

## LECTURE IX.

## THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

“Nicodemus answered and said unto Him, How can these things be?”—John, iii. 9.

LECT. IX. IN my last three lectures I have applied our general arguments, in vindication of the mysteries connected with revealed truth, to some of those essential articles of the Christian faith which have been commonly objected to on the ground of their mysteriousness: namely, *first*, to the existence of unity in combination with threefold plurality in the Godhead; *secondly*, to the union of the divine with the human nature in the person of Jesus Christ; and *thirdly*, to the vicarious sufferings of the Son of God as a sacrifice and satisfaction for the sins of men.

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Spirit.

I now proceed to apply the same general arguments to the Scriptural doctrine with reference to *the converting and sanctifying agency of the Holy Spirit.*

Of the mysteries connected with this doctrine there are *two* which seem worthy of special con-

sideration, and to which for the present our remarks shall be confined. These are, *first*, that it represents the souls of men as wrought upon by a very potent influence, which is for the most part altogether unperceived by them, and undistinguishable from the natural processes of their own minds; and *secondly*, that it implies, in the subjects of this influence, a combination of dependence and activity—of divine agency and human instrumentality—which cannot be fully comprehended or explained.

1. In the *first* place, there seems to be deep mystery in the fact, that an influence so powerful as that which the Holy Spirit exerts upon the souls of men, according to the Scriptures, should be unperceived by those who are the subjects of it, and undistinguishable from the natural workings of their own minds.

The agency of the Spirit unperceived by the subjects of it.

There are not wanting, however, instances in the physical world, of agents which are only discernible in their effects—their nature being unknown, and their mode of action imperceptible. Not to speak of electricity and magnetism—so striking in their results, yet so mysterious in their operation—we have a familiar and appropriate instance in the viewless wind, which our Lord has Himself adduced in illustration of the subject before us. We do not see the wind. Nor can we

Analogous instances of agencies only discernible in their effects.

LECT. IX. account for the fitful changes in the direction from which it comes, and the force with which it blows. But we hear its sound, as it sighs or howls around us. We feel its refreshing coolness or its sultry heat. And we mark its power in shaking the trees of the forest, or lashing the mighty ocean into a storm. And from these, its observed effects, we ascertain its agency. So is it, as our Lord teaches, with the regeneration of the soul. The work of the Spirit within us may be secret and imperceptible. But "the fruit of the Spirit" in the character and life is manifest.

A similar illustration may be taken from another natural process with which all of us are familiar. The current of a tidal river, in its downward progress to the sea, is twice in the course of every day arrested and turned backwards by the force of attraction exerted by the distant moon. We do not perceive this force except in its effects. And most of us are quite unable to understand the process of investigation by which scientific men have ascertained its existence and its influence. But yet we are perfectly willing to believe, on their authority, that the phenomenon really arises from the cause which they assign for it. If we place such reliance on the knowledge and testimony of *men*, shall we not, in a similar case, place equal reliance on the knowledge and testimony of *God*? Shall we not give credit to

*Him*, when He assures us that sinners are turned back towards the great Source of life and happiness from which they are departing, by the mighty, though unperceived, attraction of His grace? LECT. IX.

Might we not take a further illustration from the unscen, and in many respects mysterious, agency of the human soul? We do not perceive the souls of one another; nor are we able to trace or to explain the influence exerted by our own soul in dictating those sentiments which the mouth utters, and forming those designs which the hand executes. And yet we believe (as how can we avoid believing?) that the words of the mouth and the doings of the hand proceed in reality from the spirit that is within us. Why, then, should we judge otherwise with respect to the converting and sanctifying power of the grace of God? The circumstance of its being indiscernible, except by the practical effects produced by it, is no reason why we should question its reality. The Father of our spirits must surely have access to them whensoever and howsoever He thinks fit. And it is no incredible thing that He should work upon us so as to produce very evident results, without our being directly sensible of His operation. We know that our own soul moves us, and yet we can neither discern nor explain the impulse which it gives to the nerves and muscles of the bodily

LECT. IX. frame, so as to make them obedient to its behests. Surely, then, He who created both soul and body, who constantly upholds them in existence, and enables them in an imperceptible manner to act and react on one another, can be at no loss for such methods of maintaining an intercourse between our spirits and His own, as that we, when acted upon by His heavenly influence, shall not be able to discern "whence it cometh and whither it goeth."

Objection that these instances are taken from *natural* processes, whereas the agency of the Spirit is *supernatural*.

It may be objected, indeed, to any such illustrative cases, that all of them are taken from processes in the *natural* world, whereas the work of the Holy Spirit is *supernatural*. This circumstance, it may be alleged, destroys the analogy between the two. And the question may be asked, How can it be that an agency, confessedly superhuman, interfering with the thoughts and dispositions of the human mind, should be undistinguishable from that mind's independent working? Must not the interposition of such an agency stand out so broadly and palpably to our observation, that the time and manner and circumstances of its operation cannot by any possibility be unperceived?

It is not by any means so clear as many suppose that this question must be answered in the affirmative.

(I.) For, in the first place, in order to know that any event is supernatural, we must be thoroughly acquainted with that ordinary course of things from which the event in question is a deviation. For, if we are not aware of what would have taken place, had things been allowed to follow their natural course, we have obviously no means of detecting any interference with that natural course which may have occurred.

