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DIVINE POWER EXERTED

IN

**A SINNER'S REGENERATION:**

TWO DISCOURSES.

BY **GEORGE DUFFIELD**,  
*Pastor of the Presbyterian Church, Carlisle.*

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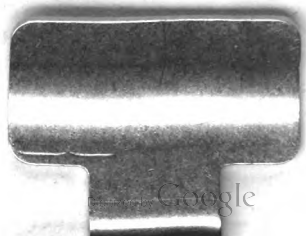


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## S E R M O N I .

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### 2 Peter, I. 3.

*His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtuc.*

These words are very plain. They teach the following facts, viz: That God calls men to glory and virtue—to the practice of that virtue in this world, which will terminate in glory in the world to come;—that all things which pertain to such a life, are matters of grace—they are given;—that these gifts or graces are derived from the divine power;—and that the means employed by the divine power, in conveying the gifts that pertain to life and godliness is the knowledge of God. These positions are as obvious as language can make them, and are clearly the propositions contained in the text.

It is admitted, on all hands, that Regeneration is one of those things which pertain to life and godliness. There can be neither where it is wanting. It is admitted, also, that Regeneration is the result of the divine power. Yet the text declares that the divine power which gives us all things, &c.—which produces Regeneration, is exerted through our *knowledge* of God. To deny this, is to deny the plain words of the Bible. Now knowledge, in its very nature, means an exercise of the human mind in discovering, observing, and being convinced of truth or matters of fact. He that attributes any other idea to the word, violates the established use of language. There is, then, and can be, no knowledge among men, independent and irrespective of the exercise of their own minds relative to truth or matters of fact. The doctrine therefore taught in the text is, *that the divine power which conveys to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, is exerted through or by means of the truth, as it secures the knowledge of God.*

We select one item from the grand total, and shall consider the doctrine more especially in application to it—that is, the Regeneration of the sinner or his being born again. This is the result of the divine power; but the divine power exerted in producing it, is through our knowledge of God, or, in other words, through the truth as apprehended by our minds. The doctrine, then, to which we invite your attention is,

*That Regeneration, as well as every thing else which pertains to a godly life, is produced by the divine power operating through the truth.* We submit this subject to your attention, not because of any love we have for controversy—nor because it has met the rash and decided opposition of some, with regard to whom we can say we can have no greater pleasure than to see them walking in the truth; but because we believe it is greatly misapprehended, and has been, unhappily, we will not say

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designedly, misrepresented by some ministers of Christ, and because we believe that the spiritual interests of every child of God, and the efficiency of his character and efforts as a professed follower of Christ, and the success of religion, and the moral energy of the church, and the great triumphs which she is destined to achieve over the powers of darkness, are all, in some measure, connected with the right understanding of this plain and scriptural account of the manner in which the power of God is exerted in giving us all things that pertain to life and godliness.

We therefore solicit your candid and dispassionate attention, and beg that any of you who have been in the habit of getting angry with our preaching, (we blush for you in adverting to the circumstance,) would for once repress such feelings and accompany us while we undertake on this point "to search the scriptures," and to "compare spiritual things with spiritual." We hope, also, that no one will accuse us, as has often been done, of hostility to the doctrines of our Confession of Faith. The doctrine of Regeneration is not set forth either in it, or in our Catechisms, and is only incidentally noticed in them in connection with the subject of effectual calling. Nor is there any thing in them that teaches or favors the idea of Regeneration being produced by *immediate power* exerted on the soul, without the intervention of truth. Our aim is your spiritual improvement. You never can be the efficient christians you might be, while under the practical influence of this theory. "All things are for your sake, that the abundant grace might, through the thanksgiving of many, redound to the glory of God."

Before submitting any remarks directly on the subject, it is necessary to state the question distinctly. There is one general class of ministers who contend that Regeneration is itself a simple existence—something produced by the power of God; i. e. his *creative force*, acting directly, *immediately* on the naked soul of man, *without the intervention of truth*, or any medium or means of influence whatever. Another class deny this altogether, and following the very words of the Bible, say, that the power which God exerts, is *through the truth* as a means, and not directly on the naked soul, so that, when the truth becomes effectual to awaken in the soul the first act of faith in God, or repentance for sin, or love to Him, which are all voluntary exercises of the soul, immediately the man begins to live for God, and is born again. This latter class allege that the expression Regeneration, or being born again, denotes simply a change in the exercises of the mind and heart, unholy exercises being exchanged for holy—holy exercises succeeding to unholy—so that, *at the very instant* a holy exercise, i. e. an act of faith or love to God is put forth, being of so entirely different a character from his former sinful exercises, the man is said to be born again, and in the strong figurative language of the Bible, may be called a new creature. He begins to live for God, to lead a holy life with the very first exercises of faith or confidence in God, but not before; and this change from sinful thoughts, and feelings, and desires, to holy thoughts, and feelings, and desires, is Regeneration. The man passes from an unholy to a holy state, and is said on that account to be born again, just as the child, in passing from its mother's womb, and beginning to breathe and act in a new way from what it did before, is said to be born. All that take this view are agreed, and explain the subject in the same way—there are no divisions among them—they constitute a

numerous class, not only of Presbyterian ministers but ministers in other Evangelical denominations. They understand each other—co-operate with each other and love as brethren, regardless of the divisions of sect. They think, and feel, and act alike.

As it regards the former class, however, they are greatly divided and subdivided, and do by no means agree among themselves. While they all contend for Regeneration being the product of simple power immediately exerted on the soul, they differ greatly among themselves in their explanations of it. Thus the party that claims to be reputed most orthodox say, that the power of God produces or *implants a principle* of spiritual life in the soul, and thus gives *ability* to believe, repent, and do other holy acts. This principle they maintain has a real existence—may exist prior, and in the case of an infant long prior, to any exercise of faith or love—is derived immediately and exclusively from the power of God, and has the power of a cause to determine the mind in acts of faith, and love, and repentance, and the like. Of this section was Owen, and other divines of the same school. To this class I adhered for the first two or three years of my ministry, having been educated in this theory. Another section of this class teach, that the power of God produces a sort of spiritual instinct in the soul, or a new sense, which adapts it to holiness, just as we are excited and adapted by our animal instincts to many different acts. Edwards, than whom the world has seldom seen a greater man, sometimes *illustrated* the subject in this way; but it was chiefly *illustration*, and therefore the injurious practical results of the abstract tenet of Regeneration by simple power, did not attend his preaching. A third section teach that the power of God produces a new ability or spiritual capacity of action, which is adapted to the inward self-evidencing light of the sacred scriptures, just as our eyes and ears are to the impressions of external objects which, when made, we call seeing and hearing. Of this class was Halyburton and others. A fourth section teach that the power of God produces in the soul of a man a new faculty, which they sometimes call taste, and sometimes heart, and which is the fountain of all holy exercises. To this class belong the Hopkinsians in Vermont and Massachusetts, who adopt the theory of Dr. Burton, Dr. Griffin, and others, and who are in accord with some ministers in the Presbyterian church. A fifth section teach that the power of God produces "*something*" in the soul—they do not say what—which causes it to relish spiritual things. This account of the matter is more vague and indefinite than any of the former. A sixth section teaches that the power of God produces a disposition, or bias, or tendency of the soul to holy things prior to all holy acts or exercises whatever, and is the cause of them. A seventh section talk of a *habit* which, unlike all other habits, is produced before there has been even one holy exercise. They assign this habit as their *cause*, and this is done upon the principles of "inductive philosophy," as Dr. De Witt, late professor in the Theological Seminary of the Dutch church, has admitted. In one or both of these three last sections are to be found our Theological professors at Princeton. Sometimes, however, you will find this cause of holy exercise called taste, faculty, bias, disposition, habit, principle, &c. and that by the very same men, which circumstance shows how much they are at a loss to determine what it is. An eighth section, yet more confusedly, talk about the power of God producing in the soul a moral quality or pro-

erty, which characterizes the man, and secures holy actions. Others, again, as brother Williams of the Carlisle Presbytery, talk of Regeneration as something which has emanative virtue, saying, that "Faith is an emanation from Regeneration." Others still talk of the power of God giving a sort of sensitiveness to the soul, which adapts it to be excited by holy objects. With this class I fell in for a season, when I began to detect the mist and error of *the philosophy* in which I had been educated; but still my mind remained perplexed, till, I bless God, I was brought to see that the whole difficulty and perplexity arose from attempting to explain the language of common sense, as used in the Bible, by different theories and dogmas of metaphysical philosophy.

