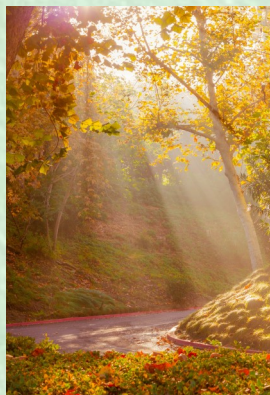


THE GREAT CHANGE

PART ONE



A. W. Pink

The Great Change

Part One

Introduction

Section One

A. W. Pink

Introduction

Some of our older readers may recall a book which made quite a stir in the religious world, especially the Arminian sections of it, some forty years ago. It was entitled, "Twice-born Men," and was written in a somewhat racy and sensational style by a well-known journalist, Edward Harold Begbie (1871-1929). It purported to describe some startling "conversions" of notorious profligates and criminals under the evangelistic efforts of the Salvation Army and City Missions. Whether or not the reader is acquainted with that particular book, he has probably read similar accounts of reformations of character. He may, as this writer, have personally heard the "testimonies" of some unusual cases. We recall listening unto one in New York City some twenty-five years ago: A man past middle age who had "spent twenty Christmas days in prison," who had been delivered from a life of crime, attributing his deliverance to the amazing grace of God and the efficacy of the redeeming blood of Christ, and who—to use one of his Scriptural quotations—had been given "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness" (Isa. 61:3).

Many, if not all, of those reformed characters testify that so thorough was the work of grace wrought in them that their old habits and inclinations had been completely taken away, that they no longer had the slightest desire to return to their former ways, that all longing for the things which once enthralled them was gone, declaring that God had made them new creatures in Christ, that old things were passed away, and all things had become new (2 Cor. 5:17). Personally, we do not deem our self competent to pass an opinion on such cases. Certainly, we would not dare assign

any limit to the wonder-working power of God; nevertheless, we should need to be in close contact with such people for some considerable time and closely observe their daily walk, in order to be assured that their goodness was something less evanescent than “a morning cloud, and as the early dew,” which quickly vanishes (Hos. 6:4). On the one hand, we should keep in mind the miraculous transformation wrought in the fierce persecutor of Tarsus; and on the other, we would not forget Matthew 12:43-45.

But this we may safely affirm, that such cases as those alluded unto above are not general or even common, and certainly must not be set up as the standard by which we should ascertain the genuineness of conversion—be it our own or another’s. Though it be blessedly true that in His saving operations, God communicates subduing and restraining grace to the soul—to some a greater measure, to others a lesser—yet it is equally true that He does not remove the old nature at regeneration or eradicate “the flesh.” Only One has ever trodden this earth who could truthfully aver “the prince of this world [Satan] cometh, and hath nothing in me” (John 14:30)—nothing combustible which his fiery darts could ignite. The godliest saint who has ever lived had reason to join with the apostle in sorrowfully confessing: “When I would do good, evil is present with me” (Rom. 7:21). It is indeed the Christian’s duty and privilege to keep himself from all outward sins: “Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not *fulfil* the lust of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16); yet as the very next verse tells us, the flesh is *there*, operative, and opposing the spirit.

But we will go further. When such persons as those referred to above appropriate 2 Corinthians 5:17 to describe their “experience,” no matter how well suited its language may seem to their case, they are making an unwarrantable and misleading use of that verse; and the consequence has been that many of God’s dear children were brought into sad bondage. Countless thousands have been led to believe that if they truly received Christ as their personal Lord and Saviour, such a radical change would be wrought in them; that henceforth, they would be immune from evil thoughts, foul imaginations, wicked desires, and worldly lusts. But

after they *did* receive Christ as their Lord and Saviour, it was not long ere they discovered that things inside them were very different from what they expected—that old inclinations were still present, that internal corruptions now harassed them, and in some instances, more fiercely than ever before. Because of the painful consciousness of “the plague of his own heart” (1 Kings 8:38), many a one has drawn the conclusion that he was never soundly converted, that he was mistaken in believing he had been born of God, and great is their distress.

Now one very important and necessary part of the work to which God has called His servants is “take up the stumblingblock out of the way of my people” (Isa. 57:14 and compare Isa. 62:10); and if he would faithfully attend unto this part of his duty, then he must make it crystal clear to his hearers—believers and unbelievers—that God has nowhere promised to eradicate indwelling sin from the one who believes the Gospel. He *does* save the penitent and believing sinner from the love, the guilt, the penalty, and the reigning power of sin; but He does not in this life deliver him from the presence of sin. The miracle of God’s saving grace does indeed effect a real, a radical, and a lasting change in all who are the subjects of it—some being more conscious of the same and giving clearer evidence of it, and some (who previously led a moral, and perhaps religious life) less so; but in no single instance does He remove from the being of that person “the flesh” or evil principle, which he brought with him when he entered this world. That which was born of the flesh is still flesh—though that which was born of the Spirit is spirit (John 3:6).

Not that the minister of the Gospel must swing to the opposite extreme and teach, or even convey the impression, that the Christian can expect nothing better than a life of defeat while he be left in this scene; that his foes—both internal and external—are far too mighty for him to successfully cope with. God does not leave His dear child to cope with those foes in his own power, but strengthens him with might by His Spirit in the inner man; yet he is required to be constantly on his guard, lest he grieve the Spirit and give occasion for Him to suspend His operations. God tells the

saint, “My grace is sufficient for thee” (2 Cor. 12:9), but that grace must be *sought* (Heb. 4:16) and *used* (Luke 8:18); and if it be sought humbly and used aright, then “he giveth more grace” (James 4:6), so that he is enabled to fight the good fight of faith. Satan is indeed mighty, but there is one yet mightier: “Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world” (1 John 4:4); and therefore is the Christian called upon to “be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might” (Eph. 6:10); and though while severed from Christ, he can produce no fruit (John 15:5), yet strengthened by Christ, he “*can* do all things” (Phil. 4:13). Christians are “overcomers” (1 John 2:13, 5:4; Rev. 2:7).

Thus we see once more that there is a balance to be preserved: Avoiding at the one extreme the error of sinless perfectionism, and at the other, that of spiritual defeatism. Truth is to be presented in its Scriptural proportions, and not dwelt unduly on either its gloomy or its bright side. When one is regenerated, he is effectually called “out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Pet. 2:9); yet if an unconverted soul reading those words forms the idea that should God quicken him, all ignorance and error will be immediately dispelled from his soul, he draws an unwarrantable conclusion and will soon discover his mistake. The Lord Jesus promises to give rest unto the heavily-laden soul which comes to Him, but He does not thereby signify that such an one will henceforth enjoy perfect serenity of heart and mind. He saves His people from their sins (Matt. 1:21), yet not in such a way that they will have no occasion to ask for the daily forgiveness of their transgressions (Luke 11:4). It is not that His salvation is an imperfect one, but that it is not completely experienced or entered into in *this* life, as such passages as Romans 13:11, 1 Peter 1:5 show. The “best wine” is reserved unto the last. Glorification is yet future.