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In order to distinguish any event as supernatural, we must thoroughly know that ordinary cause from which it is a deviation.

Doubtless, if the sun were to stand still in the firmament—if the flow of the tides, or the course of the seasons, or the succession of day and night were to be disturbed—we should be at once aware that the event was preternatural, just because we are perfectly well acquainted with the natural course of things which would thus be interfered with. But there are other processes in the physical world, the laws of which are not so well known as to enable us, in every case, to detect a deviation from them. The shiftings of the wind and the changes of the weather are, no doubt, regulated according to fixed laws. But *what these laws are*, no man has yet discovered with such a degree of certainty and precision as to enable him accurately to foretell the results of their operation at any particular time. Accordingly, though some supernatural power were to make the force or direction of the wind, or the state of the weather, on any particular occasion, to be

This we do not know in some departments of nature.

LECT. IX. quite different from what they naturally would have been, we, in the present state of our knowledge, would not be able to discover from the mere phenomena that anything extraordinary had taken place. If, indeed, as in the case of one of our Lord's miracles, the change took place at the bidding of a professed prophet, we should *then* be fully cognisant of its miraculous character. For, little as we know of the laws of meteorology, we know enough to satisfy us that no mere man is able, by the utterance of a word, to turn instantaneously a raging tempest into a "great calm." But, if there were no such circumstance as this to indicate that the event was supernatural, it is quite conceivable that a storm should be either raised or quelled by some higher power interfering with the course of nature, without our being aware of such interference.

Matt. viii.  
26.

We do not so thoroughly know the natural course of our thoughts and feelings as to be able in every case to detect a deviation from it.

How, then, does the case stand with the processes of our minds? Are the natural laws which regulate our thoughts and emotions, whether as regards the order of their succession or their degrees of vividness and strength,—are these laws of human thought and feeling so exactly known that we should be able in every instance to note a deviation from them? No man will venture to say that this is the case. The processes of our minds do not, in this respect, resemble those motions of the planetary system which can be

exactly calculated and predicted. They resemble rather the shiftings of the wind and weather, which we are not able accurately to foresee. I am often just as unable to foretell what particular thoughts and feelings will arise in my mind, if left to itself, from reading a particular book, hearing a particular discourse, or being placed in particular circumstances, as to tell in what direction the wind, if left to its natural course, will blow to-morrow. And I can no more ascertain beforehand what degree of force and liveliness these thoughts and feelings are to possess, than I can foresee whether, a week hence, the wind is to blow a gentle gale or a destructive hurricane. In the one case, therefore, just as in the other, there may be an interference by some invisible power with the course of things which would otherwise be adhered to, without my being at all conscious that there is so. The natural order of our thoughts and feelings, not being thoroughly ascertainable beforehand, may be altered by the influence of a foreign agent; and the natural force and vividness of our thoughts and feelings, being in like manner such as we cannot anticipate, may be lessened or increased by the influence of a foreign agent, without our being sensible that they are in any respect different from what they would have been, had no such agent been at work upon us. Were the case otherwise,—were we able to foretell the

LECT. IX. state of our minds, the succession of our thoughts, and the intensity of our feelings on any particular occasion—in that case no change could be wrought upon them by any foreign spiritual agent without our being fully cognisant of his interposition. But, seeing that we are *not* able to determine beforehand what or what manner of thoughts and feelings are to arise when our minds are left to follow their natural course, it is plain that that course may be supernaturally altered by the agency of the Holy Spirit in sanctifying us (or, I may add—for the cases are exactly parallel—by the agency of the evil spirit in tempting us), without our being able to distinguish His suggestions from the natural operations of our own minds.

Conversion is not usually so sudden and violent as to be fully perceptible.

(2.) Besides this, however, there are other considerations respecting the Scriptural doctrine of conversion which show it to be by no means “a thing incredible” that this important change may be accomplished by the Holy Spirit, albeit the time and manner of its accomplishment are ordinarily unperceived by the subjects of it. For, according to the description of it given in the New Testament, the conversion of a sinner is not usually brought about *in a manner so violent and sudden as unavoidably to command the notice and indelibly to impress itself upon the memory.*

In some cases, like that of Saul of Tarsus, it is undoubtedly accomplished in such a way that it cannot be either unnoticed or forgotten. But these cases are exceptional. There is, for the most part, no such want of preparation for the change, and no such violence in the mode of its accomplishment, as should make it stand forth in a broad, definite, and striking manner to our observation. "So is the kingdom of God," saith our Lord, "as if a man should cast seed into the ground, and should sleep and rise, night and day; and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how." To the same effect is another of our Lord's statements, that "the kingdom of God cometh not with observation." And both statements are applicable to the setting up of God's kingdom in each individual heart, as well as in the world at large. Indeed, what is found to be true of the natural birth is equally true with reference to the spiritual birth. "Thou knowest not," says Solomon, "what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb." The new-born child is wholly ignorant as to how or when he became a living creature; and when he comes to maturity he remembers nothing about the date and attendant circumstances of his birth, and can give you no information in regard to them beyond what may have been supplied to him by other persons. Not the less surely, however, on

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Mark, iv.  
26, 27.Luke, xvii.  
20.Eccles. xi.  
5.

