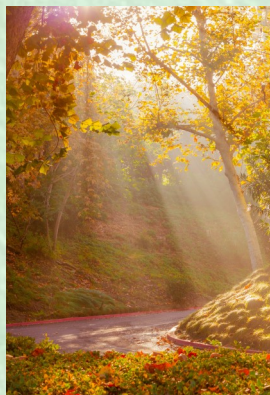


THE GREAT CHANGE PART TWO



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The Great Change

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Section Two

Continuing our review of the numerous passages wherein the Holy Spirit has described His work of regeneration, and wherein He has used such a great variety of figures and terms the better to enable us to form something more than a one-sided conception thereof, we turn next to Romans 5:5, where we read, “the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.” By nature, no man has any love for God. To those Jews who contended so vehemently for the unity of God and abhorred all forms of idolatry, and who—in their mistaken zeal—sought to kill the Saviour because of “making himself equal with God,” He declared, “I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you” (John 5:18, 42). Not only loveless, the natural man is filled with “enmity against God” (Rom. 8:7). But when a miracle of grace is wrought within him by the Holy Spirit, his heart experiences a great change Godwards, so that the One he formerly dreaded and sought to banish from his thoughts is now the Object of his veneration and joy, the One upon whose glorious perfections he delights to meditate, and for whose honour and pleasure he now seeks to live.

That great change which is wrought within the regenerate does not consist in the annihilation of the evil principle, “the flesh,” but in freeing the mind from its dominion, and in the communication of a holy principle which conveys a new propensity and disposition to the soul: God is no longer hated, but loved. That freeing of the mind from the evil dominion of

the flesh is spoken of in Ezekiel 36:26, as God's taking away "the stony heart;" and that shedding abroad of His love within the heart by His Spirit is termed giving them "an heart of flesh." Such strong figurative language was used by the prophet to intimate that the change wrought is no superficial or transient one. Through regarding too carnally ("literally") the terms used by the prophets, dispensationalists and their adherents have created their own difficulty and failed to understand the purport of the passage. It is not that an inward organ or faculty is removed and replaced by a different one, but rather that a radical change for the better had been wrought upon the original faculty—not by changing its essential nature or functions, but by bringing to bear a new and transforming influence upon it.

It ought not to be necessary for us to labour what is quite simple and obvious to the spiritually-minded, but in view of the fearful confusion and general ignorance prevailing, we feel that a further word (for the benefit of the perplexed) is called for. Perhaps a simple illustration will serve to elucidate still further. Suppose that for a long time, I have cherished bitter animosity against a fellow creature and treated him with contempt, but that God has now made me realize I have been grievously wronging that person, and brought me to repent deeply of the injustice I have done him, so that I have humbly confessed my sin to him, and henceforth shall esteem him highly and do all in my power to amend the wrong I did him; surely no one would have any difficulty in understanding what was meant if I said that I had undergone a real "change of heart" toward that person, nor would it be misleading to say that a heart of "bitterness" had been removed from me and a heart of "good will" given to me. Though we do not pretend to explain the *process*, yet something very much like that are the *nature* and *effect* of God's taking away the heart of stone and giving a heart of flesh (Ezek. 11:19; 36:26), or freeing the mind of enmity against God (Rom. 8:7), and shedding abroad His love in the heart (Rom. 5:5).

"But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was

delivered you [“whereunto ye were delivered”—margin]. Being then made free from [the guilt and dominion of] sin, ye became the servants of righteousness” (Rom. 6:17-18). In this passage, the Holy Spirit is describing that wondrous transformation whereby the servants of sin become the servants of righteousness. That transformation is effected by their being delivered unto that form of doctrine which requires hearty obedience. To aid our feeble understanding, another similitude is used. “The truth which is after godliness” (Tit. 1:1) is called “that form [“type or impress”—Young; rendered “fashion, pattern” in other passages] of doctrine” or “teaching:” the figure of a mould or seal being used wherein the hearts of the regenerate (softened and made pliable by the Holy Spirit) are likened to molten metal which receives and retains the exact impress of the mould into which it is poured; or as melted wax is cast into the impress of a seal, answering to it line for line, conformed to the shape and figure of it. The quickened soul is “delivered unto” (the Greek word signifies “given over to,” as may be seen in Matthew 5:25; 11:27; 20:19) the Truth, so that it is made answerable or conformable unto it.

In their unconverted state, they had been the willing and devoted servants of sin, uniformly heeding its promptings and complying with its behests, gratifying their own inclinations without any regard to the authority and glory of God. But now they cordially yielded submission to the teaching of God’s Word, whereunto they had been delivered or cast into the very fashion of the same. They had been supernaturally renewed into or conformed unto the holy requirements of Law and Gospel alike. Their minds, their affections, their wills had been formed according to the tenor of God’s Standard. Thus, from still another angle, we are informed of what the great change consists: it is God’s bringing of the soul from the love of sin to the love of holiness, a being transformed by the renewing of the mind—such a transformation as produces compliance with the Divine will. It is an inward agreement with the Rule of righteousness, into which the heart is cast and after which the

character is framed and modelled; the consequence of which is an obedience from the heart—in contrast with forced or feigned obedience, which proceeds from fear or self-interest.

