

T H E

AMERICAN PREACHER;

O R, A

COLLECTION OF SERMONS

FROM SOME OF THE

MOST EMINENT PREACHERS,

NOW LIVING,

IN THE UNITED STATES,

O F

DIFFERENT DENOMINATIONS

IN THE

CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

NEVER BEFORE PUBLISHED.

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M.DCC.XCI.

S E R M O N I I I .

AN INDUCEMENT TO COME TO CHRIST.

B Y

JOHN WITHERSPOON, D. D. L. L. D.

Col. N. C. P.

R E V. i i i . 17 .

*Because thou sayest I am rich, and increased with goods,
and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou
art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind,
and naked.*

HAVING in a former discourse, proved, and illustrated this truth; that all mankind are by nature, in a state of sin and misery, under the bondage of corruption, and liable to the wrath of God:—I proceed now to the *second thing* proposed, which was to shew you, that being brought to a lively sense, and genuine conviction of this, is the first, and a necessary step, to the saving knowledge of God, in Christ.

On this, I shall not need to spend much time, as it is so exceedingly plain, both in itself, and from what hath been already said---It is however neces-

sary to set it clearly before you, in order to lay a foundation, for the improvement of the subject.

If the doctrine of Christ, and of him crucified, proceeds upon the supposition of our sinful, and miserable condition by nature; then surely, it can neither be valued, embraced, nor improved; and indeed, I think hardly understood, by those, who know not this their natural state. What Christ hath done, and promises to do in our behalf, is designed as a remedy, for our distressed condition; and therefore, till the distress is known, the remedy will be set at nought. If a physician should offer his care and skill, for the recovery of a man, who esteemed himself in perfect health, would he not deride the proposal, so long as he continued in that opinion? If any man should offer a charitable supply of clothes and food, to one, who imagined himself immensely rich, and gloried in his riches; would he not look upon it, as the grossest insult?

Just so is the Gospel treated, by all such as see not their misery. What is the substance of the Gospel? 'To you O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of men. Behold! I preach to you Christ crucified, a Saviour, suited to your necessities, able to save, to the uttermost, all that come to God through him. He is well fitted to be a mediator, between you, and your offended maker. He hath offered himself up, a sacrifice to the justice of God, for your sins, by the merit of which, you may be saved from deserved and impending

ruin. He offers himself as a guide, to direct your feet in the way of peace---to stand by you in the difficulties and dangers to which you are exposed, and to give you by his communicated strength, a complete victory over all your enemies.'

What reply doth the unconvinced sinner make, to all this? Why he saith, 'I know nothing of this misery you suppose, wherefore then a Saviour? I see no sin, what necessity then, for an atonement? I fear no wrath, therefore will seek for no Intercessor. My eyes are open, therefore I will have no guide. I know of no enemies, and therefore, will not enter into contention with a shadow, or flee, when no man pursueth.'

These my brethren, are either directly, or implicitly, the thoughts of men, in a secure, and unconvinced state; and while they are so, they can see no form, nor comeliness in the Saviour, nor any beauty, that they should desire him.

It is otherwise with the broken in spirit. He sees his own vileness, and unworthiness, and therefore cannot lift his eyes to God, but through the atoning blood of Christ. He fears the *avenger of blood*, and therefore flees to the *city of refuge*---The message of the Gospel, is to him, indeed glad tidings of great joy, and he counts it a faithful saying, and *worthy of all acceptation*.

The justice of this representation, you may see, from what our Saviour himself says, of the end of

his coming. *They that be whole, need not a physician but they that are sick: But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice; for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*

See also the terms of his invitation. *Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

Appetite, and knowlege of necessity, is first required, or supposed, to the bestowing of Gospel blessings---*Ho! everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters.*

I shall only add, that we find by the instances recorded in scripture, of such as were converted by the preaching of the Gospel; that their conversion, took its rise, from conviction of sin---*Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their hearts, and said unto Peter, and to the rest of the Apostles, men and brethren, what shall we do? See also the instance of the jailor---Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas: And brought them out, and said sirs, what must I do to be saved?*

Repentance unto life, and the return of the sinner to God, proceeds from the same cause, in every age. Who are the persons who believingly apply to Christ for the pardon of their sins, but those who see they are undone without him? Who are the persons in whose eyes he is most precious, and

who maintain the most habitual dependance upon him? Are they not those who have been most effectually humbled, and see their own insufficiency for any thing that is good?

From all this I conclude, that none can come to Christ by faith, but those who see themselves to be *wretched, and miserable, and blind and naked.*

Let us now make some improvement, of what hath been said upon this subject, for your instruction and direction.