Above we have said that when such characters as those mentioned in the opening paragraph appropriate 2 Corinthians 5:17 to describe their “experience,” they make an unwarrantable and misleading use of that verse. They are not the only ones who do so, and since many have been stumbled by failing to understand that

verse aright, a careful exposition of it is called for. “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor. 5:17). It must be admitted in all fairness that the *sound* of those words decidedly favours those who claim that such a miracle of grace has been wrought in them, that the old nature with its evil propensities was eradicated when they were born again. But in view of the very different experience of the vast majority of God’s children of the last two thousand years—of whom we have any reliable knowledge—must we not pause and ask, Is *that* really the *sense* of the verse? If so, how shall we account for the actual history of the most eminent Christians? And if not, what other meaning can we legitimately ascribe to that verse? Probably there are few of our readers who have not been perplexed by its language.

The careful student will observe that we have *omitted* the opening word of 2 Corinthians 5:17, which is done eight times out of ten by those who quote it; nor are we acquainted with any exposition that satisfactorily explains its force. “*Therefore* if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.” Obviously, that “therefore” is where we must begin in any critical examination of the verse. It indicates that a conclusion is here drawn from a foregoing premise, and tells us this verse is not to be regarded as a thing apart, complete in itself, but rather as intimately related to something preceding. On turning back to verse 16, we find that it, in turn, opens with “Wherefore” (the same Greek word being used), which at once serves to *classify* the passage, indicating that it is a didactic or *doctrinal* one, wherein the apostle is presenting an argument, or a reasoned-out train of thought; and not a hortatory passage wherein a call unto duty is made, or a biographical passage in which an experience of the soul is delineated. Unless that key be used, the passage remains locked to us.

The key is hung upon the door by the presence of its introductory “therefore” or “wherefore;” and if it be ignored, and instead, we force the door, then its lock is strained, or its panels and hinges broken. In other words, the interpretation given to it will be a strained and unsatisfactory one. And such has indeed

been the case with those who sought to explain its meaning *without* giving any due weight to—using—the very word on which the verse turns. Disregarding the opening “therefore,” it has been commonly assumed that 2 Corinthians 5:17 is speaking of the miracle of regeneration and describing what is thereby effected in the one experiencing the same. But those who gave the verse that meaning at once felt themselves faced with difficulties, and were obliged to whittle down its terms or qualify its language—for it is an undeniable fact, a matter of painful consciousness to Christians, that though some of the “old things” which characterised them in their unregeneracy have “passed away,” yet others of them have *not* done so, nor have “*all* things” yet become new within them.

In his commentary on 2 Corinthians, one otherwise excellent expositor tells us: “In the Old Testament [Isaiah 43:18-19; 65:17] the effects to be produced by the coming of the Messiah are described as a making all things new. The final consummation of the Redeemer’s kingdom in heaven is described in the same terms, ‘he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new’ (Rev. 21:5). *The inward spiritual change* in every believer is set forth in the same words, because it is the type and necessary condition of this great cosmical change. What would avail any conceivable change in things external, if the heart remained a cage of unclean birds? The apostle therefore says that if any man be in Christ, he experiences a change *analogous* to that predicted by the prophet, and like to that which we still anticipate when earth shall become heaven. ‘Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new’ (2 Cor. 5:17). Old opinions, plans, desires, principles, and affections are passed away; new views of truth, new principles, new apprehensions of the destiny of man, and new feelings and purposes fill and govern the soul.”

It is accrediting just such extravagant statements as the above—which is a fair example of those made by many other good men who have held influential positions in the churches—that have brought so many of God’s little ones into cruel bondage, for they know full well that no such great change has been wrought in them as like unto that which will obtain on the new earth, concerning

which God assures us, “there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie,” and where “there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (Rev. 21:27, 4). We make so bold as to say that the Christian experience of that expositor falsified his own assertions. “Old opinions and plans” many indeed pass away when a person is soundly converted, but it is *not true* that old “desires, principles, and affections” pass away—on the contrary, they remain, are active, and plague him to the end of his course; otherwise, there would be no corruptions for him to resist, no lusts which he is exhorted to mortify.

It is really surprising to find some excellent men—whose writings are generally most helpful, and whose memories we revere—uttering such absurdities when interpreting 2 Corinthians 5:17 (The explanation is that, like our self, they too were compassed with infirmity). Another of them wrote of the Christian: “He concludes that he is in Christ, because he is ‘a new creature.’ He finds ‘old things passed away, and all things become new.’ His old secure, benumbed, unfaithful conscience is passed away. His old perverse, stubborn, rebellious will; he has a new will. His old strong, sensual, corrupt, unbelieving, impenitent heart is gone...his old disordered, misplaced, inordinate affections...He has new thoughts, new inclinations, new desires, new delights, new employments.” True, he closes his paragraph by saying, “sometimes (i.e. formerly) carnal, but now in some measure spiritual; sometimes worldly, but now in some degree has his conversation in Heaven; sometimes profane, but now in part holy”—which not only virtually contradicts his previous sentences, but serves to illustrate what we said above about men creating their own difficulties when ignoring the key to a passage, and being obliged to tamper with its terms to make them fit their interpretations.

The Greek word for “passed away” is a very strong one, as may be seen from such passages as Matthew 5:18, 24:34; James 1:10; 2 Peter 3:10, and signifies (not from its etymology, but its *usage*) a

removal, a making an end of. Whatever be the “old things” referred to in 2 Corinthians 5:17, they are not merely subdued, or temporarily put to sleep, only to waken again with fresh vigour, but are “passed away”—*done with*. Therefore, to define those “old things” as “old affections, old dispositions of Adam”—as still another theologian does—is utterly misleading, and one had supposed his own spiritual history had taught him better than to make such an assertion. An older writer is somewhat more satisfactory when he says, “By old things, he means all those corrupt principles, self ends, and fleshly lusts belonging to the carnal state, or the old man; all these are ‘passed away,’ not simply and perfectly, but only in part at present, and wholly in hope and expectation hereafter.” The very fact that such a frittering of “passed away” was deemed necessary makes us highly suspicious of his definition of the “old things;” and should make us search for an alternative one.

To say that the “old things” which are “passed away” (2 Cor. 5:17) when a person becomes a new creature in Christ refer to “old desires, principles, and appetites” is flatly contradicted by Romans 7:14-25. The old nature, the “flesh”—or evil principle—most certainly does not pass away, either wholly or in part, neither at the new birth, nor at any subsequent stage of his life while the Christian is left here on earth. Instead, the “flesh” remains in the saint, and “lusteth against the Spirit” (Gal. 5:17), producing a continual conflict as he seeks to walk with and please the Lord. That a real and radical change takes place in the soul when a miracle of grace is wrought within him is indeed blessedly true, but to describe that miraculous change as consisting of, or being accompanied by, the removal of the old sinful nature or indwelling corruption is totally unwarranted and utterly unscriptural. And it is just because so many have been confused by this error and sufficiently affected by it as to have their assurance undermined and their peace disturbed, that we are now writing upon the subject.