“For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died” (Rom. 7:9). As the last-considered passage describes the positive side of the great change experienced in the child of God, this one treats more of its negative aspect. The commentators are generally agreed that in Romans 7:7-11, the apostle is narrating one of the experiences through which he passed at his conversion. First, he says, there had been a time when he was “without the law” (Rom. 7:9)—words which cannot be taken absolutely. In his unregenerate days, he had been a proud Pharisee. Though he had received his training under the renowned rabbi, Gamaliel, where his chief occupation was the study of the Law; yet being totally ignorant of its spirituality, he was, vitally and experimentally speaking, as one “without” it—without a realization of its design, or an inward acquaintance of its power. Supposing that a mere external conformity unto its requirements was all that was necessary, and strictly attending to the same, he was well pleased with himself, satisfied with his righteousness, and assured of his acceptance with God.

Second, “but when the commandment came” (Rom. 7:9): verse seven informs us it was the tenth commandment which the Holy Spirit used as the arrow of conviction. When those words, “thou shalt not covet” (Exod. 20:17) were applied to him, when they came in the Spirit’s illuminating and convicting power to his conscience, the bubble of his self-righteousness was pricked and his self-complacency was shattered. Like a thunderbolt out of a clear sky, that Divine prohibition, “thou shalt not [even] *desire* that which is forbidden,” brought home to his heart with startling force the strictness and spirituality of the Divine Law. As those words, “thou must have no self-will,” pierced him, he realized the Law demanded inward, as well as outward, conformity to its holy terms. Then it was that “sin revived” (Rom. 7:9): he was conscious of his lusts rising up in

protest against the holy and extensive requirements of the Divine Rule. The very fact that God has said, “thou shalt not covet [lust]” only served to aggravate and stir into increased activity those corruptions of which previously he was unconscious; and the more he attempted to bring them into subjection, the more painfully aware did he become of his own helplessness.

Third, “and I died:” in his own apprehensions, feelings, and estimate of himself. Before he became acquainted with his inward corruptions and was made to feel something of the plague of his heart, living a morally upright life and being most punctilious in performing the requirements of the ceremonial law, the apostle deemed himself a good man. He was in his own opinion “alive”—uncondemned by the Law, having no dread of punishment and judgment to come. But when the tenth commandment smote his conscience, he perceived the spirituality of the Law and realized that hitherto, he had only a notional knowledge of it. Convicted of his inward depravity, of his sinful desires, thoughts and imaginations, he felt himself to be a condemned criminal, deserving eternal death. *That* is another essential element in the great change—which we should have introduced much earlier had we followed a theological order rather than tracing out the various references to it as recorded in the Scriptures. That essential element consists of a personal conviction of sin, of one’s lost estate, and *such* a conviction that its subject completely despairs of any self-help and dies to his own righteousness.

“And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:11). The “such were some of you” refers to the licentious and vicious characters mentioned in verses nine and ten, of whom Matthew Henry (1662-1714) said they were “very monsters rather than men. Note, some that are eminently good after conversion have been as remarkable for wickedness before.” What a glorious alteration does grace effect in reclaiming persons from sins so debasing and degrading! That

grand transformation is here described by three words: “washed...sanctified...justified.” It may appear very strange to some of our readers to hear that quite a number of those who regard themselves as the champions of orthodoxy, if they do not explicitly repudiate the first, yet give it no place at all in their concept of what takes place at regeneration. They so confine their thoughts to that which is newly created and communicated to the Christian, that any change and cleansing of his *original* being is quite lost sight of. God’s children are as truly “washed,” as they are sanctified and justified. Literally so? Yes; in a material sense? No, *morally*.

“But ye are washed” was the fulfilment of that Old Testament promise, “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” (Ezek. 36:25). Titus 3:5 makes it clear that the new birth consists of something more than the communication of a new nature, namely, “the washing of regeneration”—compare Ephesians 5:26. It is further to be noted that the “ye are washed” is distinct from “justified,” so it cannot refer to the removal of guilt. Moreover, it is effected by the Spirit, and therefore, must consist of something which He does *in* us. The foul leper is purged: by the Spirit’s agency, he is cleansed from his pollutions, and his heart is made “pure” (Matt. 5:8). It is a moral cleansing or purification of character from the love and practice of sin. First, “washed;” then “sanctified,” or set apart and consecrated to God, as vessels meet for His use. Thereby, we obtain evidence of our justification—the cancellation of guilt and the imputation of righteousness to us. Justification is here attributed to the Holy Spirit, because He is the Author of that faith which justifies a sinner.