I might detail to you still further divisions of sentiment among those who insist that the power of God in producing Regeneration, acts directly on the soul without the medium or instrumentality of truth; and though they cannot agree among themselves how to describe its product, or where to assign its particular location, are, nevertheless, too ready to denounce their brethren as heretics, who, in the language of the Bible, say that God begets us "*by his word,*" "through the truth;" but it is unnecessary.

I have cited these different theories, and modes of explaining Regeneration, to show how widely the advocates of its being produced by immediate power on the soul without the truth, differ from each other, and occasionally from themselves, and what great perplexity they find in accommodating among themselves their abstract metaphysical position with the language of the Bible. It is the main spring of all their perplexity and divisions of sentiment, and different explanations of the new birth, and of the apparent contradictions and inconsistencies in the language of scripture, which they admit and endeavor to solve. Only let them part with this, a dogma of philosophy, unsupported by a single text in the Bible, that Regeneration is an efficient cause of holy actions produced by the power of God in the soul of man, and they will understand at once, and see the beauty, and glory, and adaptation of *their* views, to both the letter and spirit of the Bible, who maintain that it is a change produced in the character of our thoughts and feelings by means of the truth as employed by the Spirit of God.

As it regards the question how a man under the dominion of his selfishness, can put forth one act of generous or disinterested love for God, being altogether metaphysical, it requires little or no attention. It certainly cannot be mooted by the "triangular" divines, who make the first exercise, and the very evidence of saving faith to be the sinner's believing that Christ died for him in particular, and as to those who maintain that the believer loves God in view of his own excellence apart from his personal interest in Christ, and who cannot understand how this can be, till divine grace creates a new taste which makes the exercise of love to God pleasant and delightful, or adapts the man's nature to it, this is to render the exercise of love to God selfish, and not in the least degree to explain or remove the difficulty—How does this new taste operate? Precisely according to their own shewing, as its advocates allege the instinctive desire for happiness does. There is in reality no difference, so far as the question of selfishness is concerned. For whether is it less selfish to love God, *because* it meets and *suits* a man's taste, than because He is seen to be the proper source of real happiness? Should physical depravity be asserted

the difference may indeed be apparent but such a theory is denied, and we are denounced as slandering their views by attributing to the divines of the taste, or habit, or disposition schools, such a sentiment, or by even intimating that it follows as a consequence of their doctrine of Regeneration by power without the truth.

If it be said that the Spirit employs the truth but after all it is an act of his power immediately on the soul, which *prepared* it for the truth to make a different impression, this is making truth but the *occasion*, or *pretext* and not the *means* of the Spirit's power, and that without the least evidence from either scripture or experience. For we remark,

I. That the idea of Regeneration being produced by power immediately exerted on the soul, is altogether a philosophical inference, totally unsupported by the language of scripture. The term philosophy, like many others, is used in a great many different senses, and I have been astonished sometimes at the vague manner in which it is employed. Philosophy properly denotes that process or exercise of mind, by which we assign the causes or reasons for the different effects we may observe. Thus we talk of natural philosophy, which explains the phenomena of nature by the various laws which affect the motions of bodies and their action on one another;—of chemical philosophy, which explains the various changes that take place in the structure or component parts of bodies;—of mental philosophy which explains the various phenomena of thought and feeling, or the laws which regulate the actions of the mind;—and of moral philosophy which explains or assigns the reasons of human conduct. We use it in its general sense, as denoting that process of mind by which we assign the reasons or causes of things. Now, however proper it may be, in mere matters of science, to resort to philosophy, or thus to employ our minds, we contend, that it is wholly improper in theology, or religion, which teaches matters that reason could never have discovered, and are to be received exclusively upon the word or testimony of God. "Beware," said Paul, "lest any man spoil you through philosophy." Col. 2. 8.

Now it is said that the power of God is exerted on the naked soul, independently and exclusively of the truth, to produce there a cause of holy actions. When the brethren who say this are asked for the proof of it, they do not quote the Bible; but tell us we *cannot see how* such a depraved creature as man is (assuming his physical depravity) can ever be brought to put forth holy acts in any other way, and so, because they can assign no better, or no other reason for holy acts they assign this. This is mere philosophy—the assigning the causes of effects—or it is reasoning from ignorance. i. e. because we don't know *how else it can be*, THEREFORE it must be; and there is a great deal of this sort of false philosophy in every department of human science.

Perhaps some of my hearers will say, that I misrepresent the subject: but if they were perfectly acquainted with the system we oppose they could not say so;—nor if they had read the late productions from the pens of those who advocate this view of Regeneration by power without the truth. Dr. De Witt late of Rutgers college, a champion in the defence of these views, has no hesitation in confessing this. He says, "According to this mode of reasoning," (that is the inductive philosophy) "we must *infer* and we cannot shun the *inference*,



that there *must* exist in the mind of every unregenerate person, some *moral cause*, or *law* tending to that result, and that law is *innate* and uniform, certain and *necessary* in its operations." Here then we have it distinctly avowed, that Regeneration produced by the mighty power of God, lodges a cause of holiness in the very soul of man, so that the renewed becomes necessarily holy! This is all philosophy. We do not feel ourselves at liberty to infer any thing of this sort. What says God upon the subject; that is the question, and not what says philosophy? The principles of inductive philosophy, may and do apply to matters of science but not to religion. With religion they have nothing to do. God's word is every thing here, and if a man cannot shew a "thus saith the Lord" for it, let his opinion and philosophy all go to the bats and to the moles. It is this thing of introducing philosophy, instead of plain common sense, as the interpreter of the Bible, that has thrown clouds of darkness round that precious volume, and split up the church of Jesus Christ, which he has purchased with his blood, into sects and parties, and rendered religion the mere laughing-stock of infidels and atheists.

The very circumstance that the principal and most judicious advocates, of this idea of Regeneration being wrought by the power of God immediately without the intervention of truth, are compelled to admit, that *they must resort to inductive philosophy to infer* the existence of something in the soul, which is *the cause* of holiness, shews that they cannot prove it from the Bible; for if they could, they would not resort to philosophy. If the cause of holy exercises is inquired after, the Bible answers the question very plainly. This is the Spirit of God; but at the same time it declares He produces them instrumentally through the truth,—the divine power gives us all things through the knowledge, &c. "Of his own will begat he us with the word of his truth,"\* To deny this, who will dare? Language cannot be plainer to prove that Regeneration is produced by God through the truth. The man that clings to his philosophy, in despite of such convincing testimony from the mouth of God, after that his error has been pointed out to him, I consider to be incurably blind. Some wretched passions or prejudices prevent him from seeing the light of truth. To say that Regeneration is wrought by power, exclusive of the truth, is to deny the Bible; and to say that there is an efficient cause of holy exercises created in the soul, is to run directly up against the plain testimony of the word of God. For the apostle says in the most pointed terms, that it is "the word of God, his truth which effectually worketh in them that believe."

The only passages that are quoted in proof of Regeneration being wrought by power, are the following: I have never met with more than three, and not one of them is to the point. Dr. Griffin, in a labor-ed, and obscure, discourse, entitled "Regeneration not wrought by Light," but by power, has ventured to quote two.

