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A

**DISSERTATION**

ON THE

**MEANS OF REGENERATION.**

BY

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IN THE CITY OF NEW-YORK.

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FREDERICK I. BETTS,

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## DISSERTATION, &c.

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THERE is a very desirable harmony of views among all evangelical men, in relation to the reality and importance of that radical transformation of character, which the Scriptures call regeneration. The necessity of this change lies in the total sinfulness of all mankind by nature; the cause or author of it is the Holy Spirit; the change itself consists in the commencement of holiness in the heart; and the means by which it is brought about are comprised in the varied exhibitions of the truth of God.

This unillustrated statement would probably meet the views of all who love and preach the essential and fundamental principles of the Gospel. There is one branch of this subject, however, on which there is at least, the semblance of controversy between men who are equally attached to the doctrines of grace,—I allude to the *means of regeneration*. These may all be comprised in the truth of God. When we say the truth of God is the appointed means of regeneration, we mean the truth of God as published by God himself, and as attended to by unregenerated men. By a variety of methods, God has diffused his truth over different portions of the earth; and thus *He* is using the means of regeneration. In different ways, unregenerated men are directing their

attention to the truth of God; and thus *they* are using the means of regeneration. It is important to a right interpretation of many passages of Scripture which speak of means, as well as to a full and just view of the subject, to make the distinction between *means as used by God with unregenerated men*, and *means as used by the unregenerate themselves*. This general view we propose to exhibit in the following Dissertation.

It is of some importance that our minds be satisfied that *there are means of regeneration appointed by God*. This sentiment is abundantly inculcated in the Scriptures. “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul.” “Is not my word as a fire, and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?” “I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation.” “Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth.” “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” “It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.” “In Christ Jesus, have I begotten you through the Gospel.” “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God.” “I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.” “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them which shall believe on me through their word.” The Scriptures uniformly represent the kingdom of grace as a kingdom of means. Though God himself renews the heart, it is not without the instruments and means of his own appointment.

We have confirmation of this truth in the results of universal observation and experience. Apart from the regeneration of infants, so far as is known to us, God never regenerates the soul without means. The whole history of experimental piety demonstrates nothing more conclusively, than that wherever God sends the regenerating influences of his Spirit, he sends the means of regeneration. It is not denied that God can regenerate men without means; but does he regenerate them without means? The God of nature can create a harvest of grain amid the wilds of an uncultivated and untrodden forest;—but where has he done it? And the God of grace can arrest the attention of men, and convince them of sin, and lay them at the footstool of mercy, without the aid of religious privileges;—but where has he done it? We may not affirm that he cannot convey to the mind enveloped in thickest darkness, some rays of heavenly light. It is possible that truth may be communicated to a benighted pagan, through the medium of some of the works of God, and that a mere babe in Christ may be born, where the light of revelation never shone; but is it a reality? Where have men been regenerated without the means of regeneration? Was it in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost? Was it on the heart of the eunuch of Ethiopia? Was it in the family of Cornelius? Was it in the land of our forefathers on the other side the Western Ocean? Was it here in this new world? Or amid all these scenes of divine mercy, do you discover the visitations of a

particular providence, preparing the way for the Son of Man, and preventing his Spirit by the mission of his word? The truth is, men must be placed under the dispensations of the Gospel; they must attend on the means of instruction; they must be roused from their indifference to God and eternity; they must be affected by the obligations and motives to personal godliness; they must become acquainted with the method of salvation; or they never will become thoughtful, anxious, convinced sinners, and be never born of God, and made heirs of heaven.

To confirm this representation, we may advert to the actual condition of those who are destitute of the means of God's appointment. What is their character? What are their hopes and prospects? Survey those countries from which the Lord of heaven and earth has, in his holy supremacy, withheld his Spirit, and you will fix precisely on those from which he has withheld the means of regeneration. Fix your eye upon the continent or the kingdom where the light of revelation never shines, where the voice of the living ministry is never heard, where the holy Sabbath never detaches the minds of men from their habitual absorption in things seen and temporal, to the solemn contemplation of things unseen and eternal; and you shall find the land where men grope in darkness, and stumble upon the mountains of death—where human impiety becomes the source of all that is vile and cruel, all that is intemperate and licentious, all that is earthly, sensual, and devilish, and where, if you pass through this moral wilder-

ness, in the length of it and in the breadth of it, you shall not see one indigenous plant of righteousness. Or if you will be more minute in your survey, and examine the character of the city, the village, the hamlet, the neighbourhood, the family, the individual, that is destitute of the means of regeneration; without fear of contradiction may it be asserted, that from the multitude to the individual, all will be found destitute of vital godliness. The Omniscient God has said of such portions of the earth, "Where no vision is the people perish." Over the abodes of such men, the finger of the Omnipotent has inscribed, "Without hope and without God in the world." On all their conduct, the divine holiness has imprinted the label, "Abominable, disobedient, and to every good work reprobate."

If from facts already past and now extant, we look into futurity, with equal certainty do we see all the predictions relative to the extension of holiness in the earth, parallel with the means used for the conversion of men. When Prophets foretel the glory of the Messiah and the enlargement of his empire, they speak of the wonders of that coming day as accomplished only through the instrumentality of truth. "Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased." "The Lord God shall take off the veil of the covering from the face of all nations." "I saw an angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting Gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth." But it is needless to extend this illustration. Both the Scriptures and observa-

tion substantiate the fact that there are means of regeneration of God's appointment.

The means which God has appointed for the regeneration of men *are many and various*. If we were to enumerate them, we should say, among the most important are, the Holy Scriptures,—the Christian Ministry,—the Sabbath,—the worship of God in the Sanctuary,—the religious services of the family,—social, private, and secret prayer, together with the religious education of children. Whatever, in a word, is adapted to arrest the attention of men to moral and spiritual objects, may be considered a means of regeneration. In whatever form the truth of God is presented to the mind, whether commingling with religious conversation, or held up to the perceptions in serious contemplation and prayer, it is the means of regeneration. God addresses men in all the variety of instruction, by all the force of authority, by all the terrors of his judgment, and all the persuasions of his mercy, by all the frowns and smiles of his providence, and by the frequent and powerful strivings of his Spirit.