“But we all, with open [it should be “with *unveiled*”] face beholding as in a glass [better, “mirror”] 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). In the “open [unveiled] face,” there is a double reference and contrast. First, to the veil over the face of Moses (2 Cor. 3:13), which symbolized the

imperfection and transitoriness of Judaism: in contrast, Christians behold God as He is fully and finally revealed in the person and work of His Son. Second, to the veil which is over the hearts of unconverted Jews (2 Cor. 3:15) in contrast with them, those who have turned to the Lord have the blinding effects of error and prejudice removed from them, so that they can view the Gospel without any medium obscuring it. The “glory of the Lord” (2 Cor. 3:18), the sum of His perfections, is revealed and shines forth in the Word, and more particularly, in the Gospel. As His glory is beheld by that faith which is produced and energized by the Spirit, its beholder is changed gradually from one degree to another into the “same image,” becoming more and more conformed unto Him in character and conduct. The verb “changed” (*metamorphoo*) is rendered “transformed” in Romans 12:2, and “transfigured” in Matthew 17:2!

The “mirrors” of the ancients were made of burnished metals; and when a strong light was thrown on them, they not only reflected images with great distinctness, but the rays of light were cast back upon the face of one looking into them, so that if the mirror were of silver or brass, a white or golden glow suffused his or her countenance. The “mirror” is the Scriptures in which the glory of the Lord is discovered; and as the Spirit shines upon the soul and enables him to act faith and love thereon, he is changed into the same image. The glory of the Lord is irradiated by the Gospel; and as it is received into the heart, it is reflected by the beholder through the transforming agency of the Spirit. By the heart’s being occupied with Christ’s perfection, the mind’s meditating thereon, and the will’s subjection to His precepts, we drink into His spirit, become partakers of His holiness, and are conformed to His image. As our view of Christ is imperfect, the transformation is incomplete in this life: only when we “see him” face to face shall we be made perfectly “like him” (1 John 3:2).

“For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of

the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6). Had we been following a strictly logical and theological order, this is another aspect of our subject we should have brought in earlier, for the spiritual illumination of the understanding is one of the first works of God when He begins to restore a fallen creature. By nature, he is in a state of complete spiritual ignorance of God, and therefore, of his own state before Him, sitting in “darkness” and “in the region and shadow of death” (Matt. 4:16). That “darkness” is something far more dreadful than a mere intellectual ignorance of spiritual things: it is a positive and energetic “power” (Luke 22:53) and evil principle, which is inveterately opposed to God; and with which the heart of fallen man is in love (John 3:19), and which no external means or illumination can dispel (John 1:5). Nothing but the sovereign fiat and all-mighty power of God is superior to it, and He alone can bring a soul “out of darkness into his *marvellous* light” (1 Pet. 2:9).

As God commanded the light to shine out of that darkness which enveloped the old creation (Gen. 1:2-3), so He does in the work of new creation within each of His elect. That supernatural enlightenment consists not in dreams and visions, nor in the revelation to the soul of anything which has not been made known in the Scripture of Truth, for it is “the entrance of thy words [which] giveth light” (Psa. 119:130). Yes, the *entrance*; but ere that takes place, the blind eyes of the sinner must first be miraculously opened by the Spirit, so that he is made capable of receiving the light: it is only in God’s light we “see light” (Psa. 36:9). The shining of God’s light in our hearts partially and gradually dissipates the awful ignorance, blindness, error, prejudice, and unbelief of our souls, thereby preparing the mind to (in measure) apprehend the Truth and the affections to embrace it. By this supernatural illumination, the soul is enabled to see things as they really are (1 Cor. 2:10-12), perceiving his own depravity, the exceeding sinfulness of sin, the spirituality of the Law, the excellency of truth, the beauty of holiness, the loveliness of Christ.

We repeat: the Spirit communicates no light to the quickened soul which is not to be found in the written Word, but removes those obstacles which precluded its entrance, disposes the mind to attend unto the Truth (Acts 16:14), and receive it in the *love* of it (2 Thess. 2:10). When the Divine light shines into his heart, the sinner perceives something of his horrible plight, is made conscious of his guilty and lost condition, feels that his sins are more in number than the hairs of his head. He now *knows* that there is “*no soundness*” (Isa. 1:6) in him, that all his righteousnesses are as filthy rags, and that he is utterly unable to help himself. But the Divine light shining in his heart also reveals the all-sufficient remedy. It awakens hope in his breast. It makes known to him “the glory of God” (2 Cor. 4:6) as it shines in the face of the Mediator, and the sun of righteousness now arises upon his benighted soul with healing in His wings, or [light] beams. Such knowledge of sin, of himself, of God, of the Saviour, is not obtained by mental effort, but is communicated by the gracious operations of the Spirit.

“(For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:4-5). The apostle is here alluding to his ministry: its nature, difficulties, and success. He likened it unto a conflict between truth and error. The “weapons” or means he employed were not such as men of the world depended upon. The Grecian philosophers relied upon the arguments of logic, or the attractions of rhetoric. Mohammed conquered by the force of arms. Rome’s appeal is to the senses. But the ambassadors of Christ use nought but the Word and prayer, which are “mighty through God” (2 Cor. 10:4). Sinners are converted by the preaching of Christ crucified, and not by human wisdom, eloquence, or debate. The Gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16).