1. I would improve what has been said on this subject, for discovering the danger of many among us, who have never yet been brought to a just sense of their character, and state. Even the general belief, that such, often have in the scriptures, may shew them what they have to fear. I might no doubt first of all observe, how very guilty and miserable those are, who are most notorious for sins, of the grossest and most shameful kind. But my subject leads me more directly to consider, who are in general, *unrenewed*, than to mark the several degrees of guilt in particular sinners. From the text therefore, and the illustration of it, I am authorized to declare to you, and *I beseech you to bear it with application*; that all such as were never brought to a real discovery, and inward sense, of their miserable condition by nature, are still in a state of wrath, and strangers to the power of Religion, whatever may be their profession, and whatever may be their present peace. Oh! how easy

is it, to lay asleep a natural conscience, and to keep a deceitful corrupt heart, in a state of ease and security? Some formality in outward duty, some moderation in sin, so to speak, the natural decay, and weakness of human passions, or youthful lusts, in a character, formed by human prudence, and regulated by health, credit or gain, is often made to supply the place, of a heart renewed by the spirit and grace of God. But consider, I beseech you, that though some may be ten fold more the children of the Devil than others, yet all by nature, are the servants of sin; and *except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*---It is not only such as are profane, or unclean; such as riot in brutish sensibility; such as are the plagues of human society; who live in brawls and contention; but all, in whom an essential change, has never been wrought, that are thus *concluded* under condemnation.

It is usual for men to take encouragement, from seeing others worse than themselves; and to consider all the threatnings in scripture, as levelled against the chief and capital offenders; but my text is chiefly directed to such, as say they are *rich, and increased with goods.* Can you say then my brethren, that you have been brought under genuine convictions of sin? Have you been obliged to fall down prostrate before God, when sitting upon the throne of his holiness. Have you found the sentence of death in yourselves, and discovered no remedy, but in Christ? If this has never

been our case, you have reason to fear, that you are yet *in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.*

But I must tell you also that this is matter of feeling, more than of profession. It is not enough to speak honorably of Christ, or of his works. Many do so, who never felt their necessity, or seriously and in good earnest, applied to him. It were a happy thing, if all among our hearers, who call for evangelical preaching, who quarrel with us when they think we do not preach the Saviour's cross---the lost state of man, and the doctrine of free grace, were experimentally acquainted with these truths. Many such, have only been accustomed to hear the Redeemer spoken of with reverence. They may be able to imitate the language of some of his servants, though they know very little of that brokenness of spirit, which accompanies true repentance.

But lest this should be in any measure mistaken, I must make these two observations---The *first* is, that a lively sense, and deep conviction of sin, is, properly speaking, but a negative mark of true Religion; giving us to know, that the unhumiliated are yet impenitent---For it is certain, that many have been under very strong convictions, nay, have been driven to the very borders of despair with terror, who yet never were effectually changed, but stifled their convictions, and returned to their former security of heart, and carelessness of life.

Secondly, there may be some on the other hand, who are truly *born of God*, in whom, the terrors of conviction have not been very remarkable. This happens most frequently in the case of those, who are called in their infancy, or earlier years, and who have had the advantage of a careful, and pious education. It would be destructive of the comforts of God's children to lay down *one method*, in which he always proceeds. He is free and sovereign, in the manner of his dealing with sinners; and softens some hearts by kindness, as well as others by correction. So that if the end be brought about, we need be less solicitous about the steps of his procedure. Yet I think humility of spirit, is inseparable from real Religion; and if it be less visible, in the anguish of repentance, it will be still manifest in the temper of the penitent.

II. Let me now for the improvement of this subject, lay down a few of the best and most solid evidences of genuine conviction of sin. And,

1. It is a good sign that conviction is genuine, when there is a clear and deep apprehension of the *evil* of sin, as well as the *danger* of it. When the mind dwells not only on the atrocity of particular crimes, but on the aggravation of all sin, as such: When the sinner is truly offended with himself, for departing from his maker's service; breaking his holy laws; forgetting or despising his innumerable mercies: There may be, and there is often an apprehension of suffering when there is little sense

of the evil of sin : but the conviction is then genuine, when it makes the sinner not only remember what he has done, *but confess, what he has deserved.*

2. It is a good evidence, when the sense of the evil of sin abides and grows, even though the fear of wrath, may in a great measure have abated.

