no! that is too narrow a circle for truly Christian love, (such a confined affection is but a natural, selfish, party zeal, which does not deserve the name of love,) which extends itself to all that carry the image of the holy

God, and speak in the language of Canaan, of whatever nation they be, or denomination they bear ; and as he loves all Christians for what of God he sees in them, so consequently his affection is carried forth with a greater degree of ardour towards such as excel others in holiness, humility, and circumspection ; and that not with a fearful but complacential respect. *Psa. xvi. 3. 1 John iv. 8.* The

8th Character is that change of the practice which I described in the doctrinal part of this discourse ; which I think is rather an effect of the new birth than a part of it. It is observable that, in every generation, there is a great change in the old creation, to which this work of God is for many and weighty reasons compared. *Eph. ii. 10.* There was an admirable alteration, when the present most beautiful and regular system of things was produced by the agency of the infinite Spirit of God (who moved upon the face of the waters), out of the former disorder, dark mass, and confused chaos. So is there not an admirable change, when a profane, ignorant, sottish creature is turned into a sober, holy, heavenly Christian ? “ Give me,” says Lactantius, “ a man as profane and abusive, as lewd and lascivious, as can be imagined, and with a few instructions of God, I will make him as meek and innocent as a lamb. Could ever any of the philosophers do this ? ” *Lib. 2.* In short, such a change deserves our admiration more than if a clod of earth were turned into a star of heaven. This is no less a change than from darkness to light, from death to life. *Eph. v. 8.*

And now, brethren, I pray you, for Christ's sake,

examine yourselves, whether you have had the experience of these things; it is easy to be mistaken in this matter, and a mistake is dangerous. Jer. xvii. 9. Prov. xiv. 12. I shall propose a few questions to your consciences, from what I have been treating of, and I beg you would answer them impartially as in the presence of God. And

Quest. 1. Has sin been discovered, and applied to your consciences with power, both in respect of its vile nature, and dreadful effects, by the law of God, and the Spirit of God, as I before described?

Q. 2. Have you been made to see your lost and deplorable state by nature, so as to be exceedingly distressed, and put to a soul-afflicting plunge and loss, about obtaining deliverance out of it, and shut up to Christ as the only door of hope? Acts ii. 37 & xiv. 27. John x. 7.

Q. 3. Hast thou, O sinner, been made to inquire after, and seek for relief, with anguish of soul? Acts ix.

Q. 4. Has the Lord Jesus been discovered by his word and Spirit to your inquiring, burdened, anxious soul, in his mediatorial excellency and sufficiency? Matt. xi. 21. Gal. i. 16.

Q. 5. And have you, with deliberation and resolution, unreservedly closed with the offered Redeemer, upon the terms of discipleship he has specified, viz: of taking up his cross, denying yourselves and following him? John i. 12. Luke ix. 23 & xiv. 26. That is, have you been, and are you willing, and heartily resolved, to quit freely and cheerfully your dearest natural and civil interests, your friends, relations, estates, lives, liberties, respectively, if

called to it, for the defence of truth, and readily embrace shame, solitude, poverty and death? Are you willing also to abandon your own righteousness, all your religious performances in point of dependence, and absolutely, immediately, and freely, forsake all your darling lusts, and embrace strict holiness? What sayest thou, sinner? How is it with thee in these respects, willing or not? What! does that man say, It is hard—I cannot now? Wretched soul! As the Lord lives, thou art a dead man.

Q. 6. Are old things passed away? 2 Cor. v. 17. As particularly,

1. Is thy old blindness removed? 1 Pet. i. 4.
2. Thy old security disturbed? Luke xi. 21.
3. Thy old hope sapped at the foundation? Rom. vii. 9.
4. Thy old enmity against God's people subdued? Cant. vi. 1.

5. Thy old, carnal, worldly thoughts, affections and practice altered, or are they still as they were? Why then, I may say to thee, as the apostle Peter to Simon Magus, "Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter, for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. I perceive thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity." Acts. viii. 21, 23.

Q. 7. Are all things made new? 2 Cor. v. 17. As particularly,

1. Hast thou that new light in the understanding? Acts xxvi. 18.
2. That pliability in the will? Psal. cx. 3. Acts ix. 6.
3. That proneness in the affections Godward and heavenward, which I before described? Col. iii. 2.