Not only does he use means with them in great variety, but with *unfeigned sincerity and urgency*. All the means of regeneration are accompanied with the most solemn declarations of his desire that they may prove effectual. That they are no artificial measures will appear to any one who reads the Bible. There is nothing either in the instructions which God has there communicated, or the law he has there proclaimed, or invitations of mercy he has there

announced, which looks like acting a part, or which partakes of cold formality. In every sentence and every line, he is in earnest. He pleads with men with awful solemnity and unutterable tenderness. As though he knew the time would come when they would mourn at the remembrance of privileges which they slighted, he says, "Oh that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!" As though he would suppress every thought of insincerity on his part, he declares, "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but, that the wicked turn from his evil way and live." As though he would condescend to men in paternal familiarity, he says, "Come now, and let us reason together; though your sins be as scarlet they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." As though he could not leave them to perish in their iniquity, he says, "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim?" And as though he were impatient for their moral restoration, and could entreat them to spare themselves, to spare him the woful day, he beseeches them, "Oh Jerusalem! wash thine heart from thy wickedness, that thou mayest be saved. How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee? Wilt thou not be made clean? When shall it once be?" Thus does God use the means of regeneration with unregenerated men.

Nor is this all the truth on this subject. If means

of regeneration have been appointed by God, then are all who enjoy them under obligation to make such a use of them, as will answer the end of their appointment. If it were a matter of indifference whether men attend to the means, then is it of little moment that they have been instituted. It were as well to be without the Bible, if men do not read; as well to be without the ministry of reconciliation, if they do not hear; as well to have no Sabbath and no Sanctuary, if it is harmless to disregard them.

But while we say this, there are other thoughts we may not suppress. It is important to inquire, *How do unregenerated men use the means of regeneration?*

It is not denied that they use them. It is no unusual thing for unregenerated men to perform all the external duties which God has required. They read the Scriptures; they remember the Sabbath-day, and spend it in the observances of devotion; they hear the preached word; and they attend on all the divine institutions. They often engage in these services with great apparent propriety, and not unfrequently with the diligence and decency which indicate a serious mind. In a multitude of instances, they are not satisfied with occasional acts of external devotion, but spend much time in prayer and in crying anxiously and mightily to God for mercy. All this they do; and considered as mere external observances, their conduct is unexceptionable. But may there not be, after all, a radical deficiency in their best and most serious performances? Though

it may not be denied that unregenerated men use the means, it must be confessed that they never use them as they ought to use them.

They never use them with sincerity. There is no correspondence between their professions and their character. There is no correspondence between their lips and their heart, nor between their heart and their conduct. They “draw nigh unto God with their mouth and honour him with their lips, while their heart is far from him.” Notwithstanding their professions of seriousness, which their use of the means always implies, it is possible for them to be stupid and unfeeling as a stone; and in the very solemnities in which they are occupied, to suffer their hearts, “like the fool’s eyes,” to be “at the ends of the earth.” Notwithstanding their professions of self-abasement, self-distrust, and humility, which their use of the means always involves, it is no uncommon thing for them to have no such view of their sins and their ill desert, as they profess to have when they draw nigh unto God. The heart of every unregenerated man is a self-righteous heart; and it may be, that unregenerated men never feel more of a spirit of self-righteousness, than when engaged in external acts of devotion. Notwithstanding all their most solemn expressions of reverence and esteem for God, which their use of means also always implies, it is no uncommon thing for them to carry into their religious services a sensible hostility to his character, his laws, and his grace. Notwithstanding their professed desire for holiness, the

melancholy fact is, they are enemies of holiness, and every feeling of their heart is in league with sin. Though they profess to be seeking and striving to enter into the kingdom of heaven, it is no unusual thing for them to feel that they are at heart unfriendly to the spirit and society of the heavenly world, and with a full view of the nature of its holy salvation, to be themselves conscious that they choose death rather than life. But whether they are conscious of it or not, we know the fact is so. Every unregenerated man dislikes and rejects the terms of salvation, and is not willing to have the salvation the Gospel offers upon any terms. Now all this is most insincere and disingenuous; and there is great want of truth and fidelity of heart in such a use of the means of regeneration. Do you say, Is it so that there is no sincerity in anxious, seeking sinners? Are all their tears and anxiety dissembled tears and anxiety? Doubtless they are sincerely anxious. But what does their anxiety and sincerity amount to, more than an earnest desire to be delivered from hell, and to maintain their alienation from God with impunity? And in this, the devils may be as anxious and sincere as they.

Another remark, therefore, in relation to the use which unregenerated men make of the means, it is important to subjoin: it is a wrong and sinful use. Nor is this at all a doubtful point. God requires men to use the means of regeneration only as expressions of their heart. He neither requires nor forbids any external action separated from the heart. He re-

quires a good, and forbids a bad heart; and he requires and forbids nothing but what is an expression of a heart which is either good or evil. But are not the hearts of unregenerated men entirely sinful? and is not all their moral conduct therefore, entirely sinful? The external conduct of men, even when it assumes the most sacred and imposing form, is just as sinful as the heart from which it flows. The only way to prove any action to be sinful, is to show that it is done from a wicked heart. And since unregenerated men always act from a wicked heart, their heart always vitiates their use of the means of regeneration. Nor let it be forgotten, that *the light* which unregenerated men resist in the enjoyment of means, augments and aggravates their sinfulness. The Scriptures represent the knowledge of duty as the highest aggravation of human guilt. "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men have loved darkness rather than light." "He that knoweth his Master's will and doeth it not shall be beaten with many stripes." "If I had not come among them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloak for their sin." That which renders one course of conduct more sinful than another, is not so much the external action that is performed, as the light resisted in performing it. Impenitent men know their duty, the more they are familiar with the means of regeneration; for one great design of means is to inform them. They not only may resist as great light in using the means as at any other time, but they usually resist greater. They

never do perhaps indulge such strong and direct opposition to God, as when their conscience is so far enlightened by the means of regeneration, as to leave them eminently without excuse. God is then most fully in their view; and they then have an opportunity, which perhaps they never have at any other time, of "seeing and hating both Christ and his Father." Hence the hearts of the unregenerated may be awfully sinful, while they stand before God supplicating his mercy, or performing any other external act of devotion. It is possible for them to be urged to the use of means by the worst motives, and in the indulgence of the most selfish and sinful affections. It would not be beyond the truth to say, that many an unregenerated man has been externally engaged in the means of regeneration, while he has at heart felt such vigorous opposition to God and holiness, that he would, if it were in his power, dethrone the Most High. But however this may be, we know that a heart of enmity to God is never urged to the use of means from motives that are pure and holy, and therefore that all the use which unregenerated men make of them is unholy and sinful. In no other way than this are means used by unregenerated men themselves.