LECT. IX. this account, does he know that he has been quickened and born as a living man into the world. Even so, the children of God are frequently unable to state the time, manner, and circumstances in which they have been quickened and born again of the Holy Spirit; but yet they may have good ground for believing that they have truly been regenerated, from observing those spiritual qualities and dispositions characteristic of "the new man after the image of God," by which they find themselves to be distinguished. And so long as they can point to these evidences of *the fact*, it matters little that they are ignorant of the time, and manner, and circumstances of its occurrence. The knowledge of these matters would profit them no more, nor can the want of it prejudice them any more, with reference to their spiritual than with reference to their natural birth. For, though they had noted ever so distinctly, and were able to recollect ever so accurately, *when and where and how* their birth had taken place, *this* would not make them one whit more certain *that they have been born*, than on other grounds, perfectly clear and satisfactory, they already are.

A change may be *instantaneous* without being *sudden* or un-

It may be said, indeed, that if a sinner be converted at all, there must be *some one period of time* at which the change is wrought. There must be a moment when the soul that was dead in sin

draws, as it were, the first breath of spiritual life. LECT. IX.  
prepared  
for.  
In other words, if one who was originally depraved becomes holy, there must be a *turning-point* at which he first passes from a life of sin to a life of holiness.

This may be admitted to be true; but it does not thence follow that the "moment of time" or the "turning-point" at which conversion occurs must in all cases be perceptible. A change may be *instantaneous* as to the period of its occurrence, and *essential* as regards the alteration implied in it, without being necessarily *sudden* or *precipitate*. This is the case with *death*, that great change which awaits us all, and to which conversion is sometimes likened in the Scriptures, as when it is called a "dying unto sin." *Death* takes place at one particular moment and makes an *essential* change; that is to say, a change not in degree only but in kind, as regards the condition of him who undergoes it. For up to a certain moment the man is alive, and the very next moment he is dead. But you need not be told that death does not always take place *suddenly*, without premonitory symptoms or preparations. And no more does conversion, according to the Scriptural view of it. The *turning-point* from the carnal into the spiritual state is not in most cases *come up to* so suddenly, and thereafter *passed away from* so rapidly, as to make it stand out in a prominent manner to Rom. vi.  
II.  
Gal. ii. 20.

LECT. IX. our observation. In other words, the sinner when converted is not usually hurried all at once from a state of gross depravity into a state of eminent holiness. There may be, and commonly is, such a preparatory process of fears, awakenings, impressions, and resolutions before the point of conversion has been reached, and such a subsequent process of gradual sanctification after this great initial change has been effected, as to make it exceedingly hard, and perhaps impossible for many a believer, when tracing back the successive stages of his religious experience, to say at which of these he was regenerated.

The evidences of the Spirit's work may be obscured by relapses into sin.

This difficulty, too, is rendered all the greater by those occasional seasons of *declension* which frequently occur in the life of the most sincere Christians. Their growth in grace is not always continuous and uninterrupted. It meets with occasional checks and hindrances. Sometimes their faith appears to be failing, their hope to be languishing, their love to be waxing cold, and all the energies of their spiritual life to be decaying; but again they are remarkably strengthened and revived. Amid these alternations of their Christian course—these successive instances of backsliding and recovery—we cannot wonder that they should often be perplexed when asked to specify the period of their first conversion. In such a case, for example, as that of David, after his lamentable

relapse had been repented of—or that of Peter, when he wept bitterly at the thought of his base denial of his heavenly Master—the Christian might be readily enough disposed to point out, as if it were the period of his conversion, that which was merely the period of his recovery from such a declension as one who had been previously regenerated might experience.

Nor must it be forgotten, as bearing on this question, that persons may be converted in their infancy, or at so very early a stage of life, that it is impossible for them in after-years to recollect the time or manner in which the change was wrought. It is probable that in Christian lands a very large proportion of those who become true members of the Church of Christ are thus early brought to the Saviour, through the pious training and discipline of parental care, rendered effectual by the grace of the Holy Spirit. In such cases it would be unreasonable to expect that the spiritual change should be noted and remembered by them. *After-seasons of revival* from a state of temporary backsliding they may indeed be able to tell of, but not that primal quickening of their souls, when in infancy it may be, or in early childhood, they were born again.

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Conversion  
may take  
place in  
infancy or  
early child-  
hood.

These considerations appear to me sufficient to show that the renovating agency of the Holy

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Spirit on the human soul, as set forth in Scripture, may not be the less real, although it is usually incapable of being discriminated from the natural operations of those minds which are the subjects of it. I cannot refrain, however, from adding to them the following just remarks of Dr Inglis, in his truly admirable 'Vindication of Christian Faith:': "We are so constituted," he says, "that we cannot have a direct perception of what proceeds from another without an intervention of our bodily senses. We may, indeed, have a consciousness of both the influence exerted and the effect produced on our minds by a remembrance and consideration of things which are not, *at the moment*, present to our organs of sense. The knowledge which, by their intervention, has been once communicated to us, we can store up and recall to view without their renewed agency. The impressions which we so retain may have the effect of exciting in us the passions of love or hatred, hope or fear; and the exercise in which we are so engaged is as exclusively a spiritual function as any of which human nature is capable. But still we are indebted for it to a communication originally received through the medium of our bodily senses, and to a renewal or reconsideration of the impression which we in this way received. If, on the contrary, our inward man is to be *immediately and directly* the

Inglis's  
Vindication  
of Christian  
Faith, p.  
31, 32.

receptacle of what is purely spiritual, it is quite obvious that our bodily senses cannot be the medium through which such things are to be communicated; and unless we can be referred to some other primary and original medium of communication accommodated to such a case, it is impossible for us to comprehend how the direct and immediate agency of a spiritual Being on our spiritual frame should be at all discerned or perceived by us.