It should be carefully noted that 2 Corinthians 5:17 is not describing some exceptional experience which is attained unto

only by a favoured few from among the children of God, but rather it is postulating that which is common to the whole family: “Therefore if *any man* be in Christ, he is a new creature.” The “if any man” shows that we have here a proposition which is general, one which is of universal application unto the regenerate—as much so as though it said, “if any man be in Christ, his sins are pardoned.” This at once assures the Christian that it is not through any fault of *his* that he comes short of such a standard as some would appear to measure unto. Nor is our verse giving an account of that which is gained as he reaches Christian maturity, still less that which will characterise him only when he reaches Heaven; instead, it predicates a present fact the moment one is vitally united to Christ. It is true that the substantive “he is” (or “there is”—Revised Version) is supplied by the translators, yet the legitimacy, or rather the necessity, of it is evident from what follows: “Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”

The opening “Therefore” bids us ponder the context. Upon turning to the verse immediately preceding, here is what we read: “Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him [so] no more” (2 Cor. 5:16). We wonder how many of our readers understand that verse, or have even formulated any idea of what it is speaking about. If they consult the commentators, instead of finding help, they are likely to be the more perplexed—for no two of them are agreed as to its meaning, and some of them would have been more honest if they frankly owned they did not understand it, instead of darkening counsel by a multitude of meaningless words. Now it is not obvious that in order to a right perception of its significance, we must seek answers to the following questions: Whom was the apostle here instructing? Upon what particular subject was he writing? What required his taking up *this* subject? Or, in other words, What was his special *design* on this occasion? This alone will afford us the true perspective.

As we have pointed out before in these pages, it is necessary to

know something of the circumstances *which occasioned* the writing of the Corinthian epistles, if we are to obtain an insight of many of their details. Soon after Paul departed from Corinth (Acts 18), false teachers assailed the saints there, seeking to undermine the apostle's influence and discredit his ministry. The result was that the believers became divided into opposing classes, engaged in disputes and being guilty of carnal walking (1 Cor. 1:11-12). Those who said, "I am of Paul; and I of Apollos" were in all probability the Gentile converts; whereas those who boasted, "I of Cephas; and I of Christ" (glorying in a fleshly relation to Him which the Gentiles could not lay claim unto) were undoubtedly the converted Jews. Thus, the enemies of the Gospel had succeeded in sowing the seeds of discord in the Corinthian assembly, creating jealousies and animosities by an appeal to *racial* prejudices, seeking to perpetuate the ancient enmities of Semitism and anti-Semitism.

Those false teachers had come to Corinth with "letters of commendation" (2 Cor. 3:1), issued most likely by the temple authorities. They were "Hebrews" (2 Cor. 11:22), professing to be "ministers of Christ"—i.e., of the Messiah (2 Cor. 11:23); yet, in fact, they were "false apostles, deceitful workers," the ministers of Satan (2 Cor. 11:13-15). They had attempted to *Judaize* the Gentile saints, insisting that such could not participate in the covenant blessings and privileges of God's people, unless they be circumcised and become the proselytes of the Mosaic religion. It was because of this the apostle had written to them, "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God" (1 Cor. 7:19). *That* was indeed a startling thing to affirm, for it was *God* who had instituted circumcision (Gen. 17:10), and for many centuries, it had entailed peculiar privileges (Exod. 12:48). The Lord Jesus Himself had been circumcised (Luke 2:21). But now it was "nothing"—useless, worthless. Why so? Because of the *great change* which had taken place *dispensationally* in the kingdom or economy of God upon earth. Judaism had become effete, a thing of the past. Something new and better had displaced it.

Those false teachers had evidently denied that Paul was a true

apostle of Christ, arguing (on the basis of what is recorded in Acts 1:21-22) that he could not be such, since he had not (as the Eleven) accompanied Him during the days of His flesh. This had obliged him to write unto the saints vindicating the Divine authority of his apostleship (1 Cor. 9:1-3). That his first epistle had produced a salutary effect upon them is clear from 2 Corinthians 1 and 2, yet it had neither silenced the “false apostles,” nor completely established those whose faith they had shaken; hence, the need for his second epistle to them. On the one hand, the major part of the assembly had expressed the warmest affection for him (2 Cor. 1:14; 7:7); but on the other, the boldness and influence of his adversaries had increased, and their false charges and determined efforts to repudiate his apostolic authority (2 Cor. 10:2; 11:2-7, 12:15) moved him to indignation. Those two adverse elements at Corinth is what serve to explain the sudden change from one subject to another, and the noticeable variations of language in this second epistle.

In the third chapter of 2 Corinthians (to which we devoted an article in the November 1938 issue), the apostle vindicated his apostleship in a manner which demonstrated the irrelevancy and worthlessness of the objections of his detractors, and which placed the faith of his converts on an unshakeable foundation by affirming that God had made him and his companions “able [or “sufficient”] ministers of the *new* testament” (2 Cor. 3:6)—or as it should be rendered, “of the new covenant.” Therein, he struck the keynote to all that follows, for unto the end of the chapter, he proceeded to draw a series of contrasts between the old and new covenants, and exhibited the immeasurable superiority of the latter over the former. By so doing, he entirely cut away all ground from under the feet of those who were troubling the Corinthian saints—for what mattered it whether or no Paul had companied with Christ during the three and a half years of His public ministry, or whether his converts were circumcised or not, seeing that the old order of things, Judaism, had been “done away” (2 Cor. 3:7)! Who would complain at the absence of the stars, when the sun was shining in its meridian splendour?

With unmistakable wisdom from on High, Paul wove into the texture of his personal vindication a lovely picture of the various respects in which Christianity excelled Judaism. The one was founded upon what was written on “the tables of stone” (Deut. 9:9) and the ceremonial law which accompanied the same; the other is rendered valid and vital by “the Spirit of the living God” writing in “fleshy tables of the heart” (2 Cor. 3:3). The one was “of the letter” which “killeth;” the other “of the spirit” which “giveth life” (2 Cor. 3:6), those expressions denoting the leading characteristics of the two covenants or economies—compare Romans 7:6. Judaism is likened unto “the letter,” because it was something external and objective, for it presented a rule of Divine duty, though it conveyed neither disposition nor power to obey; Christianity has to do with the soul and is made effectual—Romans 1:16. “The one was external, the other spiritual; the one was an outward precept, the other an inward power. In the one case, the law was written on stone; in the other, on the heart. The one was therefore letter, the other spirit” (Charles Hodge, 1797-1878).