It is important therefore, that we proceed to show how such a use of means is connected with regeneration. We have seen that such a use of them is connected with regeneration, because without means men are not regenerated. It is acknowledged that such a use of them is insincere and unholy. How

then is *such a use* of them connected with regeneration? Here, it is important to observe several things, if we would come at the truth as revealed in the Scriptures.

It is not because such a use of the means is acceptable to God. If such a use of the means is insincere and unholy, God cannot approve it. God approves nothing but holiness. It is not the time when, nor the place where, nor the form with which men attend on means, but the heart with which they attend, that is the object of the divine regard. Hence the apostle affirms, "Without faith it is impossible to please God." Solomon says, "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination." And again he says, "The sacrifice of the wicked is abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is his delight." God inquires of ancient Israel, "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hands to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is abomination to me, the new moons and Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting." Our Lord also confirms the testimony of Isaiah concerning that people, when he says, "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me." Who paid a more decent and punctual regard to the means than the Pharisees and Scribes? And yet the same unerring Judge

says to them, "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell? We need not therefore hesitate in saying, that such a use of the means is not connected with regeneration because it is acceptable to God.

Nor is it because such a use of the means is interested in any of the divine promises. This has often been supposed. Great and good men have believed and taught that the word of God contains unequivocal *promises of grace* to the exertions of unregenerated men. Would unregenerated men comply with the requisitions of the Gospel, there are not wanting "great and precious promises," to support and comfort them, and to encourage every right exertion. But there are no promises to an insincere and unholy use of the means. There are passages of Scripture which promise grace to those who "seek," and "ask," and "knock," and "strive," and "wrestle," to enter into the kingdom of God; but if any man will take his Concordance, and compare Scripture with Scripture, he will be convinced that the sacred writers never use these terms in application to the exertions of unregenerated men. What efforts of the unregenerated assume, in this respect, a fairer character than their prayers? And yet of these it is affirmed, "Now we know that God heareth not sinners, but if any man be a worshipper of God and doeth his will, him he heareth." The Scriptures are also most explicit in informing us, that "*all* the promises are yea and amen in Christ Jesus." Where, then, is the promise of regenerating grace to the

man who has no interest in Christ Jesus? Who can appropriate a promise in the Bible, that does not exercise the faith of the Gospel? Is it said, this is a promise altogether of a peculiar kind, and is made to encourage unregenerated men in the diligent use of the means. But if it is a promise of regenerating grace, then is it virtually a promise of eternal life: so that the amount of what is here contended for is, that there is a particular class of *unbelievers*, who have the promise of eternal life. There is no such promise. Men who do not “ask in faith deceive themselves if they think they shall receive *any thing* from the Lord.” Until they become new creatures, all men, without exception, are in a state of existing condemnation. As soon as they repent and believe the Gospel, all the promises of the new covenant are theirs. But until then, if there be a promise that reaches them, it must be one that is perfectly consistent with their present condemnation; since “he that believeth not is condemned already.” It must be one that is perfectly consistent with the execution of the threatening, *at any moment*, “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” If there are promises of grace to the efforts of unregenerated men, then do the terms of salvation fall short of holiness. If there are promises of grace to to their prayers, then does God regard the prayers of the unregenerated as he never regards the prayers of the regenerated. The Psalmist says, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.” And finally, if there be promises of grace to the

efforts of unregenerated men, then do they fail of their accomplishment; for we see every day, that there are those who engage in these external services, and with great seriousness and anxiety, who lose their convictions and never become pious. The truth on this interesting point is clearly stated in the following remarks of President Edwards, "As long as men reject Christ, and do not believe in him, however they may be awakened, and however strict and laborious they may be in religion, they have the wrath of God abiding on them, they are his enemies and children of the devil; and it is *uncertain* whether they shall ever obtain mercy. God is under *no obligation* to show them mercy, nor will he be, if they fast and pray, and cry never so much; and they are then especially provoking God under those terrors, that they stand it out against Christ, and will not accept of an offered Saviour, though they see so much need of him."\*

Nor is such a use of the means connected with regeneration, because in thus using them, unregenerated men make any approximation to holiness. Apparently, means make them better. They may remove their ignorance and stupidity; they may check outward corruptions and gross immorality; they may render the unregenerated better informed and more useful members of society. But while in these respects, they make them apparently better, there is in their character no approximation to holi-

\* Thoughts on the Revival of Religion in New-England. Opera, page 196. Edit. Am.

ness. Their wickedness consists entirely in their hearts; and though their external conduct may become better, their hearts may be all the while growing worse. And this is the tendency of the human heart under means. "The earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and beareth briers and thorns, is nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned." The more light is poured upon their understandings, the more convictions press their consciences, the more their attention is arrested by the requisitions of the Gospel; so long as this light is resisted, these convictions opposed, and these requisitions and motives disregarded, so long are they themselves increasing in guilt, and plunging deeper in condemnation. And hence we see, that if men of this description never become converted, they always become hardened in iniquity, and are very apt to be giants in guilt. "He that being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly fall, and that without remedy."

This suggests another remark on this part of our subject: Such a use of means does not always terminate in regeneration. We have already seen, that when men are regenerated, such a use of the means ordinarily precedes their regeneration. Though not acceptable to God, though not interested in any divine promise, and though there is in all their efforts no approximation to holiness; to a greater or less extent, such a use of the means precedes regeneration. But this is not always the result. "Many are called, but few are chosen."