The first is, "God that hath shined out of darkness into light, hath shined into our hearts." But the text does not say that he did these two things in the same way. It says that the *same God* did these two different things; but it is not said, that he did one *as* he did the other. He shined out of darkness into light by an act of simple power, as Moses tells us. But when he shines into our hearts to give us the light

\*James 1. 18.

of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ we are told expressly that it is by the truth, "He (the Spirit,) shall take of the things that are mine, says Christ, and *shew* them unto you, and he shall guide you into all truth." Beside, the very text itself explains the shining into our hearts, to be the giving us the knowledge of the glory of God, which in the *very nature of things, can be had only through the voluntary exercise of our own minds*. This text, therefore, is in favor of the very opposite doctrine, from that which it is quoted by Dr. G. to prove.

The second is, that in the Ephesians, "who believe according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought when he raised Christ from the dead." Here it is said, that God regenerates or produces faith by the same power that raised Christ from the dead. The former text was cited to prove that it was the same power which created the world. These things do not agree. But the truth is, that no Greek scholar will pretend to deny, that the 'working of the mighty power' in Ephesians, is the object or thing believed, not the efficient power which produced faith. This the grammatical construction proves beyond successful denial; so that this text, the great resort, and the main defence of most, so far from supporting such a sentiment, does not relate to the point at all. It is just about as much proof that God regenerates by simple power, as if I were to say, I believe in relation to the mighty power of God which raised up Christ from the dead, would be, that I meant my faith was produced by the mighty power of God.

The third and last passage adduced in proof of this by some, is in the 12th and 13th verses of John—"to as many as received him to them gave he power to become the sons of God even to them that believe on his name: which were born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man but God" If it is here alleged that the power is given to believe, which is done by the power of God exerted on us, our reply is, that every Greek scholar knows the power is not that of force, but right and authority—the word means authority or privilege. This verse, therefore, lends no support to this idea. But it is said the next verse assigns Regeneration as the cause of faith—Who were born, &c. We deny the assertion. It only states the simple fact that those who are born again—whose hearts are changed—who renounce their sins and embrace Jesus Christ, have done so, not by virtue of any worth of parentage—not through the self-determining power of their own will, but through the agency of God. This we believe and teach, but it is a very different thing from assigning the philosophical cause of holy exercises to be, in something produced in, or done unto the naked soul of man, prior to its voluntary exercises by the power of God, independent and exclusive of his truth.

II. My second remark on this subject is, that the idea, of Regeneration being produced by power without the truth is totally unsupported by the experience of Christians. Our experience goes no further than our own thoughts and feelings and consequent acts. We have no knowledge of any thing that takes place, or is done back of our own conscious exercises. I defy any rational being to give proof of something being done to his soul by an act of power of which he never was conscious.

When a man comes to you and tells you of a change having been wrought upon him, you naturally ask him to give you some account of

it. And you expect as Peter says every one who is born again must be able to do, that he will "give (you) the reason of the hope that is in him." If he begins to tell you of his having been in a swoon, or in a trance, or of having fallen down apparently dead, or of his having been thrown into great tremblings or agitations of body, it is all to no purpose. You want to know, and must hear, what have been his thoughts and feelings before you can form any judgment of the change he professes. If he cannot give you a rational account of his exercises of mind and heart, in renouncing his sins, and grieving on account of them;—of his embracing and cordially trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ, as able and willing to save him;—and of loving him, as discerning in him most exalted excellence and worth, you can give no credit whatever to the man's professions about his being converted or born again. You see at once the man has no experience, and you know, that every one who is truly born of God has had an experience, in his own conscious feelings of sorrow for sin, of faith in Christ, and of love to His name. He may talk to you about his use of means, and his hope that the power of God will or may have been exerted on his soul; and he may even assert his conversion—but it is all to no purpose. You look and ask for his *experience*, and if he has none, you at once set him down as a deceived man or a proud Pharisee.

And now, this is the strong practical testimony, which men of common sense uniformly bear against the philosophical idea of Regeneration being wrought by power without the truth. For every man, who knows any thing, knows very well, that if it is through the truth the Holy Spirit operates to change the heart, he must look for, and can have, evidence of His influence *only* in his own conscious thoughts and feelings—the voluntary exercises of his own mind. I appeal to your own experience, my dear christian friends, who have tasted that the Lord is gracious. How was it that his Holy Spirit made you new creatures in Christ Jesus? Was it by any mighty force exerted on your naked souls?—by some dreadful shock given to them by the divine power? Or, was it not through the influence of the truth? By means of some sermon preached, or word spoken, by a friend, or something read in the scriptures, or a tract, or some other book, or by a dream, or some startling Providence of God, &c., your attention was awakened to the subject of your soul's concerns. You saw and felt what a dreadful sinner you was in the sight of God. You thought and felt that your sins rendered you deserving of eternal damnation. You felt that you was lost, and that unless God should have mercy on your soul, hell, and that to all eternity, must be your portion. Oh! what a multitude of recking and tormenting thoughts were awakened in your minds by the truths of God's word which you heard preached!

But to remain in this dreadful state you could not consent. You tried this and the other way to help yourself; but here again you were taught the truth that *you* could not do any thing to atone for your sin, and recommend you to God, but that the blessed Jesus had died for sinners, and was willing to receive you, worthless, vile, hell-deserving as you were. You thought of your sins and pleasures, but for a season felt as if you could not give them up. Then hell again stared you in the face, and you asked yourself how you could dwell with devouring fire; how you could lie down in everlasting burnings. You saw that you must sacrifice your sins, or sacrifice your soul. You heard, and it made you almost quake and tremble when you heard it, that you must

deny yourself, that you must pluck out the right eye, and cut off the right hand, and crucify your affections and lusts, or you would be forever and forever lost. Rage and rebellion occasionally rose high in your hearts; but you saw hell yawning to receive you—you heard the very groans of the damned—you felt as it were the flames of the pit kindling upon you, and at last you lifted your despairing cry to heaven. At first all was dark; no bright spot appeared before you. Heaven seemed wrapped in thickening clouds of vengeance; but presently you saw, amidst the awful gloom, a dying Jesus, with arms out-stretched and waiting to receive you. You learned that He would recommend you to God—would forever take care of you, if you would but cast yourself into his arms. You felt willing to part with all your sins, and gave them up, and at the very same moment, saw something in Christ to love. Oh, such a Saviour!—Oh, such a loving, tender, gracious friend, as to die for sinners and to die for you! You could resist no longer, and with a heart full of sorrow for your sins, you cast yourself on Christ. “Lord take me—I yield, I yield, I yield;” and either then, or soon after, as you was conscious of your real deep-rooted and unshaken purpose to sacrifice your sins, and saw something more of the grace and loveliness of Christ, and was assured of your own heart’s supreme and ardent love to Him, you felt a joy unspeakable and full of glory. Nor would you exchange such bliss for all the joys of sin; but the language of your delighted heart thenceforth has been,

“Jesus thy love do I require,  
Nothing on earth beneath desire,  
Nothing in heaven above:  
Let earth, and heaven, and all things go,  
Give me thy only love to know,  
Give me thy perfect love.”

Now in all this there was nothing beyond the bounds of your own conscious exercises. You knew, and was conscious of every thought and feeling; and this transition of feeling—this change of thought and desires—from unbelieving, killing fears and anxieties, to a sweet, happy repose in Christ—from love of sin, and a refusal to part with your lusts, to a perfect willingness and ardent desire to sacrifice them all, and nail them to the cross of Jesus—from the love of the world and its pleasures, to the love of Christ—*this change of purpose and feeling* was your new birth. You became a new creature, and you felt it, in all the conscious exercises of your soul. But your experience goes no further, and as you describe this change to others, you never dream of any thing being done to your naked soul by mere force or power without the truth. For you know that it was God’s great grace, which sent his Holy Spirit, by his own truth, to break down the opposition of your minds and hearts to holiness, and make you willing to love and obey Him. You acknowledge his power in your conversion, and think it wonderful indeed; but it is power exerted through the truth, which you have felt and believed. As to any thing else you have no experience.