“In short, the objection to what is revealed on this subject seems to have originated in an abuse of the divine condescension. The divine Being condescends, for our greater good, to make our own understanding, as well as our own will and affections, partly instrumental in the blessed work of renewing and sanctifying our nature. With that view, He presents to us arguments and motives to what is good by the intervention, in the first instance, of our bodily senses. He addresses Himself to our senses as a medium through which His counsel and will shall be outwardly communicated to us. And because, thus far, we are enabled to comprehend the manner of His dealing with us, the rising presumption of some minds would lead them to conclude that more than what we thus comprehend is impossible with God. . . . We ought to be satisfied, however, with the consideration, that the Being

LECT. IX. who created the soul of man—who alone created all things—to whom all things which do not involve a contradiction are alike possible and easy—can undoubtedly find access to our hearts, in any way which approves itself to Him, in order to His moulding and framing them according to His pleasure.”

Combina-  
tion of ac-  
tivity with  
dependence  
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jects of the  
work of the  
Spirit.

2. We must now turn our attention to the other aspect of the Scriptural doctrine under consideration, as implying, in those who are converted and sanctified by the Holy Spirit, *a combination of dependence and activity, of agency on the part of God and instrumentality on the part of man, which cannot be fully explained or comprehended.*

The use of  
the 'means  
of grace'  
required.

In so far as the human activity consists in a diligent use of what are called “the means of grace”—as, for example, in giving earnest heed to the Word of God and the preaching of the Gospel—the union of such activity on the part of man with the efficacious agency of the Holy Spirit may to some extent admit of explanation. Thus much at least we may readily understand, that unless the Spirit of God were *to inspire sinners with the knowledge of divine truth* at the same time that He regenerates them, the instructions conveyed by the reading and preaching of the Word of God can in no way be superseded. For, grant that our faculties and dispositions were

renewed by Him, what are we to do with them when once they are renewed, unless we have suitable objects presented to us, on which in their rectified state they may be exercised? And where are these suitable objects to be found, unless the Holy Spirit either makes a special revelation of them to every separate individual when regenerated, or else discloses them once for all in His revealed Word, and requires us to exercise our minds upon them as there unfolded? What though we have a believing, loving, and obedient disposition wrought in us? That disposition, so far as we are able to see, will continue dormant and inoperative, like the faculty of vision when light is wholly withheld, unless it have such things to bring it into exercise as those which are placed before us in the Word of truth. To a blind man, the restoration of his eyesight would be of no practical utility, if he were to be, all his life long, immured in thick darkness which no ray of light could penetrate. In much the same condition would the sinner be, if his faculties and dispositions were renewed, without having those materials of thought, and feeling, and choice, and affection presented to him, which the Scriptures have unfolded. It thus appears that the province of the Word and the province of the Spirit, in the renovation of the human soul, do not conflict or inter-

LECT. IX. fere with one another. The former presents, as it were, *objects of vision* to the mind's eye; whereas the latter creates or restores in us *the power of spiritual vision* by which we may discern them.

Personal efforts required to do the same things which are ascribed to the Holy Spirit.

The activity of man, however, is not confined, according to the Scriptural doctrine, to the use of the means of grace. It extends also to the putting forth of *earnest personal efforts in the way of accomplishing those self-same things which are ascribed to the agency of the Holy Spirit*. Nothing is more obvious from the whole tenor of the Scriptures than that God deals with us, not as with inert machines that are incapable of thought, or feeling, or voluntary action, but in such a way as is agreeable to our constitution as sentient, reasonable, active, and accountable agents. Not only does He address truths and arguments to our understanding, but He makes appeals to our consciences and affections, holds out inducements to influence our choice, and lays down commandments to which He requires a willing obedience. And in particular, He requires of us, as our duty, those very things which He teaches us to expect from Him as the fruit of His regenerating and transforming grace. Thus, if His promise be "*a new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you,*"—it is no less clearly and expressly His injunction, "Cast away from you all

Ezek.  
xxxvi. 26;

xviii. 31.

your transgressions, and *make you a new heart and a new spirit.*" If He speaks of the spiritual resurrection as a divine work, saying, "*God who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us and raised us up together with Christ,*" —He no less explicitly speaks of it as the sinner's duty, saying, "*Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.*" In like manner, if such prayers are offered by inspired men as "*Turn Thou us unto Thee, and we shall be turned,*" "*Turn us again, O God of hosts, and cause Thy face to shine, and we shall be saved,*"—it must not be forgotten that such commands are issued by them as "*Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die?*" "*Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions, so iniquity shall not be your ruin;*" "*Repent, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.*" Sometimes, again, the human and the divine agency in the work of sanctification are presented to us in one view, as in that notable exhortation of the apostle, "*Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who worketh in you to will and to do of His good pleasure.*"

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Eph. ii. 4-6.

Eph. v. 14.

Lam. v. 21.

Ps. lxxx.

19.

Ezek.

xxxiii. 11;

xviii. 30.