“There are first which shall be last, and there are last which shall be first.” “The election obtained it, and the rest were blinded.” “It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy.” The same means which God uses to save some, serve to destroy others. The child that was born in Bethlehem was “set for the fall,” as well as “the rising again of many.” Means have a widely different effect upon different persons. Some they save, and others they destroy. There is sovereignty attending the operations of the Divine Spirit which is inscrutable to men. “The wind bloweth where it listeth.” Regenerated men see and admire this, and exclaim, “Not unto us, Oh Lord, not unto us, but to thy name give glory, for thy mercy and thy truth’s sake.” And unregenerated men see and complain of this. You often hear them say, Why is the blessing withheld from me, and imparted to others? Why from me, who have used the means so long, and imparted to others not half so laborious in the use of them? It is no uncommon thing to find those who have attended on the means a long time, unrelieved in their anxiety and hardened in sin; while on the other hand, those may be found who have paid far less attention to them; and perhaps here and there one who is accidentally thrown into the house of prayer for a single Sabbath, who is broken down and subdued by omnipotent grace. These things we cannot dispute, because we see they are facts. When we consider the manner in which the

unregenerated always use the means of regeneration, we may not wonder they should often be unavailing; and the rather do we wonder that they are ever attended with the divine blessing. No doubt there are those who use the means, and resist the obligation to them to the last, who will at the last find, that their persevering abuse of them is not forgotten by the God of righteousness, and that while they have become the savour of life unto life in them that are saved, have also become the savour of death unto death, in them that perish.

If then these things are true, we come to the inquiry with still deeper interest, *How are the means of regeneration, as used by unregenerated men, connected with their regeneration? What is the proper end and design of them? And what purposes do they accomplish?*

These inquiries are the more appropriate, because we all believe they do not change the heart. I say, they *do not change the heart*. There are those we know, who defend a different sentiment. The Pelagians affirm, that the transformation of character which the Scriptures denominate regeneration, is effected by clear and repeated exhibitions of divine truth, not as the means, but as the efficient cause of the change; and that in turning from sin to holiness, the heart yields, not to an immediate influence of the Holy Spirit, but to the exclusive power of a well-directed moral suasion, without any superadded divine influence. The Armenians affirm substantially the same sentiment, except that they hold to

the idea of the divine influence, and consider it communicated to all alike; so that the difference between the regenerated and the unregenerated is made, not by special grace, but by common grace, specially improved. But are these the revelations of God, or the theories of men? To say nothing of that class of Scriptures which attribute the work of regeneration to the immediate efficiency of the Holy Spirit, the peculiarity of the following passages cannot have escaped our notice. When Moses reminded the children of Israel of all the wonders of mercy and judgment in which God had passed before them, he took particular pains to inform them that all these had not availed to their regeneration. “Ye have seen all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, unto Pharaoh, and unto all his servants, and unto all his land; the great temptations which thine eyes have seen, the signs, and those great miracles; yet the Lord *hath not given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear unto this day.*” As though he would impress the thought that holiness was the immediate effect of divine power, in distinction from all other ways of producing it, John declares of those who were adopted into the family of Christ, that they were “born *not* of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, *but of God.*” Paul says to the Ephesians, that they were regenerated, not by that all pervading power simply which holds the universe in existence, and sustains the uniform revolutions of the natural world, but

“by the *exceeding greatness* of that power which God wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead.” We would hesitate in affirming, with some most excellent men, that the principal reason why the immediate operation of the Spirit of God in the production of holiness is necessary, is found in any deficiency of intellectual capacity in unregenerated men; or any deficiency in the moral sense; or that this divine influence is necessary, to make them moral agents, and to originate their obligations to piety. The principal reason why this influence is necessary is, that unregenerated men are enemies to God and holiness, and their hostility is so unyielding, that no light communicated to their understanding, no obligations addressed to their conscience, no motives presented to their hopes or their fears, can produce holy love.

In unequivocally recognising this important principle, there is, therefore, some embarrassment attending the question, What end do the means of regeneration answer? If the Spirit of God is the cause of holiness, why should not his agency be exerted alone? What is the use of means, if it is not expected they will exert an efficiency in producing a new heart?

In this place, it may not be amiss to premise, that if no connexion between the means and the end could be discovered by us, so long as God has established the connexion, and the end is not accomplished without the means, this furnishes no proof of their inutility. God may see reasons for

their appointment, which we do not see. Eze-  
kiel could not see what agency his voice had in  
animating the bones in the valley of vision; Naa-  
man could not see what benefit would accrue to  
him from washing seven times in the waters of  
Jordan; Joshua could not see what good was to  
be accomplished by blowing the rams horns and  
encompassing the walls of Jericho; the multitude  
could not discover the use of applying the clay to  
the eyes of the blind man; but their ignorance  
does not satisfy us that these means were of no  
utility. I would be slow to affirm that we know  
nothing of the end which the means of regeneration  
accomplish; though if it were so, I would not ques-  
tion the wisdom of their appointment. But we do  
know, and can easily see some things they accom-  
plish, which in the method of grace that God has  
established, are desirable and important.

They *enlighten the understanding*. Unregene-  
rated men are in awful darkness. The empire of  
the great adversary is the empire of darkness, and  
the chains in which his subjects are bound are  
chains of darkness. The stupidity which wicked  
men indulge, and the tranquillity and peace they  
enjoy, have their foundation in blindness and igno-  
rance. If their sins and their hopes are ever dis-  
turbed, light must be let in upon their minds. This  
gross darkness which covers the people must be dis-  
sipated. They must see their guilty and wretched  
condition, and the only escape from it, or they can-  
not be saved. Without some degree of intellectual

light, it is impossible for them to possess the holiness which God requires. The graces of the Spirit are all exercised in view of some particular object distinctly discerned by the eye of the mind. The love, repentance, faith, hope, joy, and submission of the Gospel, has each its specific object, and cannot be exercised until the object itself be brought before the understanding. It is not for us to limit the operations of the Spirit in the immediate communications of his truth to the soul. I know not how frequently this communication is made; and have no doubt that it is made especially to those who die in childhood. But since this is not the ordinary way in which the knowledge of the truth is imparted, it may be justly said to be indispensable to the salvation of men, that they be furnished with, and use the outward and ordinary means. In this way only they become acquainted with the being, character and government of God; with the nature, extent, and criminality of their own moral corruption; with the only method of salvation; and with all the obligations and motives to holiness. And it is of importance to bear in mind, that all the instruction which means convey, can be easily understood. They are not addressed to stocks, or idiots, but to *men*, and though they are unregenerated men, yet are they reasonable men, who retain all their intellectual faculties, and are capable of understanding and appreciating every truth in the Bible. This, therefore, is one of the ends accomplished by the means of regeneration. The minds of men are

awakened from their stupidity, and roused to the consideration of those grand objects, in view of which the soul is regenerated.