But I desist for the present and conclude by reminding you my hearers of the scriptural account of this whole matter. If any of you are expecting to be born again by an exercise of the divine power on your souls which will make religion easy and delightful to you, so that you will have no conflict in subduing the pride and selfishness of your

heart, and no pain in crucifying your affections and lusts you are sadly mistaken. Regeneration is a voluntary change it is a change in the voluntary exercises of your own minds and hearts. You must renounce the world and give your hearts to Christ and engage with purpose of eternal devotedness to serve him. Sinful companions and delights, selfish pleasures and pursuits must be forsaken. All must be parted with for Christ. To induce you to do so the blessed Spirit of God is striving. He urges on your conscience his solemn and awful truth. He throws open before you a burning hell. He beckons you from a radiant heaven. He points you to the cross of Calvary. He calls upon you to stop and think—to repent and turn—to escape for your life. His truth, at times enters into your very soul. You quake and tremble—you weep and pray. Are such your feelings now? You are on the very threshold of the kingdom. Break away from your sins, burst through this barrier of unbelief, strike hands with Christ for time and for eternity, and cordially submit to him, and he will seal you with his Spirit till the day of redemption. Neither the first nor second death on you will have any power. But refuse—refuse now, linger here a few moments longer without giving up to Christ, and you may fall immeasurably and eternally from hope. Yield to the voice of pleasure—obey the world's commands,—crouch and be ashamed before its deriding gaze, and let the present season go, and all, all may be forever gone. Pleasures past shall prove thorns around your bleeding brow ere long,—spectres that shall hover round your brain and aggravate and mock your woe.

## SERMON II.

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2 Peter, 1, 3.

In the former discourse from this text, I adduced two considerations to prove that Regeneration is not the product of simple power immediately exerted on the soul, in opposition to that view which represents it to be produced by the Spirit's power through the truth—by means of the word,—viz: Its main support is derived from philosophy and not from the *Bible*.—It is in direct opposition to the experience of Christians.

An appeal was directly made, particularly to your experience, and it affords me no little satisfaction, to have heard from not a few of you since, that it was accurately described. But I restrict not the appeal to you. You will find it to be the same in the case of every saint in glory who has left behind him a record of the dealings of God with his soul. All bear their testimony to the truth of the Redeemer's word, who describes the process of a sinner's conversion or emancipation from the dominion of sin to be "*ye shall know the TRUTH, and the truth shall make you free.*"<sup>1</sup> I have some other considerations to submit to your attention in the present discourse.

III. The idea that Regeneration is produced by the immediate power of God on the soul of man without the intervention of truth as a means, is productive of many sad practical results. Here, no doubt it will be said that this is not to be attributed to the doctrine, but to the corruption of men who pervert it. If the facts are not denied—and they certainly will not be by any one who has had an opportunity to trace and examine them—they will be referred to another cause than to the natural and legitimate tendency of the doctrine. Thus we shall be told that the apostle Paul's doctrine was abused, and that some even turned the grace of God into licentiousness, so that it is not fair to charge upon any doctrine, the consequences resulting from it as it acts upon the corrupt minds of men. This remark, we grant, is to a certain extent true. The best thing may undoubtedly be abused. But the case is very different, when the results are seen to be legitimate and uniform, and where, as in the present case, they are found directly at variance with the letter and spirit of the bible, affecting both ministers and people,—receiving the sanction of the former, and influencing their exhortations and prayers, their instructions and efforts, and producing appropriate habits of feeling and acting among their hearers. We shall notice a few.

1. The doctrine of Regeneration, produced by immediate power on the soul without the intervention of truth, involves the whole subject

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<sup>1</sup> John 8, 32.

of the Spirit's influence in the mysticism of philosophy. There is a propensity in mankind to trace the effect to its cause. No where do men err so frequently, and so egregiously, as in assigning the causes of phenomena as well the proximate as those more remote. We may trace their errors, through endless theories in every department of human knowledge. It is the glory of religion, that the sure word of God lays an interdict on all vain reasonings, and that the human mind is required to receive, exclusively through faith in the testimony of God, its knowledge of divine things. A neglect or refusal thus to submit to the authority of revelation, has been productive of disastrous consequences in the church of God. These consequences are peculiarly apparent in the history of that influence which the Platonic philosophy, as incorporated with the word of God, and adduced to illustrate its facts and to subserve the purposes of devotional piety, had for many centuries in the Christian church. They may be discovered even at this day in the mystic theology which still claims for itself the homage of many. We are confident that this cannot be denied, by those who have read upon the subject, and traced the influence of this old heathen philosophy, in modifying the doctrines of Christianity, as they were blended by the divines of the Alexandrian school. As for those who have never read, and are ignorant on the subject, it would be well for them to lay aside for a season, the spirit of intolerance and bigotry, and not conclude that they know all things, and cannot be instructed. They will find that most of the celebrated fathers were Platonists and that they borrowed many of their explanations of scripture from the Platonic system. Justin Martyr, Athenagoras, Clemens Alexandrinus and others have been particularly noticed. With the Eclectic sect, commenced that union of heathen philosophy and Christianity which may be traced in the writings of the mystics from that day to this.

It was by means of the first principles of the Platonic philosophy, that the mystics, who sprung up, in the close of the second century, formed their system, the effects of which were not wholly removed by the reformation, and have not yet fully been expelled from the church of God. The known doctrine of the Platonic school, which was adopted by Origen and his disciples, was, that "the divine nature is diffused through all human souls or that the faculty of reason, from which proceed the health and vigour of the mind is an emanation from God into the human soul, and comprehends in it the principles and elements of all truth, human and divine." Assuming this, the mystics denied, that men could by labour or study excite this celestial flame in their breasts, and therefore they disapproved of all attempts to lead the minds of men to form distinct common sense notions of truth. Solitude, repose, maceration of the body, abstraction from terrestrial scenes, and the exercises of an imaginative devotion were, in their estimation, the only appropriate means of exciting the Spirit of God within them. They talked of inexpressible raptures in communion with God, and believed themselves to be invested with the "inestimable privilege of contemplating truth undisguised and uncorrupted, in its native purity, while others beheld it in a vitiated or delusive form."

Time will not permit me to describe the effects produced by the appearance of their singular and austere piety, nor to trace them, in the different forms of philosophical enthusiasm which prevailed among

the Anchores and monastic orders of the third century down to the Quietists, and quakers and others fanatics of modern days. But the above presentation of one of the peculiar principles of the mystic theology, is enough to enable you to trace the resemblance observable, in certain modes of explaining the doctrine of Regeneration, and in their practical effects in some cases.

At one time we are told that when a man is born again, the Spirit of God takes up his "personal inhabitation" in the soul, dwelling there and actuating the soul, as the soul does the body. At another time, we are told that the Spirit of God, by his power, implants in the soul a celestial principle by which we become partakers of the divine nature. At other times different explanations are given, but they all proceed on the assumption of something produced by divine power being put into the soul of man, which becomes the actuating principle, giving ability to understand spiritual things, to believe, repent, and perform holy duties, which cannot be excited by the man himself, but is every moment kept alive by a still farther accession of divine power, on which like all other graces it immediately depends and for the increased energy of which he is indebted to the *sovereignty* of God. The only difference that I see between this and the Platonism of the Mystics, is that the latter considered the soul itself the celestial principle, the emanation from God, but the former removes it one step farther off, and makes it something in the soul.

It is curious too to trace the resemblance between the two systems in their practical results, and to see how this notion of something of divine origin being put into the soul as the actuating principle there, leads to Anchoresh selfshness, to spiritual pride, to mistaken abstraction from the active business of piety, and to an incorrigible aversion and prejudice against the interpretation of scripture upon the principles of common sense. Thus it is avowed by some *advocates* of this philosophy, and contended—that there is especial mystery in the whole of religion, just as Plato wrapped every thing in mystery, and that it is utterly, and in the nature of things impossible to know any thing in relation to it till there has been the illapses of this celestial principle into the soul—till almighty power has created there this counterpart of the divine nature. The whole subject of the Spirit's influence being enwrapped in peculiar mystery, we are put upon a sort of philosophical inquiry after some hidden, intangible, imperceptible, and mystic cause of our own actions, away back of and exerting a controlling power over our thoughts, purposes, feelings and desires. The appropriate and immediate impressions of truth are therefore lost sight of, and the man, who adopts these views, of necessity talks unintelligibly and mystically about the influence of the Spirit of God.