Acts, iii. 19.

Philip. ii.

12, 13.

Those persons, therefore, who think that their own endeavours are entirely superseded by the agency of the Holy Spirit, must have formed for themselves a theory of divine influence very dif-

ferent from that which the Scriptures have revealed. It certainly is not the doctrine of Holy Scripture that the power of God so works in us as wholly to subvert or set aside our own activity. We are wrought upon "*to will and to do.*" And for any man to be *thus* wrought upon, and yet to continue passive and inert, *willing nothing and doing nothing*, would involve a broad and palpable contradiction. The process of our conversion and sanctification is so far from superseding our own activity, that it really consists in a restoration of all our spiritual powers and energies to their proper exercise. And though it be "God who worketh in us" to repent, to believe, to obey, and to persevere, it is not God who repents, believes, obeys, and perseveres *in our stead*, so as to dispense with our agency in these things, but it is *we* who do them for ourselves. He, indeed, inclines and enables us to do them; and without Him we can do nothing towards their accomplishment. But *we* are, notwithstanding, the active agents in the performance of them.

Here, undoubtedly, there is a great mystery. We cannot explain or comprehend this *union of activity and dependence* in the subjects of renewing grace. But we have the clearest Scriptural evidence to assure us, that such a combination, however mysterious, actually exists. For God is represented in Scripture as dealing with us agree-

ably to our constitution as reasonable creatures and voluntary agents, making our own intellectual and moral faculties the subjects of His renovating influence and the instruments of accomplishing His gracious ends—inclining us to comply with those invitations, to trust in those promises, and to obey those precepts which His Word reveals—yet so that in all that He leads us thus to do, our own judgment is deliberately used, and our own will freely exerted.

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Various attempts have been made to solve this mystery; but, it must be owned, they have been signally unsuccessful. The only effect of them has been to obscure, if not to subvert, those truths which they have sought to explain. Instead of making it in any respect more clear how man should both *freely act* and *be divinely acted upon* in the work of his conversion and sanctification, they have either maintained the activity by limiting the dependence, or vindicated the dependence by subverting the activity.

Vain attempts to solve this mystery.

(1.) Some persons, for example, in their anxiety to maintain the free agency of man in this important matter, would represent the grace of the Holy Spirit as consisting of nothing more than what they call "*moral suasion*,"—that is to say, of an influence the same in kind with that which one

Attempt to solve the difficulty by limiting the divine agency.

LECT. IX. man exerts upon another by the presentation of arguments and motives, or the urging of appeals, remonstrances, and entreaties, although doubtless greatly higher in degree. We can readily conceive how an influence of this description should be perfectly compatible with the free activity of the subjects of it, because their compliance with it, or their resistance to it, depends upon the state and disposition of their own minds. There is, according to the supposition now referred to, no direct action of the Holy Spirit on the mind itself, to quicken its energies, to rectify its judgment, to give a new bent or bias to its inclinations. There is simply a presentation to us by the Holy Spirit of arguments, incentives, and encouragements, similar to those which the self-same Spirit has clearly and articulately placed before us in His inspired Word. And no ostensible reason can be given why the former more than the latter should be held as interfering with the freedom of our determinations.

This view, however, of the agency of the Holy Spirit, is not in accordance with the doctrine of the Word of God. Take, as a proof of this, the account given of the conversion of Lydia, when we are told that "the Lord *opened her heart* so that she attended to the things which were spoken by Paul." According to this statement, there was a direct action of divine power upon the heart of

Lydia, whereby those obstacles which would have obstructed the entrance of the truth were effectually removed. There was, undoubtedly, "moral suasion" used with her; but the moral suasion was used *by Paul*, not by the Spirit of the Lord. The work of the Lord consisted in "opening her heart" to receive and give heed to the "moral suasion" which the apostle was addressing to her. Take as a further proof such Scriptural prayers as these: "*Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law;*" "*Incline my heart unto Thy testimonies;*" "*Give me understanding, that I may know Thy testimonies;*" "*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me;*" "I cease not to make mention of you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, that *the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, ye may know what is the hope of His calling.*" These, and the like petitions, which frequently occur in Scripture, evidently point, not merely to a presentation of truths, precepts, and inducements to the soul of man, but to the exercise of a direct influence upon it, *opening the eyes of the understanding to the discernment of them, and inclining the heart to the profitable reception of them.*

Ps. cxix.  
18, 36, 125.

Ps. li. 10.

Eph. i.  
16-18.

A yet farther proof may be found in the Scrip-

LECT. IX. tural accounts of the condition of sinners prior to their conversion, as when we are told that they are not only diseased and enfeebled, but actually "*dead in sin*;" that "the natural man does not receive and cannot know the things of the Spirit;" and that "the carnal mind is enmity against God, and is not subject to His law, neither indeed can be." If there be any truth in these and the like descriptions, it is no mere "moral suasion" that will suffice for the restoration of souls that are in such a condition. Moral suasion must have something congenial to it and susceptible of it in those on whom it is to work. The mere presentation of truths to one who cannot receive them, will not of itself open his mind for the reception of them. And the mere exhibition of motives to one who cannot appreciate them, or see in them anything that is excellent or desirable, will effect no change in his disposition or in his conduct. It is not so much the suggestion of divine truths, and the urging of spiritual inducements, that are requisite, as a heart and mind made accessible to their influence.