There is another important purpose answered by the means of regeneration: They *impress the conscience*. The more light is thrown into the sinner's understanding, the more apt his conscience is to be awake to his obligations. The proper office of conscience is to teach him the difference between right and wrong, to give him impressions of his obligations to holiness, to condemn the sinfulness of all his conduct, and to make him feel that he deserves to be punished for all his iniquity. When once the understanding is duly enlightened, conscience is invested with awful authority. It belongs to conscience to judge and dictate. When the concerns of religion are presented before the mind, conscience claims the right of deciding and controlling in this important business. She makes the sinner acknowledge that what God has required is no more than his known duty. She constrains him to feel that there is nothing unreasonable in any internal affection, or external conduct which the Gospel enjoins, and challenges him to find any ground of exception to the divine requisitions. She strips him of every excuse, silences his every objection, closes his lips, turns his strength into weakness and his hopes into despair, and prostrates him a guilty, convinced, and condemned sinner at the feet of sovereign mercy. And because he will not forsake his sins and submit himself to Jesus Christ, she

pours upon him the sentence of her severest condemnation, sets his iniquities in order before him, fills him with reproach and bitterness, destroys his peace, and makes him feel that he deserves the wrath and curse of an angry God. Not unfrequently the arrow sinks deep. The soul is racked with inward disquietude and painful convictions. Terrifying apprehensions, unappeased anxiety, and keen distress throw him alternately upon his own resources and the resources of those around him, till every refuge fails, till he feels himself sinking into the pit, and in the bitterness of his soul, cries out, "What shall I do to be saved?" But these impressions on the conscience, these convictions, with no more than the ordinary strivings of the Spirit, are made by the means of regeneration. The word of God has become quick and powerful. The sword of the Spirit is entering the soul.

Another object accomplished by the means of regeneration is that *they illustrate the obduracy of the human heart*. The native tendency of truth is to enter the heart; and were there no resistance, it would enter it, and prove the occasion of all holiness. But the heart reluctates and resists. What ought to call forth its love, excites its enmity; what ought to provoke its penitence, gives resolution to its impenitence. What ought to allure its confidence, gives rise to its suspicion and jealousy. Now it is obvious, the strength of this opposition is fully evinced only by the measures adopted to subdue it. These are the means of regeneration. If

it should appear by actual experiment, that no extent and clearness of instruction, no force of the divine authority, no frowns and no smiles of an all-pervading providence, no accumulated penalties of the divine law, no liberal invitations of mercy, no cheering assurances of pardon, no fears of hell and no hopes of heaven, can avail to incline the heart of enmity to love, or charm or terrify the unregenerated mind into a feeling of attachment to God and holiness; then would these varied expedients only illustrate the impenetrable hardness of the human heart. But all this does appear, and has been manifested wherever the experiment has been tried. Hence, when all the force of truth and power of moral suasion have been exhausted, without giving rise to one holy emotion, we have in the means used to subdue the depravity of man, most affecting evidence of its unbending obduracy. Nowhere does the heart appear so desperately wicked, as in its resistance of all the light and motives of the Gospel, and its inglorious superiority over all the means of grace and salvation. Nor are there wanting reasons why it is desirable this illustration of human obduracy should be made. To the sinner himself, it evinces that he is stout-hearted, and far from righteousness. To the sinner himself, it evinces how low he has fallen by his iniquity, and how abased it becomes him to lie. On the mind of every renewed man, it leaves a deep and lasting impression of the sovereignty and fulness of that grace which rescued him as a brand from the burning, and prepares him to

feel his everlasting unworthiness, and at the same time to appreciate his everlasting obligations to the grace of his Redeemer. And even where the only result is, that such an illustration demonstrates the righteousness of the condemning sentence, it is greatly desirable that it should appear, that unregenerated men are lost,—not through any lack of forbearance on the part of God, not through any deficiency of instruction or allurements, not through any severity of justice that has proscribed the offers of forgiveness,—but through their voluntary abuse of the means of regeneration, and their persevering rejection of offered mercy. If they had gone down to hell without the means of grace and salvation, the universe might have pitied them because the universe would not have known but they might have been reclaimed. But when it is known that a way of salvation was revealed, that the means of salvation were brought to their door, and that they perish only through their own fault and their abuse of means, every mouth will be stopped, and all will feel that it is reasonable, men should forfeit what they thus reject. It will be in no small degree to the honour of divine justice when the final sentence is executed upon the wicked, that no offers of pardon, no means could reclaim them. I may add,

Another end accomplished by the adoption of means is *the exhibition of their own powerlessness, and omnipotence of the Holy Spirit*. While means are the ordinary antecedents to regeneration, regeneration is by no means the uniform consequent

of means. We know the understanding may be enlightened, the conscience impressed, the obduracy of the heart illustrated, and the sinner never become a converted man. He may be pricked in the heart, and inquire with awful anxiety what he must do to be saved; and after all be an impenitent man, and the only proper answer to him, is to direct him to do that he has never done,—*repent*. And it is important to remember this. It is not true, as is frequently represented, that where the mere work of the law upon the conscience, however distressing, is begun, God will carry it on till it end in conversion. Matters of fact have often proved the last state of such men to be worse than the first. The commencement of holiness in the soul is that “good work,” which if begun, we have confidence “will be carried on to the day of Jesus Christ.” Still no man becomes a converted man without this antecedent influence. God first places men under the sound of the Gospel, leads them to attend to the means of instruction, convinces them of sin, and then, if he means to save them, exerts his power to change their hearts. Now, it is easy to see that by the interposition of these means, a forcible exhibition is made of their own powerlessness and the omnipotence of the Holy Spirit. Without the adoption of means, it would never appear *in fact*, that means are incompetent to the work, or that the immediate power of God is at all necessary. Unless the experiment had been tried, there would have been no evidence, apart from the divine testimony,