To require him to speak intelligibly, and to question the truth of his philosophy, is by some deemed impious, and if you will persist in your attempt to drive him out from the shrine of that mysticism in which he is enveloped, and bring him, and his theories to the light of open day, the test of simple bible truth, you will be denounced as an heretic, and be punished with intolerance, for your temerity. The very same language that is held by the wildest fanatics, you will hear drop from the lips of these philosophical enthusiasts and in both cases, with as little precision of thought, though not as *injuriously*, so that if



you do not stumble, and are not in danger of turning away with disgust from the whole subject of the Spirit's influence, it will be owing to other guides and guardianship than the explanations of the mystic theology. I have no doubt that both the speculative and practical infidelity of many, are to be attributed to the manner in which the precious doctrine of the Spirit's influence through the truth, has been involved and obscured by the mysticism of philosophy. Its results here are greatly to be deplored, and these results are by no means ideal. Platonism was the great bulwark of infidelity during the days in which vital christianity flourished, i. e. the first two centuries. But after some Platonic philosophers were converted and Platonism and Christianity were united and taught together, in the Alexandrian school, the life and power of religion in the churches rapidly declined.

2. There are other mischievous results which flow from this doctrine of Regeneration being something put into the soul by an immediate act of divine power. It darkens the whole subject of spiritual experience and keeps the mind of the Christian in an uneasy and distracted state. It is always a question of deep and thrilling interest to the Christian heart, "Am I a child of God or not." He knows that he is not, if he has not been born again. The evidences of Regeneration therefore become an object of interested examination and research. But while the nature of regeneration is itself involved in mysticism, and the Christian has no distinct and definite ideas as to what it is, it cannot be otherwise than that his mind should be divided, and distracted, and unable to decide whether he has been born again. He is told that it is something put into him by the mighty power of God, and when he attends to the explanations given, he hears that it operates in his soul as a cause of holy actions. Now it is impossible in the very nature of things, that he can ever have any evidence of its existence, but what he arrives at, directly or indirectly through his own consciousness.

At first, from the language used, he expects some powerful emotion, excitement, or impulse—he cannot tell what—but something extraordinary and supernatural, for he has been told that it is to be produced by the mighty power of God. No such thing occurs in his experience. Here, however, he is told, by the advocates of this theory, that he is mistaken. This change, produced by the mighty power of God, they tell him, is done back of his conscious exercises, and that it could as readily happen when he is asleep as when awake, when lying in the womb as when arrived at age, and that the precise time when it occurs he never can know, and need not undertake to inquire after.

All this creates distraction and confusion of mind. "How then," he asks, "am I to know whether I am born again or not?"

To this question he will get the answer, "By the witness of the Holy Spirit,—He it is that must bear witness in your heart, whether you are born again."

But this is not enough. He asks again, "what is the witness of the Spirit?" for till he knows what this is, he can never tell whether he has it or not.

In reply to this question he will be told, by the advocates of the doctrine of Regeneration by immediate power, that "the witness of the Spirit consists in two things; first, what the Spirit has done in the soul,

and second, the account or characteristics of it, which He, the Spirit, has given in His own word."

But this only confounds him more. "I am inquiring after, and wanting to know," says he, "what the Spirit has done for my soul. You have already told me that I was mistaken, when I supposed that because it was produced by power, there would be some shock, or some extraordinary emotion or experience, that would prove it to me. How then am I to know it?"

To this it is replied, "You must examine your own heart carefully, and see whether you have the feelings which the scriptures describe the renewed man as having. If your experience and conduct correspond with what you read in the Bible, as being the experience and conduct of the converted sinner, why then you may infer that you have been born again—that this divine principle has been lodged in your soul. Remember that it is with your own spirit that the Holy Spirit bears witness."

And thus, after all, having travelled through this long circuitous route, and been kept in a perplexed, and sometimes agitated state of mind, the information that he gets upon this subject, which is at all satisfactory, just amounts to this, viz: if you are conscious of right feelings and actions, you may conclude that you are a child of God, and have been made a partaker of the divine nature. But the evidence arising from consciousness is greatly impaired, because he is practically taught that it is only of secondary consequence, and is put upon the plea of philosophising, i. e. of reasoning from the effect to the cause, in order to ascertain his Regeneration.

But let him be told that Regeneration consists in a change of his feelings, and purposes, and actions, from unholy to holy, i. e. that at the very moment when he exchanged his selfish feelings and self-righteous purposes, for the supreme governing purpose, of an heart to live to the glory of God—when he first ceased from his unbelief, and fears, and distrust of God, and cordially trusted in Him through Jesus Christ, he then began to live a new life, and at that moment passed from death unto life, from darkness to light, he is not distracted with any mystic philosophy. All this, as the language of common sense, is perfectly intelligible. The evidence of a change lies, directly, and wholly, within the limits of his own consciousness, and as he knows from the word of God, that it is through the appropriate influence of the truth, the Spirit excites his mind and produces these new feelings and purposes, he has, in his very consciousness of such feelings and purposes—the full witness of the Spirit—convincing evidence that he is a child of God.

The subject is brought before his mind with great plainness and distinctness, and he sees and knows, that until he feels fully conscious that he does actually, and eternally, renounce all his sins, and with his whole heart embrace and trust in Jesus Christ, he has, and can have, no evidence of being born again. He therefore looks directly to what God requires him to be and to feel. And until he meets the requisitions of God, he stares him in the face. He knows and feels that he is a rebel, and under the curse, as long as he does not consciously give up his undivided heart to God. In the absence of such consciousness, or in the consciousness of an unwillingness to part with every thing for Christ—of the want of love to Him, he sees and knows that every moment he is becoming more and more guilty and deserving of hell. Nor

should he, as he would not lose his soul, listen to the man that will come in and tell him, "Oh, be not so discouraged, you *may* have experienced a change and not know it. The seed may have been sown in your heart, and it will produce its fruits by and bye. You cannot expect to know just at once your acceptance with God. Many good christians have lived for years, yea, a whole life time, and have been in doubt about it, even at the last." Perhaps he may listen to such advice, so directly at variance with the language and spirit of the New Testament, and the consequence will be, he will settle down in a dull monotonous routine of religious duties, without life, without experience, and without knowledge of himself—of what he ought to be; and of what God requires and expects at his hands.

Go through the great mass of professors, and ask them whether they are born again, and how few can you find who will not shrink from the question? Immediately you will see them enwrap themselves, in the folds of their mystic theology, like the snail that retreats from the rays of the sun, and all your attempts to draw them out, in any spiritual converse about the state of their souls will be utterly in vain. If at any time they do venture abroad, it is in the midst of mist, and fogs, and darkness, and their progress is so slow, and there is such a slime of doubts and fears to mark their track, that you shall grow weary of your pains, and almost wish them back again within their shell. But why is this? Is the Spirit of God more unwilling to bear witness with our spirits now than he was in apostolic days? Is it really more difficult to tell whether a man is a christian now than it was then? Are the evidences of a change of heart different now from what they were then? By no means. But there is wanting among multitudes that self-denying, self-sacrificing, devoted spirit of love to God, and contempt for the world, that vivid consciousness of the emotions, and purposes, and acts that characterize the renovated soul, which, when had, never fail to furnish the most convincing proof of having passed from death unto life.