Sinners are here pictured as sheltering in “strongholds.” By hardness of heart, stubbornness of will, and strong prejudices,

they have fortified themselves against God and betaken themselves to a “refuge of lies” (Isa. 28:17). But when the Truth is effectually applied to their hearts by the Spirit, those strongholds are demolished and their haughty imaginations and proud reasonings are cast down. They no longer exclaim, “I cannot believe that a just God will make one a vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour,” or “I cannot believe a merciful God will consign anyone to eternal torments.” All objections are now silenced, rebels are subdued, lofty opinions of self cast down, pride is abased, and reverential fear, contrition, humility, faith, and love take their place. Every thought is now brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5): they are conquered by grace, taken captives by love, and Christ henceforth occupies the throne of their hearts. Every faculty of the soul is now won over to God. Such is the great change wrought in a soul who experiences the miracle of grace: a worker of iniquity is made a loving and loyal child of obedience.

Section Three

“My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you” (Gal. 4:19). In the past, the apostle had laboured hard in preaching the Gospel to the Galatians, and apparently, his efforts had met with considerable success. He had plainly set before them “Christ...crucified” (Gal. 3:1) as the sinner’s only hope; and many had professed to receive Him as He was offered in the Gospel. They had abandoned their idolatry, seemed to be soundly converted, and had expressed great affection for their spiritual father (Gal. 4:15). For a time, they had “run well,” but they had been hindered (Gal. 5:7). After Paul’s departure, false teachers sought to seduce them from the faith and persuade them that they must be circumcised and keep the ceremonial law in order to salvation. They had so far given ear unto those Judaisers that Paul now stood in doubt of them (Gal. 4:20), being fearful lest after all they had never been truly regenerated (Gal. 4:11). It is to be carefully noted that he did not

take refuge in fatalism and say, If God has begun a good work in them, He will certainly finish it, so there is no need for me to be unduly worried. Very much the reverse.

No, the apostle was much exercised over their state and earnestly solicitous about their welfare. By this strong figure of speech, “I travail in birth again” (Gal. 4:19), the apostle intimated both his deep concern and his willingness to labour and suffer ministerially after their conversion, to spare no pains in seeking to deliver them from their present delusion and get them thoroughly established in the truth of the Gospel. He longed to be assured that the great change had taken place in them, which he speaks of as “Christ be formed in you” (Gal. 4:19). By which we understand that they might be genuinely evangelized by a saving knowledge of Christ. First, that by spiritual apprehension of the Truth, He might be revealed in their understandings. Second, that by the exercise of faith upon Him, He might dwell in their hearts (Eph. 3:17): faith gives a subsistence and reality in the soul of that object on which it is acted (Heb. 11:1). Third, that He might be so endeared to their affections that neither Moses nor any one else could be admitted as a rival. Fourth, that by the surrender of their wills, He might occupy the throne of their hearts and rule over them. Christ thus “formed in” us is the proof of His righteousness imputed to us.

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10). In those words, the apostle completes the blessed declaration he had made in verses 8 and 9, thereby preserving the balance of Truth. Verses 8 and 9 present only one side of the Gospel and ought never to be quoted without adding the other side. None so earnest as Paul in proclaiming sovereign grace; none more insistent in maintaining practical godliness. Has God chosen His people in Christ before the foundation of the world? It was that they “should be holy” (Eph. 1:4). Did Christ give Himself for us? It was that “he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Tit. 2:14). So here, immediately after

magnifying free grace, Paul states with equal clearness the moral results of God's saving power, as they are exhibited with more or less distinctness in the lives of His people. Salvation by grace is evidenced by holy conduct: unless our lives are characterized by "good works," we have no warrant to regard ourselves as being the children of God.

"We are his workmanship:" He, and not ourselves, had made us what we are spiritually. "Created in Christ Jesus" means made vitally one with Him. "In Christ" always has reference to *union* with Him: in Ephesians 1:4, to a mystical or election union; in 1 Corinthians 15:22, to a federal or representative one; in 1 Corinthians 6:17 and 2 Corinthians 5:17, to a vital or living one. Saving faith (product of the Spirit's quickening us) makes us branches of the living Vine, from whom our fruit proceeds (Hos. 14:8). "Created in Christ Jesus *unto* good works" (Eph. 2:10) expresses the design and efficacy of God's workmanship, being parallel with "this people have I formed for myself; they shall shew forth my praise" (Isa. 43:21). God fits the thing for which He creates it: fire to burn, the earth to yield food, His saints to walk in good works—God's work in their souls inclining and propelling thereunto. He creates us in Christ, or gives us vital union with Him, that we should walk in newness of life—He being the Root from which all the fruits of righteousness proceed. United to the Holy One, holy conduct marks us. Those who live in sin have never been savingly joined to Christ. God saves that we may glorify Him by a life of obedience.