4. That tenderness of conscience?

5. That tenaciousness of memory respecting divine things? Psa. cxix. 98. †

6. That reformation in practice, which was before described?

Q. 8. Have you had that life of God, that likeness to God, that love for God and his people, which was before spoken of?

Q. 9. Is your obedience evangelical, universal, continual?

But I proceed to

Use 3. which is of conviction and terror to those that are not born again; but who are they, and what may afford them necessary terror?

1. More generally, you are they who cannot, with a good conscience, say yea in answer to the nine questions I proposed before. But, more particularly,

1. May persons make a strict profession of piety, and be admitted to, and enjoy religious privileges, and so pass for Christians, and yet be unconverted? How far, then, are you from this blessed change, who even scorn to profess Christ and piety, who disdain and disclaim the very name saint, as a term of reproach, a badge of dishonour, and grin and show your teeth (silly souls!) when the very word is but mentioned in your hearing? Remember, for this you shall gnash your teeth in hell, except ye repent. I suppose you think to be saved without the new birth, in a way of your own contrivance, (O blind moles!) ay, but then, the devil, your dear father, and your brethren, the

sons of Belial, the whole crew of profane, unclean rebels and venomous vermin the burdened earth now bears, or hell contains, must be saved along with you, and a pretty company you would make all together, would you not? A fine heaven, indeed! How can you expect that Christ will own you hereafter, when you will not own him here?

2. May people be convinced of sin, and of their lost and deplorable condition because of sin, so as to be in great distress about it, without being new born? Alas, then! What will become of you who are yet secure and asleep in sin?

3. May persons be restrained from gross impieties and yet be in a state of death, estranged from this divine birth? Oh! what will then become of you who give a loose to profaneness, swearing, sabbath-breaking, drunkenness, uncleanness, fraud, and the derision of what is good? Are not burnings, burnings from God, burnings hotter than Sodom's flame, likely to be your portion?

4. May persons attain the form of piety, and be externally regular in the performance of all religious duties, and yet not be new born? Then, wretched sinners! how far are you from this divine birth, who profane God's name, slight his word and ordinances by neglecting to attend upon the one, and to seek preparation for the other, who, as fearlessly as profanely, violate his holy sabbaths, and neglect many positive duties of religion? Read that passage of God's word, and blush and tremble. Matt. v. 20.

5. May people have great gifts and good motions, and

want this new birth I have been treating upon? Then what will become of you, ignorant souls, especially such of you as are willingly ignorant? how far are you from a sound conversion to God, which begins in light and knowledge! 1 Cor. iv. 6. And how far will you be at last from obtaining that inheritance conversion qualifies persons for? Isa. xxvii. 11. 2 Thess. i. 7, 8.

6. May persons have a partial alteration upon some or all the powers of their souls, and be almost persuaded to be real Christians, and yet be void of the new birth? What will become of you, hardened wretches, every of whose faculties is perhaps altered for the worse, whose necks are as an iron sinew, and whose brow is brass? Pharisees, heathens and devils outdo you in what is good. The Pharisees in most or in all the outward duties of religion. Phil. iii. The heathens in their morality (perhaps), *e. g.*, the Turks or some of them, have had a greater concern about their souls than thou hast. Remember trembling Felix, and be ashamed of thy horrible stupidity! Yea, the very devils tremble, and yet thou art senseless! O man! Is thy breast adamant, or thy bowels iron, that thou thus slightest the terrors of the Almighty, which set themselves in battle array against thee? Canst thou imagine that thou art new born, or shalt be saved in this condition? No, no: be not deceived, the devil himself would find as easy an admission into heaven as thou in thy present condition, as our text demonstrates.

7. May persons have a zeal for religion as Jehu and others, and yet be unconverted? Oh then! What will become of

you, lifeless, listless, careless Gallios in religious affairs, who do not care a straw whether religion prospers or not? If you can but get worldly prosperity, if you can but with Gehazi get the changes of raiment, with Judas carry the bag, or with cursed Achan get the wedges of gold, you care not, perhaps, though for it you should betray Christ's cause, and bring judgments upon others. But will not such lukewarm, selfish wretches be spued out of Christ's mouth? Rev. iii. 16. How far are ye, poor souls, from this divine birth?