In 2 Corinthians 3:7-11, the apostle contrasts the *ministrations* of the two dispensations or economies. It is *not*—as the Dispensationalists erroneously teach—that he here opposes Grace (a word never occurring in this chapter!) to the Moral Law, but that Christianity is set over against Judaism. It is a great mistake to suppose that Paul was here speaking of the Ten Commandments as such. Rather, it is the whole Mosaic system which he has in view—“when Moses is *read*” (2 Cor. 3:15), the reference is primarily to the *ceremonial* law, wherein there was much that pointed forward to Christ and typified His work of redemption, but which, because of their carnality, the Jews discerned not. Judaism was a “ministration of death” (2 Cor. 3:7)—the Moral Law is designed to slay all self-righteousness, for it condemns, and brings in the whole world guilty before God, thereby revealing the sinner’s dire need of salvation. The ceremonial law with its priesthood and ritual likewise exhibited both the guilt and pollution of man, as well as the ineffable holiness and inexorable justice of God, so that without shedding of blood is no remission. The brazen

altar in the outer court, where the sacrificial victims were slain, testified loudly to this fact that Judaism is “a ministration of death.”

Though the ministration of the old covenant was one of “death,” nevertheless, it was “*glorious*” (2 Cor. 3:7). Judaism was not of human invention, but of Divine institution. In it there was a solemn and yet glorious revelation of the moral perfections of God. In it there was a wondrous and blessed foreshadowing of the person, office, and work of the Redeemer. In it there was a wise and necessary paving of the way for the introduction and establishment of Christianity. That “glory” was adumbrated on the countenance of the mediator of that covenant (Deut. 5:4-5, Gal 3:19) when he returned to the people after speaking with Jehovah in the mount, for the “skin of his face shone” (Exod. 34:29-30). That radiance of his features was emblematic of the glory pertaining to the old covenant—and that, in two noticeable respects. First, it was only an *external* one; whereas a glorious work of grace is wrought *within* the beneficiaries of the new covenant. Second, it was but a *transcient* glory, as the quickly-fading brightness of Moses’ face symbolized; whereas that connected with the new covenant is one that “fadeth not away” (1 Pet. 1:4). Christians, beholding the glory of the Lord, “are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor. 3:18).

Any one who gives an attentive reading to 2 Corinthians 3 and 4 should have no difficulty at all in understanding what the apostle was referring to when he said in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “old things are passed away.” First, he tells us in 2 Corinthians 3:7 that the glory connected with the old covenant “was *to be done away*.” But he went further, saying, second, “For if that which *is done away* was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious” (2 Cor. 3:11)—the old economy and its ministry were but temporary and had even then been set aside. The sacrificing of bulls and goats was no longer valid now the Antitype had appeared. Third, in verse 13, he uses still stronger language: “That which is abolished” (2 Cor. 3:13) or “destroyed.” In the former epistle (1 Cor. 13:10), Paul had laid down the maxim that “when that which is perfect is

come, then that which is in part shall be done away;” so here, he declares the new covenant annulled the old, for that was never designed to have anything more than a transient existence. The “old things” which are “passed away” (2 Cor. 5:17) are circumcision, the temple ritual, the Levitical priesthood, the whole of the ceremonial law; in a word, Judaism and all that marked it as a system.

In 2 Corinthians 4, the apostle continues the same subject. The “this ministry” of verse 1 is that of “the new testament” [or “covenant”] spoken of in 2 Corinthians 3:6 and termed, “the ministration of the spirit” and “of righteousness” (2 Cor. 3:8-9). In 2 Corinthians 3:14, speaking of the great body of the Jewish nation, he said, “but their minds were blinded;” and in 2 Corinthians 4:3-4, he declares, “but if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world [i.e. Satan, as the director of its religions] hath *blinded* the minds of them which believe not.” In 2 Corinthians 3:9-10, he affirmed that while indeed there was a “glory” connected with the old covenant, yet that of the new “excelled” it. Amplification of that is made in 2 Corinthians 4:6. The pillar of the cloud and of fire which guided Israel during their journeying was but external and temporary, but Jehovah has now “shined in *our hearts*, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” That inward illumination abides in the believer forever—immeasurably superior are the “new things” which have displaced the old! In 2 Corinthians 4:8-18, the apostle mentioned some of the trials which a faithful discharge of his commission had entailed.

After a characteristic digression in which the apostle described the rich compensations God has provided for His servants—and His people in general (2 Cor. 5:1-10)—he returns to the subject of his ministerial labours, making known the springs from which they issued (2 Cor. 5:11-14). As in chapter 3, when vindicating his apostleship, he had interwoven important doctrinal instruction, so here. First, it should be carefully noted that Paul was still engaged in closing the mouths of his detractors, yea, furnishing his converts with material to silence them (*see* 2 Cor. 5:12), speaking of his

adversaries as those who “glory in appearance, and not in heart.” In what follows, he adduces that which could not be gainsaid. “Because we thus judge [or “reason”] that if one died for all, then were all dead” (2 Cor. 5:14)—a most misleading translation, which is corrected in the Revised Version: “One died for all, therefore all died.” It is quite true that those for whom Christ died were spiritually dead, but that is not what is here referred to—their being unregenerate was a fact *without* Christ dying for them! Rather was Paul showing the legal *effect*, or what follows as the consequence of Christ’s having died for them.

“Having judged this, that if one died for all, then the all died” (Bagster’s Interlinear). The apostle there enunciates a theological axiom: it expresses the principle of federal representation. The act of one is, in the sight of the law, the act of all those on whose behalf he transacts. The whole election of grace “died” *judicially* in the death of their Surety. Christ’s death—so far as the claims of the Divine Law or the end of the Divine government were concerned—is the same as though they had all personally died. “Died” *unto what?* The consequences of their sins, the curse of the Law? Yes, though that is *not* the main thing which is here in view. What then? This, rather that they had “died” to their old standing in the flesh: they no longer had any status in that realm where such distinctions as Jew and Gentile obtained. They had not only died unto sin, but unto all *natural relations*. Death levels all distinctions!

But that is only negative; the apostle goes further and brings in the positive side: “And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again” (2 Cor. 5:15). “That they which live” does not *here* signify those quickened into newness of life by the Spirit, but those who lived *legally* when their Representative came forth from the tomb. It is premier “life” which is in view—that life which the Law awards unto those who have fulfilled all its requirements. It is the legal oneness of Christ and His Church on resurrection-ground. Having borne the curse, they are dead in law; living now through Christ’s resurrection, they

cannot but “live unto him” (Luke 20:38), because judicially, they are one with Him. His resurrection was as vicarious as His death, and the same individuals were the objects of both. The pertinency of this reasoning, this blessed truth and fact to the apostle’s case should at once be apparent. Christ’s own relation to Judaism terminated at His death, and when He came forth from the grave, it was onto resurrection—entirely *new*—ground; and thus it is with all those He legally represented.