"Put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:24). Those words occur in the practical section of the epistle, being part of an exhortation which begins at verse 22, the passage as a whole being similar to Romans 13:12-14. Its force is, Make it manifest by your conduct that you are regenerate creatures, exhibiting before your fellows the character of God's children. That which most concerns us now is the particular description which is here given of the great change effected in the regenerate—namely, a

“new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph. 4:24). With our present passage, it should be carefully compared with the parallel one in Colossians, for the one helps to explain and supplements the other. There we read, “And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him” (Col. 3:10). In both, we find the expression “the new man,” by which we are *not* to understand that a new individual has been brought into existence, that a person is now brought forth who previously had no being. Great care needs to be taken when seeking to understand and explain the meaning of terms which are taken from the material realm and applied to spiritual objects and things.

A regenerated sinner is the same individual he was before, though a great change has taken place in his soul. How different the landscape when the sun is shining than when darkness of a moonless night is upon it—the same landscape and yet not the same! How different the condition of one who is restored to fullness of health and vigour after being brought very low by serious illness—yet it is the same person. How different will be the body of the saint on the Resurrection morning from its present state—the same body which was sown in the grave, and yet not the same! So too with those saints alive on earth at the Redeemer’s return: “Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body” (Phil. 3:21). Thus it is, in measure, at regeneration: the soul undergoes a Divine work of renovation and transformation: a new light shines into the understanding, a new Object engages the affections, a new power moves the will. It is the same individual, and yet not the same. “Once I was blind, but now I see” is his blessed experience.

In Ephesians 4:24, we read of the new man “which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness;” while in Colossians 3:10, it is said “which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him,” i.e. originally. By comparing the two passages, we understand the “which after

God” to signify in conformity to Himself, for it is parallel with “after the image of him.” That the new man is said to be “created” denotes that this spiritual transformation is a Divine work in which the human individual plays no part—either by contribution, co-operation, or concurrence. It is wholly a supernatural operation, in which the subject of it is entirely passive. The “which is *renewed*” of Colossians 3:10 denotes that it is not something which previously had no existence, but the spiritual quickening and renovating of the soul. By regeneration is restored to the Christian’s soul the moral image of God, which image he lost in Adam at the fall. That “image” consists in “righteousness and true holiness” (Eph. 4:24) being imparted to the soul, or, as Colossians 3:10 expresses it, in the spiritual “knowledge” of God. God is now known, loved, revered, loyally served. It is now fitted for communion with Him.

“Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it” (Phil. 1:6). This verse contains a manifest warning, if an indirect or implied one, against our pressing too far the figure of a “new creation.” “Creation” is an act and not a “work,” a finished or completed object, and not an incomplete and imperfect one. God speaks and it is done, wholly and perfectly done in an instant. The very fact that the Holy Spirit has employed such figures as “begetting” and “birth” to describe the saving work of God in the soul intimates that the reference is only to the *initial* experience of Divine grace. A new life is then imparted, but it requires nurturing and developing. In the verse now before us, we are informed that the great change produced in us is not yet fully accomplished, yea, that it is only just begun. The work of grace is called “good,” because it is so in itself, and because of what it effects: it conforms us to God and fits us to enjoy God. It is termed a “work,” because it is a *continuous process*, which the Spirit carries forward in the saint as long as he is left in this scene.

This good work within the soul is commenced by God, being wrought neither by our will nor our agency. That was the ground

of the apostle's persuasion or confidence: that He who had begun this good work would perform or finish it—had it been originated by man, he could have had no such assurance. Not only did God initiate this good work, but He alone continues and perfects it—were it left unto us, it would quickly come to nought. “Will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6) tells us it is not complete in this life. With that should be compared, “them that believe to the saving of the soul” (Heb. 10:39): observe carefully, not “have believed” (a past act) to the salvation (a completed deliverance) of the soul, but “who believe [a present act] to the *saving* of the soul”—a continuous process. As Christ ever liveth to make intercession for us (Heb. 7:25), so the Spirit ever exercises an effectual influence within us. The verb for “finish” is an intensive one, which means to carry forward unto the end. “The LORD *will perfect* that which concerneth me” (Psa. 138:8) enunciates the same promise.

“According to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly *through* Jesus Christ our Saviour” (Tit. 3:5-6). If we followed our inclination, we should essay an exposition of the whole passage (verses 4, 7), but unless we keep within bounds and confine ourselves to what bears directly on our present theme, these articles will be extended too much to suit some of our readers. In this passage, we are shown how the three Persons of the Godhead co-operate in the work of salvation, and that salvation itself has both an experimental and legal side to it. Here we are expressly said to be “saved by” the effectual operations of the Holy Spirit, so that the Christian owes his personal salvation unto *Him* as truly as he does unto the Lord Jesus. Had not the blessed Spirit taken up His abode in this world, the death of Christ would have been in vain. It is by the mediation and merits of His redemptive work that Christ purchased the gift and graces of the Spirit, which are here said to be “shed on us abundantly *through* Jesus Christ our Saviour.”