that the regeneration of men is an enterprise not to be accomplished without the arm of Omnipotence. But when the most hopeful expedients have actually been tried, and tried in vain, there is a practical demonstration, I do not say of their fruitlessness, but of their inefficacy. When the strongest obligations and most winning persuasives to holiness have exhausted all their energy without producing one holy emotion; when the Supreme God has exhausted all the force of his commands, and men have trampled on his authority; when he has exhausted all the weight of his denunciations, and they have despised his justice; when he has exhausted all the overtures of his mercy, and they have contemned his favour; when he has well nigh exhausted his patience and long-suffering in opening their eyes to see their danger, and awakening their consciences to feel their guilt, and all this diversified discipline only proves that the obduracy of men holds on its way with all the means to subdue it, and the obstacles to their conversion rise higher by every effort to surmount them; then, and not till then, are the declarations of the Bible confirmed by sound experience, and it is known and confessed that the power of God himself must be "brought to bear upon a mass of resistance," the strength of which was little thought of, until every other method proved abortive. It is at the hour when every other refuge fails; when every thing is hung round with darkness and despondency; when the sinner himself feels that he is sinking into perdition; and when men and angels

might inquire, what resistless power can break this heart of adamant? what mighty grasp can lift this rebel from the deep abyss? that the interposition of the Holy Spirit is visible almost to the eye of sense, and glorious beyond thought. Nor is this a consideration of trivial moment. When I consider that God made all things for himself; when I learn from the Scriptures that the manifestation of his own intrinsic excellence is the ultimate end of all that he does; when I hear him saying with peculiar emphasis, and again and again repeated, that the dispensations of his providence and grace are so directed that “men may know that he is Lord;” when I see for myself how much he has done to bring out his glorious nature from the retirements of eternity, to the view and admiration of principalities and powers in heavenly places and men on the earth; when I witness the wonderful exhibitions of his power and glory in the effusions of his Spirit, and recollect that these brightest exhibitions of mercy would be dim and indistinct but for the developements they make of Deity; and when I think of the untold importance to himself and the universe, of the most distinct announcement of his awful name, the most impressive exhibition of his stupendous, his amazing glory; I am compelled to feel that the means of regeneration are not without utility, and answer a most desirable and important end, if they are only significant indices of the exceeding greatness of God’s power in accomplishing a work, to which all other efforts have proved inadequate.

It is thus that the means of regeneration, as used by God with unregenerated men, and as used by unregenerated men themselves, are connected with regeneration. They enlighten the understanding; they impress the conscience; they illustrate the obduracy of the heart; they evince their own powerlessness and the omnipotence of the Holy Spirit; and thus bring God to the view of men, and prepare the way for his grace to be illustriously triumphant. They accomplish that, without which men are not regenerated, and without which, neither men nor angels can appreciate the regeneration. The truth on this interesting subject therefore, lies within a narrow compass. Man is fallen by his iniquity. So criminally averse is he to God and holiness, that nothing will transform his character, except the powerful agency of the Holy Spirit. God is under no obligation to men to exert his transforming agency; and when he does it, he communicates an unpromised favour, and in a way wisely adapted to the intellectual and moral nature of his creatures, as well as wisely adapted to show forth his own glory,—and that is *through the instrumentality of truth*. This is the amount of what I can learn from the word and providence of God in relation to the means of regeneration. It is easy to see, what means do accomplish, and what they do not accomplish. If after the means God uses with men, and men use with themselves, they are not holy, it is because means cannot reach them; and the strongest effort and deepest impression leaves them in the

hands of Him, who killeth and who maketh alive, who hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth, from whose hands none can deliver, and who hath a right to do what he will with his own.

There are then means of regeneration appointed by God, and we have great encouragement to use them with our fellow men. The means are God's, as well as the success of them. When we remember that God does not operate the less really, because he operates instrumentally, we may bring home the obligation to extend the means of his appointment, with something more than the hope, that by so doing, we extend the sphere of divine influence. We have strong and perhaps conclusive reason to believe, that where God sends the means, there he will to some extent at least send the agent, and that his own Spirit will accompany his institutions, and make them the wisdom of God and the power of God to salvation. To every sincere lover of God and man, therefore, the preceding illustration addresses the language of encouragement. To every parent, to every teacher, to every minister of the Gospel, to every student in theology, it speaks in tones of awful authority, when it declares that men cannot be saved without the means of grace and salvation. Is it the appointed method of God's providence to influence men to action through the agency and zeal of their fellow men? So is it the method of his grace. And I see not why we have not just as much encouragement to use the means of regeneration with our fellow men, as

we have to actuate them in the common concerns of human life. It is the purpose of God, by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. And is it not enough to animate us in our work, that such is the method of God's appointment? What higher encouragement exists, than that we may be fellow-workers with God? Well may every minister of the Gospel say, "I thank Jesus Christ our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry." And I would that we might be urged forward to our work by the ardent desire of a pious heart, that can be gratified with nothing short of the happiest instrumentality in the salvation of men!

But there is another truth we may never lose sight of. If there are means of regeneration appointed by God, then it is important to make use of those which God has appointed, and no other. Error has no part with the means of regeneration. We may not expect to derive any advantage from the use of means which God has not appointed. If means have a passive suitableness; if they are adapted in their nature, to enlighten the understanding and impress the conscience; then they must be the very means which God has appointed. Our solicitude, therefore, as ministers of the Gospel, should be, that we do not mistake error for truth. There is awful responsibility in this matter; and I have only to say, that he is the happy minister who has a conscience void of offence toward God and toward man. "The prophet that hath a dream, let

him tell a dream; but he that hath my word, let him preach my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat, saith the Lord?" Be it our concern, that the means of God's appointment do not lose their urgency in the hands of weak, frail, and sinful man. If instead of the truths of the Gospel, we modify or adulterate those truths; if instead of the holiness of the Gospel, we urge the maxims of a heartless morality or selfish philosophy; if instead of the solemn and authoritative obligations of the Gospel, we substitute considerations of inferior importance; these are not the means of God's appointment, and therefore we may not expect the divine blessing to attend them. If this mighty instrumentality is committed to men, shall they not feel the constraints of obligation that are unutterably tender and inviolably strong, to be faithful in their work? And in their nearest views of eternity, what peculiar comfort and satisfaction will they have, that they have not handled the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth, commended themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. Then if they have planted the seed of the kingdom and watered it, they can leave the increase with him who does not call his ministers to plant and water in vain. "For as the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so shall his word be that goeth forth out of his mouth: it shall not return to him void, but it

shall accomplish that which he please, and shall prosper in the thing whereto he sent it.”