What has just been pointed out above is made yet clearer in 2 Corinthians 5:16, where the apostle shows the conclusion which must be drawn from what he had just proved: “Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him [so] no more.” To know a man after the flesh is to own him according to his *natural state*, his racial distinction. To know Christ “after the flesh” was to approve Him as the “seed of David” (Rom. 1:3), the Jewish Messiah. But the death of Christ annulled such relations: His resurrection brought Him a new and higher relationship. Therefore, in the exercise of his ministry, Paul showed no respect to a man merely because he was a Jew, nor did he esteem Christ on account of His being the Son of David—rather did he adore Him as being the Saviour of Jew and Gentile alike. Thus, the sinful partiality of those who were seeking to Judaize the Corinthian saints was conclusively exposed. 2 Corinthians 5:17 states the grand conclusion to be drawn from what has been established in the context.

“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor. 5:17). Familiar as are those words, simple and plain as their meaning appears to be; yet like almost every verse in the Epistles, this one can only be rightly understood by ascertaining its connection with the context. Nay, we go further: Unless this verse be interpreted in strict accord with its setting, we are certain to err in our apprehension of it. The very fact that it is introduced with “therefore” shows it is inseparably connected with what goes before, that it introduces an inference, or draws a conclusion

therefrom; and if we ignore it, we reject the key which alone will open its contents. In our last, we took up the preceding verses, though we by no means attempted to give a full exposition of the same. Our design was simply to supply a sufficient explanation of their terms, as would enable the reader to perceive the apostle's drift. That required us to point out the general conditions prevailing in the Corinthian assembly (so that it might appear *why* Paul wrote to them as he did), and then to indicate the trend of what he said in chapters 3 and 4.

In 2 Corinthians 5:12, the apostle tells them, "For we commend not ourselves again unto you [see 2 Cor. 3:1-2], but give you occasion to glory on our behalf, that ye may have somewhat to answer them which glory in appearance, and not in heart." Those who gloried in appearance were the Judaizers, who boasted of their lineage from Abraham and of belonging to the Circumcision. In what follows, Paul furnishes his converts with arguments which the false teachers could not answer, employing language which set aside the exclusivism of Judaism. First, he pointed out that "if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all" (2 Cor. 5:14-15). That thrice repeated "all" emphasized the international scope of Christ's federal work: He died as truly on the behalf and in the stead of God's elect among the Gentiles as for the elect Jews, and as verse 15 goes on to show, the one benefits therefrom as much as do the other. The cross of Christ effected and introduced a great change in the kingdom of God. Whatever peculiar position of honour the Jews had previously occupied, whatever special privileges had been theirs under the Mosaic economy, they obtained no longer. The glorious inheritance which Christ purchased was to be the portion of all for whom He endured the curse, and of all for whom He earned the reward of the Law.

Next, the apostle showed the logical inferences which must be drawn forth from what he had established in verses 14-15. First, "Wherefore *henceforth* know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now *henceforth* know we him [so] no more" (2 Cor. 5:16). Notice first the words which we have placed in italics: they are time marks defining the

revolutionary transition, calling attention to the great dispensational change, which the redemptive work of Christ had produced. That change consisted of the complete setting aside of the old order of things, which had held sway during the fifteen centuries preceding, under which a fleshly relation had predominated. Christ had ushered in an order of things, wherein such distinctions, as Jew and Gentile, bond and free, male and female, had no virtue and conferred no special privilege. For one who had been redeemed, it mattered nothing whether his brethren and sisters in Christ were formerly members of the Jewish nation or aliens from the commonwealth of Israel. He knew or esteemed no man according to his natural descent. The true Circumcision are they “which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh”—or their genealogy (Phil. 3:3).

Not only had the death and resurrection of Christ resulted in the setting aside of Judaism—which was based upon a fleshly descent from Abraham, and whose privileges could only be enjoyed by those bearing in their bodies the covenant sign of circumcision (Judaism being displaced by Christianity, which is based upon a spiritual relation to Christ, the privileges of which are enjoyed by those who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, the sign and seal of the new covenant)—but Christ Himself is now known or esteemed after a different and higher manner. It was as their promised Messiah He had appeared unto the Jews, and it was as such His disciples had believed on Him (Luke 24:21; John 1:41, 45). Accordingly, He had bidden His apostles, “Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 10:5-6)—contrast Matthew 28:19 after His resurrection! So far from knowing Christ as the Jewish Messiah, they worship Him as exalted above all principality and power. “Jesus Christ *was* a minister of the circumcision” (Rom. 15:8), but He is *now* seated “on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; A minister of the [heavenly] sanctuary” (Heb. 8:1-2).

In 2 Corinthians 5:17, the apostle draws a further conclusion

from what he had stated in verse 15: “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature”—yes, “any man,” be he a Jew or Gentile. Before we can ascertain the force of “a new creature,” we have to carefully weigh the opening word, for its absence or presence entirely changes the character of the sentence: “If any man be in Christ, he *is* a new creature” is a simple statement of fact, but “therefore if” is a conclusion drawn from something preceding. That one consideration should be sufficient to show our verse is not treating of regeneration, for if it signified “any person who is vitally united to Christ has been born again,” the “therefore” would be entirely superfluous—he either is or he is not a spiritually-quickened soul, and no reasoning, no inference can alter the fact. Or is there anything in the context from which regeneration can be deduced, for the apostle is not treating of the gift and operations of the Spirit, but of the judicial consequences of Christ’s federal work. Instead of describing Christian experience in this 17th verse, Paul is stating one of the *legal effects* which necessarily results from what Christ did for His people.

In 2 Corinthians 5:13 and 14, Christ is set forth as the federal Head of His Church, first in death, then in resurrection. From that doctrinal statement of fact, a twofold inference is pointed. First and negatively (2 Cor. 5:16), those whom Christ represented *died in Him* to their old status or natural standing, so that henceforth, they are no longer influenced by fleshly relationships. Second and positively (2 Cor. 5:17), those whom Christ represented *rose in Him* and were inducted into a new status or spiritual standing. Christ was transacting as the Covenant Head of His people, and He rose as the Head of the new creation (as Adam was the head of the old); and therefore, if I be federally in a risen Christ, I must legally be “a new creature” (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15), having *judicially* “passed from death unto life” (John 5:24; 1 John 3:14). As Romans 8:1 declares, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus”—and why? Because being legally one with Him, they died in Him. In like manner, they are therefore new creatures in Christ—and why? Because being legally one with Him, they rose in Him: “Who is the beginning [i.e. of the new

creation—compare Rev 3:14], the firstborn from the dead” (Col. 1:18). Judicially, they are “risen *with* Christ” (Col. 3:1).

Not only does the context and its opening, “therefore” preclude us from regarding 2 Corinthians 5:17 as describing what takes place in a soul at regeneration, but the contents of the verse itself forbid such an interpretation. It is indeed true that such a miracle of grace effects a most blessed transformation in the one who is the subject of it, yet *not* such as comes up to the terms here used. What is the principal thing which affects the character and conduct of a person *before* he is born again? Is it not “the flesh?” Beyond dispute it is. Equally indubitable is it that the old nature does *not* “pass away” when God quickens a spiritually dead soul. It is also true that regeneration is an entrance upon a new life, yet it certainly is not the case that “*all* things are become new,” for he receives neither a new memory nor a new body. If verse 17 be describing some aspect of Christian experience, then it is glorification, for most assuredly its language does not suit regeneration.