Perhaps the advice above noticed does not satisfy, and the christian is too much awake to be lulled into the sleep of formalists and Pharisees, and hypocrites, who are quietly floating down to hell, and he is impatient and anxious to know something about his state, and pores over his own heart, and inquires of this and the other inexperienced guide, till anxiety of mind deranges his nerves, and disease produces most distressing hallucinations. There are not wanting sad instances of alienations of mind, produced through the influence of this wretched mysticism, which, had the individuals been instructed in religion, not as philosophically explained, but as adapted to common sense, and been put upon a plan of efficient action, might have been altogether prevented. It is a circumstance of no little consolation to us, that although we have seen three seasons of powerful revival, and many hundreds deeply excited on the subject of religion, there has not one instance occurred, under our ministry, in which confirmed melancholy, or mental alienation, or fatal termination in violent disease, has ever eventuated in persons convicted and troubled about their soul's concerns. We have heard and read of melancholy cases of this sort, however, where the mystic views obtained, and where christians have been kept in a doubting and almost despairing state of mind for months and years together. But we cannot dilate on this subject;—nor would we attach

too much consequence to it, although we are convinced it is deserving of some attention.

3. It is easy to perceive, from what has already been said, that this doctrine of Regeneration by immediate power without the truth, not only darkens and distracts the experience of the christian, but also destroys his efficiency. He is given practically to understand, that he can do nothing till this divine principle, by which God gives ability for spiritual duties, is infused into him, and that it would be presumption and impiety in him to attempt to do any thing in his own strength. But he does not know—he has no satisfactory evidence that this principle has been implanted in him, and he therefore fears and hesitates to make any effort. He cannot think of undertaking to discharge the duties which characterize the christian. He cannot appropriate the christian's consolations. He feels that there is danger of acting the hypocrite, if in his present state he undertakes to imitate the one and appropriate the other. He would feign do this and that, he thinks, but then he is afraid, lest in the end, he may be found to want the infused principle of life and holiness, and the consequence is, that he is dragged from Sabbath to Sabbath, and month to month, through a round of external means. He may, indeed, to satisfy conscience, go forward to the Lord's table, and have his children baptized; but cannot be persuaded to come out and take a public, open stand on the subject of religion, and speak and act for Christ. His whole effort seems to be to persuade himself that he may be a christian, and yet not be steadfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. He don't know yet that this something has been infused into him, and when he sees young christians and others active and engaged, and hears them talk of Christ and his cause, and finds them bold and decided, he wonders at their presumption, and goes away to mourn over the degeneracy of the times, the prevalence of heresy, the impudence of youth, and the utter want of that humility, in which he falsely flatters himself will be found *his* chief excellenc. Thus while he always moves like a cripple himself, he falls at times, as a great incubus upon lively, warm-hearted and zealous christians; and while setting an example of censurable inefficiency himself, breathes a pestilential vapour, to cramp the energies of others. How very different would his example and efforts be were he told, and did he believe, that he is not to look after this infused something, which is to give him ability to act for Christ, but that God is now and always willing to help him, and work through him, in the exercise of those capacities he already possesses, and that it is his duty never to hesitate or distrust the promise of God, but rise in the very power of His might, and spend and be spent for God.

The question, when called to act for God, or perform any Christian duty, would not be, "have I been made partaker of the principle of spiritual life," but "am I willing to do my duty?" He could not skulk away from the service to which God calls him, under the dim shadows of his mystic theology; but he would see and feel at once that it was a question of submission or rebellion, that he was called to settle, and that during every moment's delay to rise and act, he is parlying with his enemies. Instead of being invaded with fears and misgivings, lest the infused principle should not be found in him, his fears would be, lest he should prove a deserter, or faithless at his post, and, by inconsistency, indolence, and neglect of duty, bring dishonor on the cause of God.

4. The injurious results in relation to ministers' and churches' efforts for the cause of God and the conversion of souls, which flow from this doctrine of Regeneration by power without the truth may also be noticed. If a minister and people believe it is immediately by power and not through truth, that God regenerates, they will, of necessity, feel that they cannot anticipate success, if such power should be withheld even though the truth be preached. This power is exerted they believe in a sovereign way, meaning arbitrarily,—and that therefore “until God’s time to exert it shall arrive all is vain.”

When they look into the Bible they find no promise as it respects the exercise of such power, and thence they conclude that this is a matter which God has reserved to himself, and that all they can do is to use the external means, and wait for *God’s time to revive his work, and save immortal souls*. Accordingly they do not feel, because according to this view, they do not, cannot believe, that any blame attaches to themselves. They quiet all uneasiness by the thought, “we have done *our* duty, but God is a sovereign, and he does not see fit to bless our efforts.” Thus although the bible says explicitly of even false teachers that “if they had stood in the counsel (of the Lord) and had caused (his) people to hear his words, then they would have turned them from their evil way and from the evil of their doings,”<sup>1</sup> yet you will hear ministers, who claim to be most orthodox, and whose glory is that they stand in the counsel of the Lord, and walk in the “good old ways,” get up in their place, and while they see and cannot but confess, that sinners are not turned unto the Lord through their means, and that no revival has ever attended their preaching, comfort themselves and their hearers by saying “God is a sovereign. He has his own way and time of working. Many a faithful minister may toil for a long time, yea a whole life, and see no fruit. We must wait patiently till his time to favor Zion shall come. It is an act of sovereign and Almighty power independent of the truth as a means by which God converts the sinner.”

Now such exhortations contradict God as if were to his very face, yet are they the natural, legitimate, and in some cases, the actual result of the doctrine of Regeneration by power immediately exerted on the soul as taught by some ministers. God has said, most pointedly and positively, “he that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bearing his sheaves with him.”<sup>2</sup> It is enough to induce us, at once, to abandon any theory, and any explanation of the new birth and the influences of the Spirit, which are so directly at variance with the plain letter of the word of God. However legitimately such exhortations and conclusions may flow from the doctrine of Regeneration by power, they are not sanctioned by the word of God. The ministry of Christ was extensively blessed. Never was there a preacher on earth that made such a deep and extensive impression within the limits to which he confined himself.<sup>3</sup> The ministry of the apostles was extensively blessed, and so has been that of every zealous and active labourer from that day to this, who did not confine himself to times and seasons, and set phrases and stereotype modes of exhibiting the truth.

<sup>1</sup> Jer. 23, 22.

<sup>2</sup> Ps. 126. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Mat. 4. 23, 25. Luke 4. 14, 15. John 4. 39, 42. 8. 30. &c. &c.

No man has a right to plead the sovereignty of God as the reason of his want of success. God does not delight to counteract his own design in commissioning the ministers of Christ, nor in violating His pledge which he gives them to be "always" with them. It is a frightful form of rebellion against Him, a taking part with His enemies, to plead his sovereignty as the reason why success does not attend right efforts made for the conversion of sinners. It will not do to urge it, and I wonder at the awful blindness of those that do. It is but turning the blame of a man's own indolence, and indifference, and imprudence, and folly, and shamefacedness, and want of believing prayer, over on God's sovereignty—an high-handed act of treason against the divine government. No wonder that where this doctrine is preached, no revivals occur, and souls perish by hundreds—and professors live without prayer in their families, and self-denial and benevolent efforts, drowned in formality and worldliness, or if ever they become zealous, it is in the manifestation of their uneasiness, and in opposition against decided active ministers and measures, and in sounding forth the cry of heresy, and false and dangerous doctrine. No wonder that you will find many professors, and whole churches, opposed to weekly prayer meetings, and visiting for the purpose of conversing with others about their souls' concerns. No wonder too that you will see parents actually training up their children for hell, by neglecting to press their consciences with the truth, and in the spirit of Christ labour for their conversion. If Regeneration is to be produced by immediate power irrespective of the truth, they may indeed, just as well whip them for not committing the catechism and words they do not understand, or pay a school master to do it for them, and call this religious instruction, as any thing else. They may be as worldly-minded, and as covetous and as slanderous, and as vindictive before their children as they find it convenient, or as suits their own pride and selfishness, for if truth is not the means of conversion, the power of God can effect it, as certainly, even though that truth has not been exhibited in their example, breathed forth in their spirit, carried out in their actions, presented in their conversation, and pressed in every varied form upon the conscience. No wonder that you shall find whole families of children whose parents adopt and act upon this sentiment, and abuse ministers who prescribe the contrary, and oppose and thwart their efforts to instruct the consciences of children, growing up in an unconverted state, going beyond their parents, and catching from their very lips the spirit of hatred and malice and prejudice, which prevents the access of the truth to their hearts. No wonder, too, that you shall see a whole church sleep year in and year out, oppose four day meetings and revival measures, and never make one solitary effort to revive religion in the midst of them or warn sinners of the perdition that awaits them. No wonder that you will meet with professors of religion who can talk about politics and doctrines and the disputes in the church and the slanders circulated against zealous ministers, and every thing but vital piety,—who have never been the means of converting a single soul from the errors of his way,—who have never even prayed with their families and children and talked with them about the concerns of their souls,—who co-operate not but stand aloof from revival efforts—who find no attractions in the weekly meetings for prayer,—who oppose temperance societies or refuse to join them,—who ne-

glect the weekly lecture and the monthly concert, and have no communion with their ministers and Christians on spiritual subjects, while they have full and frequent communion, with the money making, pleasure-loving, grog-drinking, and gospel-despising sinners around.