The will of the Father is the originating cause of our salvation, the worth of the Son's redemption, its meritorious cause; and the

work of the Spirit, its effectual cause. Experimental salvation is begun in the soul by “the washing of regeneration” (Tit. 3:5), when the heart is cleansed from the prevailing love and power of sin and begins to be restored to its pristine purity. And by the “renewing of the Holy Ghost,” that is, the renewing of the soul in the Divine image; or, more particularly, the renewing of the “mind” (Rom. 12:2); or, more expressly still, being “renewed in the *spirit of your mind*” (Eph. 4:23)—that is, in the *disposition* of it. The whole of which is summed up in the expression, God has given us “a sound mind” (2 Tim. 1:7), “an understanding, that we may know him” (1 John 5:20). The mind is renovated and reinvigorated, so that it is capacitated to spiritually discern the things of the Spirit, which the natural man cannot do (1 Cor. 2:14), no matter how well he be educated or religiously instructed.

But that to which we would specially direct the attention of the reader is the present tense of the verbs: “the washing of regeneration, and renewing [not “renewal”] of the Holy Ghost” (Tit. 3:5). Like 2 Corinthians 3:18 and Philippians 1:6, this is another verse which shows that the great change is not completed at the new birth, but is a *continual process*, in course of effectuation. The “good work” which God has begun in the soul—that washing and renewing of the Holy Spirit—proceeds throughout the whole course of our earthly life, and is not consummated until the Redeemer’s return, for it is only then that the saints will be perfectly and eternally conformed to the image of God’s Son. God says of His heritage, “I the LORD do keep it; I will *water it every moment*” (Isa. 27:3): it is only by the continuous and gracious influences of the Spirit that the spiritual life is nurtured and developed. The believer is often conscious of his need thereof, and under a sense of it, cries, “Quicken me according to thy word” (Psa. 119:154). And God does: for “though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day” (2 Cor. 4:16). That “inward man” is termed “the hidden man of the heart” (1 Pet. 3:4).

“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of

Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts” (Heb. 8:10—quoted from Jer. 31:31-34). Without entering into the prophetic bearings of this passage (about which none should speak without humble diffidence), suffice it to say that by the “house of Israel,” we understand “the Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16)—the whole election of grace—to be here in view. The “I will put” and “I will write” refer to yet another integral part of the great change wrought in God’s people, the reference being to that invincible and miraculous operation of the Spirit which radically transforms the favoured subjects of it. “God articles with His people. He once wrote His laws *to* them; now He writes His laws *in* them. That is, He will give them understanding to know and believe His laws, memories to retain them, hearts to love and consciences to revere them; He will give them courage to profess, and power to put them into practice: the whole habit and frame of their souls shall be a table and transcript of His laws” (Matthew Henry, 1662-1714).

“I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts” (Heb. 8:10). We are here shown how rebels are made amenable to God. “God calls to us without effect, as long as He speaks to us in no other way than by the voice of man. He indeed teaches us and commands what is right, but He speaks to the deaf; for when we seem to hear aright, our ears are only struck by an empty sound, and the heart, being full of depravity and perverseness, rejects every wholesome doctrine. In short, the Word of God never penetrates into our hearts, for they are iron and stone until they are softened by Him; nay, they have engraved on them a contrary law, for perverse passions reek within, which lead us to rebellion. In vain, then, does God proclaim His Law by the voice of men, until He writes it by His Spirit on our hearts; that is, until He frames and prepares us for obedience” (John Calvin, 1509-1564).

“I will...write them in their hearts.” The “heart,” as distinguished from the “mind,” comprises the affections and the will. This is what renders actually effective the former. The

heart of the natural man is alienated from God and opposed to His authority. That is why God wrote the Ten Words upon tables of stone: not so much to secure the outward letter of them, as to represent the hardness of heart of the people unto whom they were given. But at regeneration, God takes away the heart of stone and gives “an heart of flesh” (Ezek. 36:26). Just as the tables of stone received the impression of the finger of God, of the letter and words wherein the Law was contained, so the “heart of flesh” receives a durable impression of God’s laws, the affections and will being made answerable unto the whole revealed will of God and conformed to its requirements: a principle of obedience is imparted, and subjection to the Divine authority is wrought in us.

Here, then, is the grand triumph of Divine grace: a lawless rebel is changed into a loyal subject, enmity against the Law (Rom. 8:7) is displaced by love for the Law (Psa. 119:97). The heart is so transformed that it now loves God and has a genuine desire and determination to please Him. The renewed heart “*delight[s]* in the law of God” and “*serve[s]* the law of God” (Rom. 7:22, 25), it being its very “nature” to do so! Let each reader sincerely ask himself, Is there now that in me which responds to the holy Law of God? Is it truly my longing and resolve to be wholly regulated by the Divine will? Is it the deepest yearning of my soul and the chief aim of my life to honour and glorify Him? Is it my daily prayer for Him to work in me “both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13)? Is my acutest grief occasioned when I feel I sadly fail to fully realise my longing? If so, the great change *has been* wrought in me.