“And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us [the ministers of the new covenant—2 Corinthians 3:6] the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:18). This also is quite against the popular interpretation of the foregoing. Let it be duly noted that verse 18 opens with “And,” which indicates it continues the same line of thought. “All [‘the’—Greek] things” which are of God refer not to the universe as proceeding from Him, nor to His providential agency by which all events are controlled, but rather to those particular things spoken of from verse 13 onwards: All that Christ accomplished—the great dispensational change which has resulted from His death and resurrection, the preaching of the ministers of the new covenant—have God for their Author. The outcome of what Christ did is that those for whom He transacted are “reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:20); and reconciliation, be it particularly noted, is like justification—entirely *objective*, and not subjective as is regeneration! Reconciliation is—as we have fully demonstrated in our articles on that doctrine—wholly a matter of

relationship: God's laying aside His wrath and being at peace with us.

“And hath given to us [His ambassadors] the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world [‘a world’—Greek] unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them” (2 Cor. 5:18-19). From there to the end of 2 Corinthians 6:10, the apostle informs us what this “ministry” consisted of. First, it was that God “was in Christ, reconciling” not merely an apostate Judaism, but an alienated “world”—that is, the whole election of grace, the “all” of 2 Corinthians 5:14 and 15. Then he states the negative side of “reconciliation”—namely, “not imputing their trespasses unto them,” which again brings in the *legal* side of things. The positive side of reconciliation is given in verse 21: “That we might be made the righteousness of God in him,” which is entirely objective and judicial, and in no sense subjective and experimental. How vastly different is that than if he had said, “reconciling a world unto Himself, imparting unto them a new nature” or “subduing their iniquities!” It is not what God works *in* His people, but what by Christ He has done *for* them, that the whole passage treats of.

Turning back again to verse 17, “Therefore:” In view of what has been established in the preceding verses, it necessarily follows that—“if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature”—he has a new standing before God; being representatively one with Christ, he has been brought onto resurrection ground, he is a member of that new creation of which Christ is the federal Head; and consequently, he is under an entirely *new Covenant*. This is the grand and incontrovertible conclusion which must be drawn: The “old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” The natural and national distinctions which obtained under the old covenant find no place on resurrection ground: *They* were connected with the flesh; whereas, the relationship which obtains, and the privileges which are enjoyed under the new covenant are entirely spiritual. Once that was clearly apprehended and laid hold of by faith, it rendered nugatory the contentions of the Judaizers.

It is by no means easy for us at this late date to conceive of what

that revolutionary transaction from Judaism to Christianity involved, to Jew and Gentile alike. It was the greatest change this world has ever witnessed. For fifteen centuries, God's kingdom on earth had been confined unto one favoured nation, during which time all others had been left to walk in their own ways. The gulf which divided Judaism from Paganism was far more real and very much wider than that which exists between Romanism and orthodox Christianity. The divisive spirit between Jew and Gentile was more intense than that which obtains between the several castes in India. But at the Cross, the Mosaic economy "passed away," the middle wall of partition was broken down; and upon Christ's resurrection, the "Go not into the way of the Gentiles" (Matt. 10:5) gave place to "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). Fleshly relationships which had so markedly characterised Judaism, now gave place to spiritual ones; yet it was only with the greatest difficulty that converted Jews could be brought to realise that fact; and much in the New Testament is devoted unto a proving of the same.

The principal design of the entire epistle to the Hebrews was to demonstrate that "old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17)! In it, the apostle makes it manifest that the "old covenant" which Jehovah had entered into with Israel, at Sinai, with all its ordinances of worship and the peculiar privileges connected therewith, was disannulled, that it was superseded by a new and better economy. Therein, it is declared that Christ hath "obtained a more excellent ministry" in proportion to His being "the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises" (Heb. 8:6); and after quoting from Jeremiah 31, where the new covenant was announced, pointed out that the former one "which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away" (Heb. 8:13). The transcendent superiority of the new above the old is brought out in many details: The former was but temporary, the latter is eternal; the one contained only the shadow of good things to come, the latter the substance. The Aaronic priesthood has been displaced by Christ's—an earthly inheritance

by an heavenly. The blessed contrast between them is set forth most fully in Hebrews 12:18-24.

Not only did the converted Jews find it difficult to adjust themselves to the great change produced by the new covenant displacing the old, but unconverted Jews caused much trouble in the Christian assemblies, insisting that their descent from Abraham conferred special privileges upon them, and that Gentiles could only participate in them by being circumcised and becoming subject to the ceremonial law. Not a little in Paul's epistles is devoted to a refutation of such errors. That the Corinthians were being harassed by such Judaizers, we have already shown—further evidence is supplied by 2 Corinthians 11:18, where the apostle refers to “many glory after the flesh”—i.e. their natural lineage. But all ground had been cut from under their feet by what he had declared in 2 Corinthians 3 and his unanswerable argument in 2 Corinthians 5:13-18. Christ's death and resurrection had caused “old things” to pass away: The old covenant, the Mosaic economy, Judaism, was no more. “*All things are become new:*” A new covenant, Christianity—with better relationships and privileges, a superior standing before God, different ordinances of worship—had been introduced.

The same is true of the epistle to the Galatians, wherein there are many parallels to what has been before us in Corinthians. The churches of Galatia were also troubled by teachers of error, who were seeking to Judaize them, and Paul uses much the same method in exposing their sophistries. “There is neither Jew nor Greek...bond nor free...for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28) is an echo of “henceforth know we no man after the flesh” (2 Cor. 5:16). In several respects, the contents of Galatians 4:21-31 are similar to what is found in 2 Corinthians 3—for in both, the two covenants are contrasted; and in Galatians 4, under the allegory of Hagar and Sarah and their sons, the superiority of the latter is shown. “Ye that desire to be under the law” (Gal. 4:21) means under the old covenant. “Born after the flesh” in verse 23 signifies according to nature, “by promise” equals supernaturally. “These are” means that “*represent* the two covenants” (Gal. 4:24).

“Cast out the bondwoman and her son” of verse 30 has the force of act, in accordance with the fact that the old things are “passed away;” while the “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature” (the only other place in the New Testament that expression occurs!!) of Galatians 6:15 is enforcing the same truth as 2 Corinthians 5:17.