But we cannot detail all the mischievous practical results that flow from this mode of explaining Regeneration. It is enough for us to point to the barren ministrations, and, to the absence of revivals, of the revival spirit, and revival efforts, in those churches and among those professors and ministers where the sovereign power of God without the truth is urged continually as the mode of the divine efficiency. Ministers cry "God is a sovereign and he will be as much glorified in the damnation as in the salvation of a sinner. You must wait patiently for Him." Christian professors take up the cry at their lips: "Well and truly said—we are waiting patiently for God. It is presumption, it is Arminianism, it is *heresy*, it is taking the work out of God's hands, to say that *we* have any thing to do in this business." Sinners catch the sound, and roll it back exclaiming "if we are elected to be saved we will be saved, if not it is all in vain, we will be damned and cannot help it. You tell us we cannot do any thing, cannot believe, cannot repent, and we esteem it folly to make the attempt."

These things are not imaginary, but solemn frightful matters of fact. Ministers remain at ease, and wake not to multiplied and increasing effort. People remain at ease, and call for pillows to be sewed to their arm-pits, that they may sleep more profoundly, and beg that no harsh expressions may be pronounced in their hearing. Anxious sinners are quieted, their consciences blunted, and they are flattered into a routine of refined self-righteous seeking of the Lord and waiting for the day of his power. And impenitent sinners are fortified in their rebellion, and chained in unbelief, and practically taught to ward off every impression of the word, by expecting some effort of divine power irrespective of the truth, till which is exerted they have no ability to believe, repent, or do any thing else that God requires. Oh, the wretched soul-destroying influence of that vain philosophy which has concealed itself in their practical exposition and illustration of the doctrine of a change of heart, who inculcate that it is produced by power immediately exerted on the soul without the truth! It is true that many excellent men who theoretically believe this, do not preach it. All their preaching and practical exhibitious of truth are inconsistent with it. Among such you will not trace the consequences we have noticed. They are obviated by the truth. Their theory exerts no practical influence. The above remarks apply to those only whose theory and practice correspond.

IV. I subjoin but one more general remark. The doctrine of Regeneration being produced by the divine power operating through the truth removes all appearance of inconsistency and contradiction in the language of scripture, and is asserted in as plain and pointed terms as can possibly be employed. The Bible teaches that a new heart, a change in the feelings, desires and purposes of the soul, is the gift of God, the result of his powerful influence, but at the same time it teaches that that influence is exerted in and through the truth; and is appropriate to the natural tendency of the truth itself. Now the natural tendency of the truth is to excite the mind, and secure those thoughts and feelings and voluntary actions which bespeak a change of heart.

But that truth is presented through the instrumentality of men and books, &c. When therefore such a change takes place it is equally proper according to the usages of speech, to say, that God changed the heart—referring to his agency as principal; that the truth changed the heart—referring to the truth as the medium of this powerful influence; that the minister who preached the truth changed the heart—referring to his instrumental agency; and that the man changed his own heart—referring to the perfect voluntariness with which he renounced his former feelings and purposes, and gave his heart to God. Now in all this there is no contradiction—no inconsistency.

And the Bible does actually speak, in different places, precisely in this way, in all these different respects. Thus God says, "I will take away the heart of stone out of their flesh and will give them an heart of flesh"<sup>1</sup> referring to His own gracious agency in the matter, which is the principal, but which is by no means that of physical efficiency. In like manner the Saviour says "the truth shall make you free"<sup>2</sup> The law of the Lord is perfect converting the soul"<sup>3</sup>—and "the law of the Lord is truth." Here the truth, the medium through which God acts, has efficiency ascribed to it, and is spoken of as converting the soul. In like manner also, the apostle Paul says himself "*I have begotten you through the gospel.*"<sup>4</sup> and of himself and Apollos "who are they but ministers by *whom* you believed."<sup>5</sup> Here the change is referred to ministers the instrumental agency employed by God. And still further the bible commands sinners to "make to themselves a new heart"<sup>6</sup> and to save themselves"<sup>7</sup> and "to work out their own salvation"<sup>8</sup> and says expressly of converted sinners, that they "have purified themselves in obeying the truth."<sup>9</sup>

Thus this doctrine shews the harmony of the language of the scriptures: and no contradiction or inconsistency is seen between the divine and human agency—between the efficient influence of God, and the voluntary agency and accountability of man.

The language of common sense, as used in the Bible, is just as intelligible on this subject, as when we speak of the influence which one man exerts upon another, through the use of appropriate means, which his wisdom and skill teach him how to use efficiently. God's sincerity in his promises does not conflict at all with his purposes and commands. The glory of his moral character and government is not obscured by any secret or dark design to be effected by his physical efficiency. His requirements of his creatures, are seen to be right, and reasonable, and just such as they are capable of meeting. The necessity of his interference, in all the power of his moral suasion, is seen to be owing to the perverse, wilful, obstinate rebelliousness of men, not from any physical deficiency or imbecillity of nature; and while the grace of God appears transcendantly glorious, and every one must give the entire glory of his salvation to God, on man the rebel, and on man alone, is seen the whole guilt of his impenitence to rest. While the saints rise to Heaven and shout redeeming grace, the impenitent sink to hell, and feel and acknowledge that it is just, just, eternally just, and that they themselves have been the authors of their own ruin.

<sup>1</sup> Ezek. 11, 19. <sup>2</sup> John 8, 32. <sup>3</sup> Ps. 19, 7. <sup>4</sup> 1 Cor. 4 15. <sup>5</sup> I. Cor. 3, 5. <sup>6</sup> Ezek. 18, 31. <sup>7</sup> Acts 2, 40. <sup>8</sup> Phil. 2, 12. <sup>9</sup> I Peter 1 22



How plain and pointed, and abundant are the proofs from scripture on this point! "Oh Israel thou hast destroyed thyself but in me is thy help."<sup>1</sup> "Hearken unto me ye stout hearted that are far from righteousness."<sup>2</sup> "Hearken diligently unto me and eat ye that which is good."<sup>3</sup> It is but to *hearken* when God speaks—to *believe* what he says—and the soul is saved. It is therefore *through the truth* that he exerts his power. The gospel is called "the power of God to salvation"<sup>4</sup> The preaching of the gospel is spoken of in the same terms. The text says that the power of God hath given us all things that pertain unto life and godliness through the knowledge, &c. and James says that "of his own will God begat us by the word of truth."<sup>5</sup> The word of God is said to be like a "hammer which breaketh the rock in pieces."<sup>6</sup> Believers are said to have "heard the word of truth the gospel of their salvation."<sup>7</sup> and to be "kept by the power of God thro.' *faith* unto salvation."<sup>8</sup> "The grace of God which bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all *teaching* us to deny all ungodliness."<sup>9</sup> The truth is called "the word of salvation."<sup>10</sup> and the word of God is said to be able to make us wise unto salvation."<sup>11</sup> And it is said to be "quick and powerful,"<sup>12</sup> and believers are said to be "born again by the word of God."<sup>13</sup> Christ prays God to "sanctify" his people, "through the truth."<sup>14</sup> He says that they are "clean through the word which he hath spoken unto them."<sup>15</sup> Paul says that "the word of God worketh effectually in them that believe."<sup>16</sup> God told Jeremiah that he would make his word in his mouth fire."<sup>17</sup> And it is a fact "the word of God mightily grew and prevailed."<sup>18</sup> Time will not permit us to accumulate proof on this point. The above is sufficient. Whatever power God exerts for the conversion and sanctification of sinners, it is through the truth. It is a moral power adapted to the mind of man as a rational and accountable creature, and not a creative or physical efficiency.