I may further appeal to the Scriptural comparisons by which the work of conversion is usually illustrated. These are taken from the mightiest and most astonishing acts of divine power. Thus, we read of converted sinners that they are "new creatures," the "workmanship of God, created in

Eph. ii. 1.

1 Cor. ii.

14.

Rom. viii.

7.

2 Cor. v. 7.

Eph. ii. 10.

Christ Jesus unto good works." The enlightening of their minds in the knowledge of divine truth is ascribed to the grace of God "shining in their hearts," and is likened to that primal act of His creative power whereby He "commanded the light to shine out of darkness." The change they have undergone is also compared to those miraculous cures which the Saviour wrought upon the human body,—nay, even to that most stupendous of miracles, the resurrection of Christ Himself from the dead. For we are told that they are "risen with Christ;" that "even when they were dead in sin, God who is rich in mercy quickened them together with Christ;" and that He did so "according to the working of His mighty power which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead." And when the Apostle Paul wishes to assure the Ephesians that "God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that they can ask or think," he adds, "*according to the power that worketh in us,*"—as if he could think of no display in all the universe which could give to believers so impressive a sense of the boundless power of God, as that which was supplied by the work of grace within their hearts. It cannot surely be said that these representations comport with the supposition of a divine agency that is limited to the mere proposal of rational arguments or moral inducements. In order to give them anything

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2 Cor. iv. 6.

Col. iii. 1.

Eph. ii. 5;

i. 19, 20;

iii. 20.

LECT. IX. like their just significancy, we must conclude that there is some direct change wrought upon the mind itself, or that something is originated in it, which did not before exist, and which the Creator of all things out of nothing and the Quickener of the dead is alone able to produce.

It need only be added, with reference to this topic, that the notion of converting grace as consisting in mere "moral suasion," appears to detract from the perfection of the Word of God. For it seems to proceed upon the supposition that there is a lack of persuasiveness in those things which the Holy Spirit addresses to us in the Scriptures, insomuch that the arguments, motives, appeals, encouragements, and remonstrances with which He there plies us, require to be supplemented by Him with some farther means and appliances of the same kind, in order that the desired effect may be accomplished. But, of a truth, the Word of the Lord is perfect. In *it*, as a means of "moral suasion" addressed to us, there is nothing faulty that needs to be amended, nothing defective that needs to be supplied. If our minds and hearts were only opened for the reception of it, we should find it to be fraught with a sufficiency of instructing light, and quickening power, and persuasive energy for all the wants and exigencies of our condition. It would pierce us like a sword ; it would smite us like a hammer ; it would melt

Heb. iv. 12.

Jer. xxiii.

29.

Ps. xlv. 6.

us like a fire; it would "cast down all imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." It is not, then, in the Word of God that the fault lies, when sinners are unimpressed and unaffected by it, but in the blindness and hardness of their own hearts. And accordingly, it is not some additional influence in the shape of "moral suasion" that is necessary, but some direct action of the Spirit upon their hearts preparing them for the reception of the Gospel, so that it may "come to them, not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance."<sup>1</sup>

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2 Cor. x. 5.

1 Thess.

i. 5.

(2.) But while some persons have thus vainly sought to maintain the free activity of man by limiting the divine agency in his conversion and sanctification, others have gone to the opposite extreme of unduly limiting man's activity in this matter with the view of maintaining his dependence on the grace of God. They tell us that it is impossible for men to repent or to believe, or to perform any other of those acts which are truly characteristic of the spiritual life, until they have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit; and hence that such things ought not to be attempted by them, or urged upon them, prior to their conver-

Attempt to solve the difficulty by subverting man's activity.

<sup>1</sup> Appendix, note G.

LECT. IX. sion. The preaching of the Gospel, as addressed to unconverted persons, ought, we are told, to be altogether confined to a simple statement of the great truths of Christianity, combined with an exhortation to use diligently the means of grace, and perhaps also to refrain from outward acts of sin ; and anything more than this, such as inviting sinners to exercise "repentance towards God and faith towards the Lord Jesus Christ," would, it is said, be improper and unwarranted, inasmuch as it would be encouraging them to do things which in their present state are utterly impracticable. Unconverted men, say the persons to whom I am now referring, must simply be admonished to continue "waiting at the pool of ordinances," like those John, v. 3. impotent folk who lay beside the pool of Bethesda "waiting for the moving of the water." And it may be that, while they are thus waiting in the use of those means of grace which they are able to employ, the Spirit of grace will come to render these means effectual in healing them of their spiritual discases and disabilities, and thereby empowering them to do those spiritual acts which are, for the present, hopelessly beyond their efforts.

Now it seems evident that this mode of dealing with the case of unconverted men is altogether unwarrantable. The means of grace are grievously perverted by exhorting sinners to continued diligence in the use of them, as a substitute for

Use of the means of grace must not be substituted for compliance with the

that faith and repentance to which they are intended to be conducive. The great purpose for which the means of grace are instituted, is to bring men to a cordial reception of the offers, and a hearty obedience to the requirements, of the Gospel. And therefore no greater perversion of them could be well imagined than to put the continued use of them in the room of that instant and thorough compliance with the calls of the Gospel, to which they are designed to lead. Yet *this* is virtually the very thing we would be doing did we urge unconverted men to the mere use of the means of grace, and scrupulously refrain at the same time from enjoining them to repent, or to believe, or to love God, or in other respects to discharge those spiritual duties which the Gospel requires.