8. May unconverted persons come so far as to love God's people, associate with them, and delight in hearing of God's word, and attending upon his ordinances? How far then are those from regeneration, or the way to it, who do not come half so far as hypocrites in this? Instead of associating with God's people, they carefully avoid their company, deride them, and spitefully abuse them, and most contemptuously neglect opportunities of hearing God's word, instead of delighting in it, and that, forsooth, because the preacher will not be false to God and souls, and preach smooth things according to their fancy. Will not Herod, that heard John the Baptist gladly, rise up in judgment at last, and condemn the haughty and contemptuous wretches of this generation?

9. May persons be brought to mourn for sin with bitterness and anguish, and yet be strangers to the new birth, as Ahab and Judas? How far, then, are those monsters in nature from conversion, who, instead of mourning for their impieties, boast of them, and so glory in their shame?

But what are the miseries of those and all other kinds of unconverted sinners?

Ans. 1. Ye are blind men. Acts xxvi. 18. Ye see not the beauty of holiness, of Christ and heaven, otherwise ye would not live as ye do. John iv. 10.

2. Poor men, however you swell and strut in worldly wealth and grandeur. Rev. iii. 17.

3. Mad men, Psalm xiv. 1, compared with x. 1. Luke xv. 17. You act like distracted men in preferring sin to holiness, perishing, sensual gratifications to the pure, sinless, and everlasting delights that are at God's right hand. Do you not act like fools in preferring your lusts to God and Christ—your worldly gain, which lasts but for a moment, to an immortal crown of life? And does not your folly and madness eminently appear in your daring to affront such a sovereign, infinite Majesty, whom you can neither overcome, deceive nor avoid, whose loving-kindness is better than life, but whose anger is worse than death, and you will find it so in a little time, when you shall wish for death as a sanctuary from it, but shall not obtain your desire?

4. Dead men, wholly void of divine life. Eph. ii. 1.

5. Darkened men, or men under the power of darkness. Eph. v. 8. Col. i. 13. By which metaphor the Scriptures express all kinds of misery. Ps. xxiii. 4. Matt. xxii. 13. Isa. l. 10.

6. Possessed men, under the power and government; and in the possession, of the devil, his slaves, his vassals. Luke xi. 21. 1 John iii. 8, 10. 2 Tim. ii. 26.

7. You are cursed men, cursed by the God that made

you, which none can revoke but himself, and who has declared he will not unless ye repent. Gal. iii. 10. Luke xiii. 3.

8. You are condemned men. John iii. 18.

9. Guilty men. Mark iv. 12. And remember, God has said he will "by no means clear the guilty." Num. xiv. 18.

10. You are bereaved men, secluded from, and bereaved of, all the notices and sweet intimations of God's peculiar favour and friendship, in this world or the next. You are without God in the world, and what can be worse than this? Eph. ii. 12. And as you are justly deprived of his love, so you are continually exposed to his wrath. John iii. 36. You are the very children of the devil by imitation and possession, the seed of the serpent. Gen. iii. 13. 1 John iii. 9, 10. John viii. 44.

11. Miserable men; you are not only void of true light, life, comfort in this world, but of any interest in the inheritance of God's chosen in the next, as our text asserts, and are entitled to a very contrary portion. Eph. ii. 3.

12. Murdering men, cruel murderers, self-murderers, soul-murderers. Ezek. xviii. 31, 32 & xxxiii. 11.

13. Inexcusable men; your eternal damnation is but the natural and necessary fruits of your own wickedness and obstinacy, in rejecting, against your own souls, God's repeated warnings and invitations; and therefore it is but justice, and that not owing to any rigorous severity of God, but entirely to your own cruelty and barbarity, against yourselves, that you should perish. Hos. xiii. 9.

Acts xiii. 46. And this you will be forced to own at last to God's honour, and your own shame. Matt. xxii. 11, 12. For you have slighted the remedy provided with infinite cost for sin; this will make your sin inexcusable, your damnation unavoidable, and yourselves unworthy of pity, because your misery is a voluntary misery, but the fruits of your own choice. Psa. xcv. 8, 11. Matt. xxii. 3, 5 & xxviii. 37. Prov. xxix. 1. What unspeakable pain will your reflections upon these things cause in your consciences to eternity! Mark ix. 44. Isa. lxvi. 24. Oh! think of these things and apply them to heart before it is too late, and never rest until you get converting grace.