I cannot, therefore, in closing this discourse, but animadvert on what seems to be the arrogance of those who denounce them as errorists and heretics, who, in illustrating the great change which takes place in the sinner's conversion, prefer to adhere closely to the very letter of the word of God, and reject the deductions of philosophy employed for that purpose. Especially, too, when on this question the confessional standards of the Presbyterian church are silent, and lend no sanction to their views who teach it is by power simply.

On the one hand, are a close adherence to the very language of the Bible, and a train of powerful revivals of religion—strong presumptions of truth at least. At the same time there is manifested an untiring, ardent spirit, which leads to multiplied and varified effort, and shudders at the very thought of giving either to professing christians or impenitent sinners, the least apparent or imaginable ground of excuse for their sins, by teaching that men are so passive in Regeneration, as to be operated on by immediate power from God, and can do nothing until *thus* aided from on high. You see no disposition among them to say we have done as

<sup>1</sup> Hos. 13, 9.    <sup>2</sup> Isaiah 46, 12.    <sup>3</sup> Isaiah 55, 2.    <sup>4</sup> Rom. 1, 16.    <sup>5</sup> James 1, 18.    <sup>6</sup> Jer. 23, 29.    <sup>7</sup> Eph. 1, 13.    <sup>8</sup> I Peter 1, 5.    <sup>9</sup> Tit. 2; 11.    <sup>10</sup> Acts 13, 26.    <sup>11</sup> Tim. 3, 15.    <sup>12</sup> Heb. 4, 12.    <sup>13</sup> I Pet. 1, 23.    <sup>14</sup> John 17, 17.    <sup>15</sup> John 15, 3.    <sup>16</sup> I Thes 2, 13.    <sup>17</sup> Jer. 5, 14.    <sup>18</sup> Acts 19, 20.

much as could be expected, or to speak of their faithfulness; but rather a fear, lest after all they may be found unfaithful, and a determination, despite of opposition, and peril, and detraction, to labor on as God gives health, time and opportunity.

On the other hand, you hear cries of running too fast, of heresy, of innovations, of subverting the old and established usages, of departing from the faith, of Pelagianism, and the danger of the church, and sometimes a slandering of revivals, which they have never seen, but which, from their own theoretic principles, they have concluded must be wrong. Let me err with the former rather than the latter, if I am to err; and while I concede to others a liberty of illustration, but reserve to myself the right of comparing their illustrations with the word of God, and judging as to their propriety, and truth, and practical bearing, may the good Lord ever keep me from denouncing my brethren, as heretics, of exciting popular prejudices against them, and of destroying popular confidence in them as men and ministers, because I cannot approve of their theory and tactics. And what we concede to others, we claim in return. The spirit of intolerance and bigotry, are at war with the spirit of christianity, and whoever evince it, and would repress fair and candid discussion and investigation on matters of such immense practical consequence, only betray the weakness of their own cause, their want of christianity in this particular, and the inefficiency of their principles and spirit to urge them forward to the higher attainments of scriptural piety. On this subject we feel deeply. We are firmly convinced, that the piety of many professors falls far, very far, below the gospel standard. As it regards their absolute state, we pretend not to judge; but a spirit of anti-nomianism does exist to a wide and baneful extent. "If I am accepted of God, and have been born again, he will forgive me in this and the other thing, which is confessedly wrong," is the summary process of reasoning resorted to by some when their consciences are pressed by the truth, and thus they lull themselves into a state of profound repose, while their example, and conduct, and conversation, are very far from what they ought to be. It is *with this spirit*, as dishonoring to God, and as ruinous to the souls of men that we combat. We have nothing to say against individuals. If our remarks apply to any, it is not because we aim at them, or design to upbraid them. They may impeach our motives, and say we do, and lay things to our charge that we know not. They may strive to guard against the impressions of the truth, and flatter themselves in their iniquity, by whatever means they think most effectual. They may falsely accuse us of denying the Confession of Faith, which we believe to contain the system of doctrine taught in the sacred scriptures, and receive most cordially, as the best systematic expression of our own views of truth, that we know. And thus, by persuading themselves, that we are in error, they may blunt the edge of our appeals, and guard their hearts against the humbling and exciting influence of the truth we preach; but we cannot help it. Yet we feel no revenge but are deeply moved with pity for them,—we know that all is not right with them if they treat us thus. We know that thus our divine Saviour was treated, that thus Paul was treated, and thus have multitudes been treated, who, among a people where vital piety was languid, or on the decline, or opposed by formalists, and men of wealth, and Pharisees, and those puffed up with spiritual pride, have sought to urge professors and others to entire

self consecration of soul to God, and to untiring and active measures for advancement in personal holiness, and for the conversion of sinners. Should we fall a sacrifice in this cause, we shall have the consoling thought through life, and on our dying bed, that we have "not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God," and that we have fallen the victims of an ardent and unconquerable desire to see the standard of piety in this church, brought up to that of the Bible, and exhibited in the humble, holy, loving, active, benevolent, self-sacrificing devotedness of its members, to the honor and glory of that adorable Redeemer, whose plaudit alone we seek and prize, and to whom we expect one day to render our account.

And while thus remarking, for the benefit of all that profess the name of Jesus, we must charge it on the consciences of the impenitent around, to beware, lest on this subject they make a ruinous mistake. Look not to any man, or any set of men, as your example. There is not one among us whose example is what it ought to be. I dare not flatter any one. Look only to Christ. If you shape your ideas of piety from this, and the other professor, you may stumble over them into perdition;—there is enough in them that is wrong to lead you astray. Look not at us. We charge you to beware of our example, except in so far as it conforms to the spirit and precepts of our divine Redeemer. There is no man on earth to whom you should attach any consequence, as having lodged in him, by creative power from God, something that of necessity, and by virtue of its very inbeing, makes him holy. It is only as the Spirit of God dwells in us, and operates through the truth, to bring us to think, feel and act right, that we are holy, and can be safe examples to you. Oh, I beseech you, dismiss all superstitious reverence for the sanctity of any man. There is no man to be accounted renewed, and holy, and safe in Christ, who lives to himself, and does not devote himself soul, spirit and body unto God. This is what you must do or you will perish. Jesus says you must *DENY YOURSELVES*; you must *abstain from every appearance of evil*; you must *love Him above every thing else*, or you cannot be his disciples. We press His claims upon you in faithfulness to your souls. We dread the thought of having your blood in our skirts. Nothing, nothing will do; all, all your religion will vanish like a dream, and leave you eternally to perish, which does not begin, continue, and end in entire consecration of heart and life to God, through Christ. Here is the pathway to Heaven—none other is marked out in the sacred scriptures. Christ calls upon you to believe and pursue the path to life. Are you travelling in it—if not, are you willing now to enter on it? Refuse, and you pursue your dreary, wretched, and accursed way down to hell. You are now dead in trespasses and in sins—already condemned and under sentence of eternal death. Consent to his demands. Put your confidence in his word—renounce eternally your sins, and devote your whole souls to God, and in so doing, you pass from death unto life. Have you done so? Then are you born again. You leave this house new creatures in Christ Jesus. Do you yet refuse?—then do you bear along with you the wrath and curse of God. "He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."