As for the alleged analogy between the case of unconverted men waiting at what is called the "pool of ordinances," and that of the impotent folk in the porches of Bethesda "waiting for the moving of the waters," a very slight consideration will satisfy you that the analogy is a false one.

The waters of Bethesda *healed* those disabled persons who were the first to go into them when they were agitated. But, on the other hand, the ordinances of religion are not meant to heal the diseases of the soul, but *only to bring us to Him who is the source of healing*, showing us our need of Him, and urging us to have recourse to Him.

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calls of the  
Gospel.

False ana-  
logy of the  
pool of  
Bethesda.

LECT. IX. When once they have done this, their function is fully discharged, and nothing more remains to be done by them as a prerequisite to our reception of the Saviour. It is the Saviour Himself, and not those means of grace which merely tell us about Him and invite or direct us to Him, that ought to be likened to the waters of Bethesda. For He is the true fountain of salvation, and the only one. Yet, even as applied to *Him*, the analogy is defective. For the Saviour, if likened to a fountain of healing at all, must be likened to one that is of constant and un-failing efficacy—to one which needs not, like the pool of Bethesda, any periodical “moving of its waters” to make them available for the healing of our souls. At this fountain of salvation no sinner is required to “wait” for some more fit or favourable opportunity at which the blessings of redemption may be obtained by him. We read in Scripture of the Lord as “waiting that He may be gracious ;” but never do we read of sinners, who would fain receive His grace, being required to wait till He is ready to bestow it on them. It is nowhere written, “Believe, *but not yet* ; repent and come to the Saviour, *but not now* ; continue for a while longer to read and hear the Word, but *do not yet* think of attempting such a thing as to trust in its promises or to comply with its invitations.” On the contrary, we are told that “all things are

ready" for us; that "*now* is the accepted time, and now is the day of salvation;" and that God "*now* commandeth all men everywhere to repent." In the exhortations of our Lord and His apostles we find no lowering or limiting of their requirements, so as to accommodate them to the abilities of unconverted men—no setting aside or holding in abeyance of the peremptory calls to repent and believe the Gospel—no substitution in the room of these essential requisites of any such things as men may be expected to do while yet in a state of spiritual deadness and unregeneracy. Thus, when the Philippian jailor said to Paul and Silas, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" the plain and direct answer given to his question was, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." When the hearers of Peter's discourse on the day of Pentecost were pricked in their hearts and asked in deep anxiety, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" they were told to "repent every one of them" without delay, instead of betaking themselves to any such preparatory exercises as they might deem themselves able to perform while yet in an impenitent condition; and on a subsequent occasion the same apostle said to a promiscuous audience of his countrymen, "Repent, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." In like manner, when certain Jews asked of the Lord Jesus, "What shall we do that we may work the

LECT. IX.

Matt. xxii.

4.  
2 Cor. vi. 2.

Acts, xvii.

30.

Acts, xvi.

30, 31.

Acts, ii. 37.

38.

Acts, iii. 19.

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John, vi.  
28, 29.

works of God?" His reply was, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent." He did not advise them to attempt, in the first instance, *something short of that work of faith*, which could not be done until divine grace should enable them to do it; but He instantly and peremptorily admonished them to "believe on Him," as the very first step to be taken in truly "working the works of God."

Such is the practice of our Lord and His apostles. We do not mean to say that they *never* exhorted sinners to anything else than repenting and believing. For undoubtedly sinners are also admonished by them to search the Scriptures, to hear the preached Word, to pray, to watch, and to abstain from outward acts of sin. But we confidently affirm that none of these other things have ever been recommended or enjoined by them as *substitutes for repenting and believing*; and that whichever of these other things may at any time have formed the subject of their admonitions, they have also, and not the less urgently, exhorted sinners to an immediate exercise of "repentance towards God, and faith towards the Lord Jesus Christ."

Answer to  
the objec-  
tion, that it  
is vain to  
address the  
calls of the

It may indeed be said, and it often has been said, that such exhortations must be fruitless and presumptuous. For are we not taught in the Scripture that unregenerate men are utterly without

strength for the performance of spiritual actions? Nay, are we not taught that they are "dead in sin"? And if so, is it not just as vain to call them to repent, or to believe, or to perform any of the other functions of spiritual life, as it would be to summon a dead man to rise from his grave? The answer is obvious. We might confidently venture even to summon a dead man to rise from his grave, *if God had expressly commanded us so to do, and had promised by His divine power to render our call effectual.* Now, in the case of those who are *spiritually dead*, we have such a command and such a promise given to us. And it is our plain duty implicitly to obey the one, and confidently to look for the fulfilment of the other. But mark *this*, I beg you, that the promise of divine power to quicken those souls which are "dead in trespasses and sins," can be warrantably pleaded and hopefully relied on *in connection with the fully issued call of the Gospel and with that alone.* If the call be *materially qualified and restricted*, so as to come far short of the full requirements of the Gospel, we have no ground to think that it will be accompanied with the life-giving power and energy of the Holy Spirit. We must go forth, as did the prophet into the valley of vision, and summon "the dry bones" in the Lord's name to arise and live, if we hope that the Spirit of God is to reanimate them, so that they shall "stand on their feet as a

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Gospel to  
the unre-  
generate.Ezek.  
xxxvii.  
1-10.