Section Four

“According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the

corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Pet. 1:3-4). That is more of a general description of experimental salvation than a delineation of any particular part thereof, yet since there be in it one or two expressions not found elsewhere, it calls for a separate consideration. The opening, “According as” should be rendered “Forasmuch as” or “Seeing that” (Revised Version)—for it indicates not so much a standard of comparison, as that verses 3 and 4 form the ground of the exhortation of verses 5 to 7. First, we have their spiritual enduement. This was by “divine power,” or as Ephesians 1:19 expresses it, “the exceeding greatness of his power to us—ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power”—for nothing less could quicken souls dead in trespasses and sins, or free the slaves of sin and Satan.

That divine power “hath given unto us [not merely offered them in the Gospel, but hath graciously bestowed, actually communicated] all things that pertain unto life and godliness” (2 Pet. 1:3): that is, whatever is needful for the production, preservation, and perfecting of spirituality in the souls of God’s elect. Yet, though the recipients be completely passive—yea, unconscious—of this initial operation of divine grace, they do not continue so—for second, their enduement is accompanied by and accomplished “through the knowledge of him that hath [effectually] called us to glory and virtue” or “energy.” That “knowledge of him” consists of such a personal revelation of Himself to the soul as imparts a true, spiritual, affecting, transforming perception of, and acquaintance with, His excellency. It is such a knowledge as enables its favoured recipient in adoring and filial recognition to say, “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee” (Job 42:5). God has now become an awe-producing, yet a living and blessed, reality to the renewed soul.

Third, through that spiritual “knowledge” which God has imparted to the soul, all the gracious benefits and gifts of His love are received: “Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers” (2

Pet. 1:4), etc. The “whereby” has reference to His “glory and virtue”—or better, His “glory and energy” or “might.” The “promises” are “given unto us” not simply in words, but in their actual fulfilment: just as the by His “glory and virtue [or might]” is the same thing as “his divine power” in the previous verse, so “are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature” corresponds with “hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness”—the one amplifying the other. The “exceeding great and precious promises” were those made in the Old Testament—the original (Gen. 3:15), fundamental, central, and all-pervading one being that of a personal Saviour; and those made by Christ, which chiefly respected the gift and coming of the Holy Spirit, which He expressly designated as “*the promise of the Father*” (Acts 1:4).

Now those two promises—that of a divine Saviour and that of a divine Spirit—were the things that the prophets of old ministered “not unto themselves, but unto us” (1 Pet. 1:12); and they may indeed most fitly be termed, “exceeding great and precious promises” (2 Pet. 1:4)—for they who are given this Saviour and this Spirit do in effect receive “all things that pertain unto life and godliness” (2 Pet. 1:3)—for Christ becomes their Life; and the Spirit, their Sanctifier. Or, as the following verse expresses it, the end for which this knowledge (as well as its accompanying blessings) are bestowed is first “that by these [i.e. the promises as fulfilled and fulfilling in your experience] ye might be partakers of the divine nature.” Here we need to be on our guard against forming a wrong conclusion from the bare sound of those words: “Not the essence of God, but His communicable excellencies, such moral properties as may be imparted to the creature, and those not considered in their absolute perfection, but as they are agreeable to our present state and capacity” (Thomas Manton, 1620-1677).

That “divine nature”—or “moral properties”—is sometimes called “the life of God” (Eph. 4:18), because it is a vital principle of action; sometimes “the image of him” (Col. 3:10),

because they bear a likeness to Him—consisting essentially of “righteousness and true holiness” (Eph. 4:24); or in 2 Peter 1:3, “life and godliness”—spiritual life, spiritual graces, abilities to perform good works. It is here called “the divine nature,” because it is the communication of a vital principle of operation which God transmits unto His children. The second end for which this saving knowledge of God is given is expressed in the closing words: “Having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Pet. 1:4). Personally, we see no need for taking up this expression *before* “partakers of the divine nature,” as that eminent expositor Thomas Manton did, and as did the most able John Lillie (1812-1867)—to whom we are indebted for part of the above—for the apostle is not here enforcing the human-responsibility side of things (as he *was* in Romans 13:12; Ephesians 4:22-24), but treats of the divine operations and their effects.

It is quite true that *we* must put off the old man before we can put on the new man in a practical way, that we must first attend to the work of mortification ere we can make progress in our sanctification, but this is not the aspect of truth which the apostle is *here* unfolding. When the Gospel call is addressed unto our moral agency, the promise is “that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, *but have* eternal life” (John 3:15-16). But where spiritual things are concerned, the unregenerate man never discharges his moral agency. A miracle of grace must take place before he does that; and therefore, God in a sovereign manner (unsought by us) imparts life, that he may and will believe (John 1:12-13; 1 John 5:1)—the “sanctification of the Spirit” precedes the saving “and belief of the truth” (2 Thess. 2:13)! In like manner, our becoming “partakers of the divine nature” precedes (not in time, but in order of nature and of actual experience, though not of consciousness) our escaping “the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Pet. 1:4).