It is observable, that conviction of sin, usually takes its rise, from some gross, or heinous acts, which first alarm the conscience, and in such a situation, the attention of the penitent is fixed on nothing else, but the enormities of his life. If this view continues, and produces its effects, he is soon brought to see, and confess, the inherent vanity of his heart; the worldliness of his affections; and the unprofitableness of his conversation. It is a very common thing, for persons who seem to have some sense of the commission of crimes, to have little or no sense at all, of the neglect of duty, and of living daily to themselves. It was a heavy charge, however, brought by the Prophet against Belsazzar:---*And the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified.* Wherever there is true repentance, though there may be the greatest peace of mind, there will be also a deep, and growing sense, of the evil of sin, and the obligation of being habitually devoted to God.

3. It is a good evidence, when there is a continued, and growing esteem of the necessity, and value of the mediation of Christ---It was to save

sinners that he came. A sense of sin is necessary to our receiving him; and in proportion to its strength, will certainly be our attachment to him: This indeed is the great, and vital principle, of the spiritual life---*I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God; who loved me, and gave himself to die for me.*

4. The best and surest mark of real conviction of sin, is, if it leaves you possessed of a deep hatred, and abhorrence of it, and a daily solicitude to fly from it. Some may counterfeit a sense of the evil of sin, to their own hearts; may have a real fear of its bitter consequences; and even a presumptuous reliance on Christ for pardon; and yet may in some instances, adhere to the practice of it.

Floods of tears from such a person, avail nothing: but he, hath certainly, truly sorrowed for sin, who in his practice forsakes it:---that is to say, he is not willingly subject to any known sin,---but says with Elihu, *That which I see not teach thou me: If I have done iniquity, I will do no more.*

III. Let me beseech all serious persons, to improve this subject for the trial of their state. Examine, by the principles above laid down, the reality, and the progress of Religion in your souls. Have you a growing sense of the evil of sin, and of

your own unworthiness?—This is at once an evidence, and a mean, of growth in grace. He that thinks least of himself, is highest in God's account; and the more a believer increases in holiness and real worth, the more he increases in humility. As it is an evidence, it is also a mean, of further improvement; for he that hath the deepest sense of his unworthiness and weakness, will certainly live most by faith, in the merit and grace of his Redeemer.

Therefore, Christians, try yourselves by this important sign. Whether do you, by religious duties, build yourselves up on self-righteousness, or do you only learn by them, how far you fall short of what is incumbent on you? What innumerable evils compass you about? and therefore, how much you have need of mercy instead of reward? Do you look upon the works of righteousness which you have done, as something, by which you *merit* at the hand of God; or do you look upon them, as the *evidence* of his own work in you, and for you, and give him the glory, to whom it is due?

IV. I shall now conclude the whole, with a few directions for producing and preserving this profitable sense, and conviction of sin. And,

1. Let me beg of every hearer, the serious consideration of himself, and his ways. Many have no sense of their sinfulness, because they have no

knowledge of themselves at all; but go through the world, in uninterrupted thoughtlessness, and unconcern. Is there any thing of greater moment than the state of your minds, and your hope towards God? Inattention, is perhaps a more universal cause of impiety, than high handed, and obstinate profanity. Would you but seriously consider your ways, and lay to heart the things that belong to your peace, I would count it a hopeful circumstance; and expect, you would speedily see your danger, and God in his mercy would lead you to the cure.

2. Give yourselves much to reading, and hearing the word of God. The entrance of his word, giveth light.---It is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, and correction: but it is particularly necessary for *conviction*; for by the law is the knowledge of sin. What wonder, if those who never open a bible, and seldom enter into the house of God, should be ignorant of their guilt and misery? The word of God shews his right in you, pleads his cause, and challenges your apostacy. It is exceedingly rare that those who have fairly turned their backs upon God's instituted worship, are disturbed in their security; but are suffered to sleep on, till they sleep the sleep of death. But it frequently happens, that those who attend ordinances, even from no higher principle than curiosity, custom, or form, find that the word of God is *a fire and hammer*, that breaketh the rock in pieces;

that it is quick and powerful, sharper than any two edged sword, piercing, even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts, and intents of the heart.

3. In the last place. Let me beseech you, often to seat yourselves, in the immediate presence of God, or rather, frequently to recollect, that you can no where go from his spirit, or fly from his presence. There is, if I may speak so, a light and glory in the presence of God, that discerns, and discloses the works of darkness. We may often excuse, or palliate our conduct to men, and even hide its deformity from our own view, when we could not justify it to ourselves, if we reflected, that *it is open and manifest, in the sight of God.*---If therefore there is any thing in your practice, which you are inclined to palliate, and apt to excuse---suppose, you were standing at the judgment seat of Christ, where all of us shall shortly be; and think, whether your excuses will then stand the test of his impartial search.

If our hearts condemn us not, God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things. It is therefore the duty, and interest of every sinner, to take shame and confusion of face to himself, and apply to the *blood of sprinkling, which speaketh better things, than the blood of Abel.*