LECT. IX. living army." We must come nothing short of the apostolic exhortations, "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light;" "Repent, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out;" "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved;" and those to whom such exhortations are addressed must come nothing short of an earnest endeavour to obey them,—like the man with the withered arm when Christ told him to stretch it out, or the helpless paralytic when Christ commanded him to "take up his bed and go to his house;" and thus honouring God by a simple compliance with His Word, we may trust that He will honour and bless us with the fulfilment of it, by quickening the dead souls, and raising them up to newness of life.

Matt. xii.  
10-13.

Matt. ix. 6.

We must  
accept the  
mystery.

These considerations appear to me sufficient to show that the mysterious *combination of activity and dependence*—of agency on the part of God and instrumentality on the part of man—implied in the work of conversion and sanctification, cannot be explained by attempted limitations either of the divine or of the human element without seriously darkening and perverting the statements of Holy Scripture. It only remains, then, that we receive with becoming meekness the Scriptural doctrine with reference to this subject, however incapable we may be of comprehending it. We

know too little of the subtle workings of our own minds, especially as regards our processes of voluntary action, and we have too limited means of information respecting the manner in which the Holy Spirit exerts His renovating influence on the soul, to warrant us in thinking that human activity and divine agency in the work of grace are incompatible because we are unable to show their harmony with one another. We readily admit our entire dependence on the providence of God, "in whom we live, and move, and have our being;" but we do not the less acknowledge on this account, that in the ordinary concerns and business of life we are the free, deliberate, and voluntary agents which we perfectly well know and feel ourselves to be. Why, then, should we be slow of heart to believe that there may be in the processes of the spiritual life a like combination of activity and dependence? Surely the circumstance of God having constituted us intelligent and voluntary agents does not remove us beyond His supreme control, or make it impossible for Him to effect His purposes with us except by subverting the constitution which He has given to us. On the contrary, we have no reason to doubt that the Father of our spirits can find access to them in ways which we are incompetent to trace, and that He is able, without any infringement of the principles of our rational and moral nature, to

LECT. IX.

Acts, xvii.  
28.

LECT. IX. restore to their normal and healthful exercise those faculties which His creative power at first bestowed, and which His providential care continually upholds in being. As for the particular mode of operation by which this spiritual renovation is effected by Him, the Scriptures have not given us any description of it, and we have no independent means of ascertaining it. Our wisest and best course, therefore, is to rest content with that knowledge which has been afforded us of *its effects*, without seeking too curiously to pry into its hidden nature. For, happily, we *do* know, alike from the testimony of Scripture and from the experience of all sincere Christians, that the actual result of it is to make us "*free indeed*," by liberating our souls from the enslaving bondage of sin, and to enable us willingly to comply with the gracious calls and invitations which God addresses to us, and to "run with an enlarged heart in the way of His commandments."

John, viii.  
36.

Ps. cxix.  
32.

The doctrine, however mysterious, is most worthy of the place assigned to it in the scheme of revelation.

Finally, the doctrine of Holy Scripture on this subject, whatever difficulties or mysteries may be connected with it, is, in itself considered, altogether reasonable, and eminently worthy of that prominent place which has been assigned to it in the scheme of revelation. I am satisfied, indeed, that much of the prejudice with which the evangelical system has been regarded by worldly men arises

from the circumstance that this doctrine has not usually had that pre-eminent importance given to it in the estimation of professed Christians to which it is justly entitled. Too often has the great truth been inadequately apprehended, that, in so far as redeemed sinners are themselves concerned, sanctification is *the very end of their redemption*—the grand and ultimate consummation of the scheme of grace. The Scriptures teach that Christ “gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works;” that “He bare our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, might live unto righteousness;” and that “Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it, . . . and present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.” Many professed Christians, however, are inclined to look upon their deliverance from the merited wrath, and restoration to the forfeited favour of God, as constituting the sum and substance of the “great salvation;” and it is no uncommon thing among them to speak of the personal holiness of a believer, wrought in him by the grace of the Holy Spirit, as being solely or chiefly valuable from the evidence it affords of the sincerity of that faith by

LECT. IX.

Tit. ii. 14.

1 Pet. ii. 24.

Eph. v.  
25-27.

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which he is justified and accepted in the sight of God. In doing so, they not only misconceive but positively invert the doctrine of the New Testament. Personal holiness is there represented as having an intrinsic importance, and that of the very highest order. True, it is not the *foundation* on which we are called to build; but it is a prominent part of the *stately edifice* for the erection of which that foundation has been laid. It is not our *remedy*; but it is the completion of the *actual cure* which that remedy is designed to accomplish. It is not in any respect, or in any degree, *the means of salvation*; but it is one of the most essential and most precious elements of *salvation itself*. Let it be but thus viewed, and then a flood of light before unnoticed, or at the best imperfectly discerned, will at once appear to be shed upon the Christian system. The Gospel will then present itself in a character every way worthy of its divine origin, as a wonderful scheme devised by heavenly grace for the furtherance of the wisest, noblest, holiest, and most beneficent end that could possibly be contemplated—the regeneration and recovery of a fallen race; their restoration, in the first instance, to the forfeited favour, but ultimately to the lost image and likeness of God, and the final “presentation of them faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.”