Once the meaning of 2 Corinthians 5:16 be perceived, there is no place for any dispute as to the signification of what immediately follows. In the light of 2 Corinthians 5:12; 10:7; 11:18, it is unmistakably clear that the apostle was dissuading the Corinthian saints from a carnal and sinful partiality, namely, of regarding men according to “outward appearance,” or fleshly descent; bidding them to esteem their brethren by their relation *to Christ* and not to Abraham, and to view Christ Himself not as “a minister of the circumcision” (Rom. 15:8), but as “the mediator of a better covenant” (Heb. 8:6) who has made “all things...become new” (2 Cor. 5:17). The old covenant was made with one nation only; the new covenant, with believers of all nations. Its sacrifices made nothing perfect; our Sacrifice has perfected us forever (Heb. 10:1, 14). Circumcision was for the natural seed of Jacob; baptism is for the spiritual children of Christ. Only the Levites were permitted to enter the holy place, all the children of God have the right of immediate access to Him. The seventh day was the Sabbath under the Siniatic constitution; the first day celebrates the order of things introduced by a risen Christ. “Old things are passed away; behold, *all* things are become new!”

Section One

Those who have carefully read this magazine, if for only one year, must recognize that whatever be its faults and failings, it cannot fairly be charged with presenting a toned-down picture of a genuine Christian, or that we hail as “Brother and Sister” all who style themselves such. More and more during the last ten years have we sought to expose windy professors and sweep away the sandy foundations on which so many of them rest their worthless hopes. Yet that does not warrant us going to the opposite extreme

and cutting off those who are entitled to enjoy a Scriptural assurance; and when we see some doing so themselves, we deem it a duty to stretch forth a helping hand. It was in that spirit we wrote the three articles (included in this booklet) which have already appeared under our present title, for we know some who have concluded that the language of 2 Corinthians 5:17 prohibits them from regarding themselves as regenerated souls; and though others of God's little ones do not go so far as that, yet its terms have much perplexed their minds.

Having endeavoured to remove a stumbling-stone from the path of conscientious souls by showing that 2 Corinthians 5:13-21 does not describe the work of the Holy Spirit within God's people, but rather that which results legally from what Christ did for them, it seems needful that we should now seek to probe and search out a different class by considering what does take place in one who is supernaturally quickened. In other words, having dealt with the great *dispensational* change which the death and resurrection of Christ effected, we turn now to contemplate the great *experimental* change which, in due time, is wrought in each one of those for whom the Redeemer shed His precious blood. There are many in Christendom today who give no evidence that they have been made the subjects of such a change, who nevertheless are fully persuaded they are journeying heavenwards; while there are not a few souls perplexed because uncertain of what this great change consists of.

That which we now propose to treat of may perhaps be best designated "the miracle of grace." First, because it is produced by the supernatural operations of God. Second, because those operations are wholly of His sovereign benignity, and not because of any worthiness in those who are the favoured subjects of it. Third, because those operations are profoundly mysterious to human ken [knowledge]. Furthermore, that expression, "a miracle of grace," is sufficiently abstract and general as to include all such terms as being "born again," "converted," etc.—which really refer to only *one* phase or aspect of it. Moreover, it possesses the advantage of placing the emphasis where it properly belongs and

ascribes the glory unto Him to whom alone it is due, for God is the sole and unassisted Author—whatever instruments or means He may or may not be pleased to use in the effectuation of the same—in a sinner’s salvation. “It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy” (Rom. 9:16). By “a miracle of grace,” we include *the whole* of God’s work in His people, and not simply His initial act of quickening them.

Nothing short of a miracle of grace can change a “natural man” (1 Cor. 2:14) into a “spiritual” one (1 Cor. 2:15). Only the might of Omnipotence is able to emancipate a serf of Satan’s and translate him into the kingdom of Christ. Anything less than the operations of the Holy Spirit is incapable of transforming a child of disobedience (Eph. 2:2) into a child of obedience (1 Pet. 1:14). To bring one whose carnal mind is enmity against God into loving and loyal subjection to Him is beyond all the powers of human persuasion. Yet being *supernatural*, it necessarily transcends our powers to fully understand. Even those who have actually experienced it can only obtain a right conception thereof by viewing it in the light of those hints upon it, which God has scattered throughout His Word; and even then, but a partial and incomplete concept. As our eyes are too weak for a prolonged gazing upon the sun, so our minds are too gross to take in more than a few scattered rays of the Truth. We see through a glass darkly, and know but in part (1 Cor. 13:12). Well for us when we are made conscious of our ignorance.

The very fact that the great change, of which we are here treating, is produced by the miracle-working power of God implies that it is one which is more or less inscrutable. All God’s works are shrouded in impenetrable mystery, even when cognizable by our senses. Life, natural life, in its origin, its nature, its processes, baffle the most able and careful investigator. Much more is this the case with spiritual life. The existence and being of God immeasurably transcend the grasp of the finite mind; how then can we expect to fully comprehend the process by which we become His children? Our Lord Himself declared that the new birth was a thing of mystery: “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou

hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8). The wind is something about which the most learned scientist knows next to nothing. Its nature, the laws which govern it, its causation, all lie beyond the purview of human inquiry. Thus it is with the new birth: it is profoundly mysterious, defying proud reason’s diagnosis, insusceptible of theological analysis.

The one who supposes he has a clear and adequate comprehension of what takes place in a soul when God plucks him as a brand from the burning is greatly mistaken: “If any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know” (1 Cor. 8:2). To the very end of his earthly pilgrimage, the best instructed Christian has reason to pray, “That which I see not teach thou me” (Job 34:32). Even the theologian and the Bible-teacher is but a learner and—like all his companions in the school of Christ—acquires his knowledge of the Truth gradually: “Here a little, and there a little” (Isa. 28:10). He too advances slowly, as one great theme after another is studied by him and opened up to him, requiring him to revise or correct his earlier apprehensions and adjust his views on other portions of the Truth, as fuller light is granted him on any one branch thereof. Necessarily so, for Truth is a unit; and if we err in our understanding of one part of it, that affects our perception of other parts of it.

None should take exception to, nor be surprised at, our saying that even the theologian or Bible-teacher is but a learner and acquires his knowledge of the Truth gradually. “But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day” (Prov. 4:18). Like the rising of the sun, spiritual light breaks forth upon both preacher and hearer by degrees. The men who have been the most used of God in the feeding and building up of His people were not thoroughly furnished for their work at the outset of their careers, but only by dint of prolonged study did they make progress in their own apprehension of the Truth. Each preacher who experiences any real spiritual growth views most of his first sermons as those of a novice; and he will have cause for shame as he perceives their crudity and the relative ignorance

which marked the production of them—for even if he was mercifully preserved from serious error, yet he will probably find many mistakes in his expositions of Scripture, various inconsistencies and contradictions in the views he then held, and which a fuller knowledge and maturer experience now enables him to rectify.

What has just been pointed out explains why the later writings of a servant of God are preferable to his earlier ones; and why in a second or third edition of his works, he finds it necessary to correct, or at least modify, some of his original statements. Certainly this writer is no exception. Were he to re-write today some of his earlier articles and pieces, he would make a number of changes in them. Though it may be humiliating unto pride to have to make corrections, yet it is also ground for thanksgiving unto God for the fuller light vouchsafed which enables him to do so. During our first pastorate, we were much engaged in combating the error of salvation by personal culture and reformation; and therefore, we threw our main emphasis on the truth contained in our Lord's words, "Ye must be *born again*" (John 3:3, 5, 7), showing that something far more potent and radical than any efforts of our own were required in order to give admission into the kingdom of God; that no education, mortification, or religious adorning of the natural man could possibly fit him to dwell for ever in a holy heaven.