A perplexing inquiry has often been made in relation to means which the view which has been given of this subject, may lead us to answer:—it is this, Whether it is best for unregenerated men to use the means, or neglect them? This question is often put by persons in a serious frame of mind. Before we venture to answer it, we may remark, that the question is often prompted by a variety of views and feelings. If by the question be meant, Whether men perform any part *of their duty* by using the means in the insincere and unholy manner in which all unregenerated men use them?—we answer, No unregenerated man performs any part of his *duty*. In the sight of God, that high and important word implies something which an unregenerated man never does. Hence one of the highest human authorities declares, “that works done by the unregenerate, although for the matter of them, they may be things which God commands, and of good use both to themselves and others; yet because they proceed not from an heart purified by faith, nor are done in a right manner, according to the word, nor to a right end, the glory of God; they are therefore sinful.”\* If by the question be meant, Whether unregenerated men *commit more sin* in using the means than neglecting them?—it is a question which no human being can answer. There is sin in so using them; and there is sin in neglect-

\* Vide Confession of Faith of the Presb. Church. Ch. XVI. Sec. VII.

ing them; and to know which is the more sinful we must know the heart. That is a most erroneous view which affirms there is sin in using them, and none in neglecting them. And that is an unwarrantable view which decides, that there is less sin in neglecting them, than using them. And that also is an unwarranted view which decides there is less sin in using them, than in neglecting them. It may be so, and it may not be so. This depends *upon the motive* with which they are used, or neglected. It is easy to conceive there may be less sin in using them, than neglecting them. The mind may not be so far from God; the heart may not be so vigorous in its hostility, while engaged in religious observances, as when away from them. And perhaps, the opposite of all this may be true. This is a point which cannot be decided without *knowing the heart*, which God only knows, who weighs the motives which induce men to use means, or neglect them, and who alone is competent to determine, whether they commit more sin in using or neglecting.

But if by the question be meant, Whether those who use the means are *more likely to be saved*, than those who neglect them? of this there is no doubt. We see every day, that the probability of becoming pious is in favour of those only, who pay an exemplary external regard to means. The probability in favour of conversion lies on one side of the question only. Men cannot be saved, who neglect them. There is nothing but death and despair for those who neglect

them. Common sense combines with the principles of the preceding discourse in deciding this question. When we see our children anxious to read the Bible, and to frequent their closets, and to attend the public ordinances of religion, our hearts are filled with hope. But when we are the distressed spectators of the reverse of all this, how do our bosoms throb with anxiety? And yet we can easily conceive of a wrong use being made of this truth. If we were expostulating with a thoughtless and vicious man, we should make a very different use of this truth from that we should make of it, were we protesting against the formality and procrastination of anxious and delaying sinners. And in all cases, we should feel ourselves bound to raise our warning voice against *resting in the use of means*. There is an invincible proneness in men, when they cannot satisfy their consciences in the neglect of religion, to have recourse to something short of it. And this refuge is the means of grace. But such a use of means is death to the soul. This is the course which multitudes have trodden who have made their bed in hell. If men who are now strangers to God, ever become pious, the time will come when they will be thoroughly dissatisfied with all their use of means. The most moral among them will see this, as well as the most immoral. It is owing to nothing but the want of clear and strong convictions that leads sinners to feel pleased and comforted in their religious observances. Persons in the last stages of conviction are more than ever.

and more than all others, convinced of the entire sinfulness of all their religious performances.

There is another subject on which the preceding illustration may perhaps throw some light. I mean the directions it is proper for ministers to give to persons who inquire, *What they must do to be saved.* I need not say, there exists both in theory and practice, two different and opposite views on this interesting point. There are those whose views of human depravity are such, that they feel great embarrassment in addressing the requisitions of the Gospel to the hearts and consciences of unrenewed men, and therefore fail in enforcing those requisitions, and leave them satisfied with their use of means. On the other hand, there are those, whose views of human depravity, though equally humiliating, are such as to present no embarrassment in urging these requisitions upon the sinner, as the commandment of the everlasting God, and as the most powerful means of conviction and conversion. These two different modes of thinking and acting are never brought to the test so thoroughly, as when ministers are laid under the necessity of answering the inquiry of distressed and convinced sinners, who with all the weight of their sins upon them, and all the horrors of eternity before them, ask, *Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*

The question is, *Shall they be told to do any thing which implies the neglect or postponement of immediate reconciliation to God,—or shall they be cut off from every refuge, and urged without delay, to repent and believe the Gospel?*

To this we reply, *The only proper direction to be given them is, REPENT AND BELIEVE THE GOSPEL.* Nothing should relax the force of this pressing obligation. No matter what they perform beside, until this is done not a step is taken in the business of their salvation. Until this is done, they are only contending with God, justifying all their former sins, and grieving his Holy Spirit. Until this is done, they are only resisting the most powerful motives to holy obedience, trampling on the divine authority, abusing the divine goodness, and rejecting the great salvation. No direction ought therefore, to be given them, that will afford their consciences the least relief in the neglect of this reasonable duty. And I do not hesitate to say, it is *at the peril* of ministers to pursue any other course with them, than one which shall shut them up to the faith.