But in seeking to refute one error, great care needs to be taken lest we land ourselves into another at the opposite extreme—for in most instances, error is Truth perverted rather than repudiated, Truth distorted by failure to preserve the balance. Being "born again" is not the only way in which Scripture describes the great change effected by the miracle of grace: other expressions are used; and unless they be taken into due consideration, an inadequate and faulty conception of what that miracle consists of and effects will be formed. Our second pastorate was located in a community where the teaching of "Entire Sanctification" or sinless perfectionism was rife; and in combating it, we stressed the fact that sin is not eradicated from any man's being in this life, that

even after he is born again, the “old nature” still remains within him. We were fully warranted by God’s Word in so doing, though if we were engaged in the same task today, we should be more careful in defining what we meant by “the old *nature*” and more insistent that a regenerate person has a radically different disposition sinwards from what he had formerly.

That a great change is wrought upon and within a person when God regenerates him is acknowledged by all His people—a change very different from that which is conceived of by many who have never personally experienced it. For example, it goes much deeper than a mere change of creed. One may have been brought up an Arminian, and later be intellectually convinced that such tenets are untenable; but his subsequent conversion to the Calvinistic system is no proof whatever that he is no longer dead in trespasses and sins. Again, it is something more radical than a change of inclination or taste. Many a giddy worldling have become so satiated with its pleasures as to lose all relish for the same, voluntarily abandoning them and welcoming the peace which he or she supposes is to be found in a covenant or monastery. So too it is something more vital than a change of conduct. Some notorious drunkards have signed the pledge and remained total abstainers the rest of their days, and yet never even made a profession of being Christians. One may completely alter his mode of living and yet be thoroughly carnal; forsake a life of vice and crime for one of moral respectability, and be no more spiritual than he was previously. Many are deceived at this point.

Let not the reader infer from what has just been said that one may be the subject of a miracle of grace, and yet it be unaccompanied by an enlightening of his understanding, a refining of his affections, or a reforming of his conduct. That is not at all our meaning. What we desire to make clear is that, that miracle of grace consists of something far superior to those superficial and merely *natural* changes which many undergo. Nor does that “something far superior” consist only in the communication of a new nature which leaves everything else in its recipient just as it was before: it is *the person* (and not simply a nature) who is

regenerated or born again. “Except *a man* be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3) is an altogether different thing from saying, “Except a new nature be born *in* a man, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Any deviation from Scripture is fraught with mischief, and if we reduce that which is personal to something abstract and impersonal, we are certain to form a most inadequate—if not erroneous—conception of regeneration.

Those who have written upon God’s work of grace in the soul, especially when treating of His initial act therein, have used a wide variety of terms—generally those most in vogue among the particular party to which they belonged. Each denomination has its own more or less distinctive nomenclature—determined by the portions of Truth, it is wont to emphasize—and even when dealing with doctrine which is held by all the orthodox, does so with a certain characteristic pronunciation or emphasis. Thus, in some circles, one would find, “effectual calling” the term most frequently employed; in other places, where “the new birth” is substituted, few would understand what is meant by “an effectual call;” while “a change of heart” is how a third group would describe it. Others, who are looser in their terminology, speak of “being saved,” by which some signify one thing, and others something quite different. As a matter of fact, each of those expressions is justifiable, and all of them need to be *combined* if we are to form anything approaching an adequate concept of the experience itself.

The better to enable our feeble understandings to grasp something of the nature of the great change which takes place in each of God’s people, the Holy Spirit has employed a considerable variety of terms—figurative in character, yet expressing spiritual realities—and it behoves us to diligently collate or collect the same, carefully ponder each one, and regard *all of them* as being included in “the miracle of grace.” Probably we are not capable of furnishing a full list, but the following are some of the principal verses in which experimental salvation is described. “The LORD thy God will *circumcise* thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, *to love* the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy

soul” (Deut. 30:6): an operation painful to the soul, in removing its filth and folly—its love of sin—is necessary before the heart is brought to truly love God! This figure of circumcising the heart is found also in the New Testament: Romans 2:29; Philippians 3:3. “Thy people shall *be willing* in the day of thy power” (Psa. 110:3): omnipotence must be exercised ere the elect will voluntarily deny self and freely take Christ’s yoke upon them.

“Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh” (Ezek. 36:25-26). We are not concerned here with the prophetic or dispensational bearing of this statement, but with its doctrinal import. Nor can we here attempt a full exposition of it. In our judgment, those verses describe an essential aspect of that “miracle of grace” which God performs in His people. The “clean water” with which He sprinkles and cleanses them within is an emblem of His holy Word, as John 15:3 and Ephesians 5:26 make quite clear. The heart of the natural man is likened to one of “stone”—lifeless, insensible, obstinate. When he is regenerated, the heart of man becomes one “of flesh”—quickened into newness of life, warm, full of feeling, capable of receiving impressions from the Spirit. The change effected by regeneration is no superficial or partial one, but a great, vital transforming, complete one.

“Make the tree good, and his fruit good” (Matt. 12:33): the Husbandman’s method of accomplishing this is shown in Romans 11:17. “Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:3): to “be converted” is to experience a radical change, for pride to be turned into humility, and self-sufficiency into clinging dependence. “Of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace” (John 1:16): the life of the Head is communicated to His members, and every spiritual grace that is found in Him is, in measure, reproduced in them. “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him” (John 6:44): to come to Christ is to receive Him as

our Lord and Saviour—to abandon our idols and repudiate our own righteousness, to surrender to His government and trust in His sacrifice; and none can do that except by the power of God. “Purifying their hearts by faith” (Acts 15:9, and compare 1 Pet. 1:23—“Ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth”): the Christian does not have two hearts, but one which has been “purified!” “Whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken” (Acts 16:14): the door of fallen man’s heart is fast closed against God until He opens it.

“I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness...To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me” (Acts 26:16, 18). Here, we have still another description of that miracle of grace which God performs within His people, and wherein He is pleased to make use of the ministerial instrumentality of His servants. The faithful preaching of His Word is given an important place therein, though that preaching is only rendered effectual by the powerful operations of the Spirit. That miracle is here spoken of as the opening of our eyes, the reference being to the eyes of our understanding, so that we are enabled to perceive something of the spiritual meaning of the Gospel message and its bearing upon our own deep need. The soul which hitherto was engulfed in spiritual darkness is brought forth into God’s marvellous light (1 Pet. 2:9), so that we now discover the perfect suitability of Christ unto our desperate case. At the same time, the soul is delivered from the captivity of Satan, who is “the power of darkness” (Luke 22:53), and brought into a new relation with and knowledge of God, which produces faith in Him and issues in the forgiveness of sins.

The first of three booklets.