Do you say, sinners will not be satisfied with these directions, and these directions will only discourage and distress them? Be it so. We do not wish to satisfy them, but to render their condition more and more distressing, as long as they stay away from Christ. On the other hand, we wish to add to the weight of their obligations, till they become so awful and accumulated as to be insupportable, and crush their rebellion. And this course commends itself to the consciences of convinced sinners. It makes them feel just as the Spirit of God makes them feel. This is the work in which the Spirit of God is engaged with them, and we wish to fall in with it; and we know that any other course

is to oppose the Spirit in his work. You feel it your duty to keep them from despair, and therefore you direct them to the use of means, and comfort them with the hope, that if they wait God's time, all will be well! And what do you, *in effect*, accomplish by this? You do not mean to tell them, they need not repent, they need not now believe the Gospel; but is not this the *impression* of your directions? It is just as though you said to them, *You need not repent; God does not require it. You need not believe the Gospel; God does not require it. You cannot believe; you cannot repent; and your business is to do as well as you can, without faith and and repentance.* I say again, you do not mean to say this, but the effect upon the mind of the sinner is the same as though you had said it. You make him feel as though he was doing very well, without complying with the terms of salvation. And if the sinner does not find out his error by being told that he is not in the right way, he must find it out by bitter experience in direct opposition to such preaching. Why should ministers hesitate to discourage sinners in their procrastinated impenitence? Were they ever injured by such discouragements? "Why," says the great Edwards, "should we be afraid to let persons, that are in an infinitely miserable condition, know the truth, or bring them into the light, for fear it should terrify them? It is light that must convert them, if ever they are converted. The more we bring sinners into the light, while they are miserable, and the light is terrible to them, the more

likely it is, that by and by, the light will be joyful to them."\* And *how* does such a course as this discourage the sinner? Do we not set before him the fulness and freeness of the great salvation? Do we not on the authority of God invite and urge him to come to Christ, and tell him that whosoever cometh, he will in no wise cast out? Is this discouragement? Or must we, in order to encourage him, comfort him in his sins, and tell him there is hope for men, while they reject the Saviour? And *whom* does such a course discourage? Any other than the man who persists in enlightened rebellion? Any other than the sinner who perseveres in anxious and remorseful impenitence? Nothing prevents him from receiving Christ, but wickedness, *mere wickedness*, wickedness that he has already cherished and defended too long, and for which he now sees he has no excuse. And must such a sinner be encouraged and comforted?

Ministers of the Gospel should remember that the *weight of their ministry* lies in beseeching men to become reconciled to God. Ministers may preach the doctrines of the Gospel generally, and illustrate and defend them with ability; but if they fail in urging the *present obligations* of the Gospel on impenitent sinners, they do not make the *weight of their ministry* their proper business. And when good men, who have failed in this matter in theory, have been thrust into the field of action, their weapons have failed them, and they have been obliged

\* Thoughts on the Revival, &c. page 195.

to shift their ground. The preaching of the Gospel loses its weight and authority, if ministers feel embarrassed in addressing the requisitions of the Gospel to the hearts and consciences of unrenewed men. Many a minister is spoiled, because in this most important part of all his duty, he does not know how to engage in his Master's business. And every minister may be satisfied that he has fallen into some error in doctrine, if he feels this practical embarrassment. It is the business of a minister so to preach as to leave the impression on the minds of sinners, that he has a right to expect that they will at once cease to do evil, and learn to do well. In such a course of duty he feels strong. He knows that God is with him, and that the consciences of his hearers are with him. And he feels that the truth he utters holds a dominion over the consciences of men, and exerts an authority upon them which nothing can gainsay or resist. Though infinitely inferior to his Master, yet in this respect he resembles him, and teaches his fellow men, as one "having authority, and not as the Scribes." I do not speak with hesitation on this subject. Ministers who have not learned their duty in this particular, must learn it from experience. "Whatever minister," says the experienced preacher whose sentiments we have already more than once recited, "Whatever minister has occasion to deal with souls under anxiety, I cannot but think he will soon find himself under a necessity *greatly to insist upon it with them*, that God is under no manner of obligation to show any

mercy to any natural man, whose heart is not turned to God; and that a man can challenge nothing in absolute justice, or by free promise, from *any thing he does, before* he has believed in Jesus Christ, or has true repentance begun in him. It appears to me, if I had taught those who came to me under trouble any other doctrine, I should have taken a *most direct course utterly to have undone them.* I should have directly crossed what was plainly the drift of *the Spirit of God in his influences upon them*; for if they had believed what I said, it would either have promoted self-flattery and carelessness, and so put an end to their awakenings; or cherished and established their contention and strife with God, concerning his dealings with them and others, and blocked up their way to that humiliation before the Sovereign Disposer of life and death, whereby God is wont to prepare them for his consolations. I think I have found that no discourses have been more remarkably blessed, than those in which the doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty with regard to the salvation of sinners, and his just liberty with regard to answering the prayers, or succeeding the pains of mere natural men have been insisted on."\*

We cannot deem it an unimportant matter, that ministers faithfully discharge their duty in this particular. There is no danger in directing men at once to repent and believe the Gospel. This is the direction, the wisdom of which is fortified by sound

\* Edward's Narrative, &c. Opera. Vol. III. page 34.

experience. This is the direction of the Bible. Witness the conduct of Peter on the day of Pentecost. Witness the interview between the Apostles and the anxious Jailer at Philippi. Witness the direction of our Lord to a class of men who superseded the obligations to inward holiness by their external observances, when he said, "Cleanse *first* that which is *within*." Witness his reply to the question, "What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?" when he said, "*This* is the work of God, that ye believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ." Witness the entire Scriptures. This comprehensive direction may be followed, and the sinner may do his duty. This may be followed, and the sinner will be safe. I say again, it is at the peril of ministers to quiet the consciences of anxious sinners, or in the least diminish, or relax their obligations to repent and believe the Gospel. Ministers should not fail to let their people distinctly understand, that their first and most important work is to become reconciled to God. Let the ministry be pure from the blood of all men. Be it our business to let our fellow men know that to repent and believe the Gospel, is a duty on which their whole eternity is suspended, and which requires despatch. Never may we cease to tell them to go about it immediately, and to "salute no man by the way." We may not vary from the spirit of these injunctions. There are a thousand ways that lead to hell; there is only one that conducts to heaven. We have nothing to do with conducting our hearers in the way to hell.

We may not take upon ourselves the responsibility of deciding which of the numerous ways that lead to that dark abode is the safest and best. God has not decided. The best of them is the way of sin and death. So long as there is this one way to heaven, our business is to direct them thither in this only way. It is a strait and narrow path, but there is no other. Except they repent, they shall all likewise perish. And they have no time to lose in fruitless exertions. The next admonition they hear, may be, cut it down. The next place they occupy may be the mansion of the dead. The next assembly to which they are convoked, may be the congregated universe before the Son of Man.









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