Let not the young preacher be confused by what has been pointed out in the last paragraph. His marching orders are plain: when addressing the unsaved, he is to enforce their

responsibility, press upon them the discharging of their duties, bidding them forsake their “way” and “thoughts” *in order to* pardon (Isa. 55:7), calling upon them to “repent” and “believe” if they would be saved (Mark 1:15; Acts 16:31; Rom 10:9). But if God be pleased to own his preaching of the Word and pluck some brands from the burning, it is quite another matter (or aspect of truth) for the preacher (and, later on, his saved hearer, by means of doctrinal instruction) to understand something of the nature of that miracle of grace which God wrought in the hearer, which caused him to savingly receive the Gospel. It is *that* which we have endeavoured to deal with in the above paragraphs—namely, explain something of the operations of divine grace in a renewed soul, so far as those operations are described in 2 Peter 1:3-4.

“Having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Pet. 1:4). First, by the divine operation, and then by our own agency—for it is ever “God which worketh in you both *to* will and *to* do of his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). Indwelling sin (depravity) is here termed, “corruption,” because it blighted our primitive purity, degenerated our original state, and because it continues both in its nature and effects to pollute and waste. That “corruption” has its source in, or is seated in, our “lusts”—depraved affections and appetites. This “corruption” is what another apostle designated as “evil concupiscence” (Col. 3:5)—for it occupies in the heart that place which is due alone unto the love of God as the Supreme Good. “Lust” always follows the “nature:” as is the nature, so are its desires—if corrupt, then evil; if holy, then pure. All the corruption that is in the world is “through lust,” i.e. through inordinate desire—lust lies at the bottom of every unlawful thought, every evil imagination.

The world could harm no man were it not for “lust” in his heart—some inordinate desire in the understanding or fancy, a craving for something which sets him a-work after it. The fault is not in the gold, but in the spirit of covetousness which possesses men; not in the wine, but in their craving to excess.

“But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of *his own* lust” (James 1:14)—the blame lies on us, rather than Satan! It is remarkable that when the apostle explained his expression, “all that is in the world,” he defined it as “the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (1 John 2:16). Now of Christians, our passage says, “having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Pet. 1:4)—and that, by the interposition of the divine hand, as Lot escaped from Sodom; yet not through a simple act of omnipotence, but by the gracious bestowments which that hand brings, by that holiness which He works in the heart, or, as a passage already reviewed expresses it: “By the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost” (Tit. 3:5). We escape from the dominion of inward corruption by “the divine nature” in us, causing us to hate and resist our evil lusts.

Thus it is by adhering closely to the divine order of this passage that we are enabled to understand the meaning of its final clause. When we become “partakers of the divine nature”—that is, when we are renewed after the image of God—a principle of grace and holiness is communicated to the soul, which is called “spirit,” because “born of the Spirit” (John 3:6) and that principle of holiness (termed by many “the new nature”) is a vital and operating one which offers opposition to the workings of “corruption” or indwelling sin—for not only does the flesh lust against the spirit, but “the Spirit [lusteth] against the flesh” (Gal. 5:17). The “divine nature” has wrought “godliness” in us, drawing off the heart of its recipient from the world to heaven, making him to long after holiness and pant for communion with God. Herein lies the radical difference between those described in 2 Peter 1:3-4, and the ones in 2 Peter 2:20—nothing is said of the latter being “partakers of the divine nature!” Their escaping from “the pollutions of the world” was merely a temporary reformation from *outward* defilements and gross sins, as their *turning again* to the same makes clear (2 Pet. 2:22).

“We know that we have passed from death unto life, because

we love the brethren” (1 John 3:14). Here is set before us still another criterion by which the Christian may determine whether the great change has been wrought in him. First, let us point out that it seems to be clearly implied here (as in other places in this epistle—e.g. 1 John 2:3; 4:13) that the miracle of grace is *not* perceptible to our senses at the moment it occurs, but is cognizable by us afterward from its effects and fruits. We cannot recall a single statement in Scripture which expressly declares, or even plainly implies, that the saint is conscious of regeneration during the moment of quickening. There are indeed numbers (the writer among them) who can recall and specify the very hour when they were first convicted of sin, realized their lost condition, trusted in the atoning blood, and felt the burden of their hearts roll away. Nevertheless, they knew not when life was imparted unto their spiritually dead souls—life which prompted them *to* breathe, feel, see, hear and act in a way they never had previously. Life must be present before there can be any of the functions and exercises of life. One dead in sin cannot savingly repent and believe.

Now it is one of the designs for which the first epistle of John was written that the regenerate may have assurance that eternal life has been imparted to them (1 John 5:13), several different evidences and manifestations of that life being described in the course of the apostle’s letter. The one specified in 1 John 3:14 is “love [for] the brethren.” By nature, we were inclined to hate the children of God. It could not be otherwise: since we hated God—and that because He is holy and righteous—we despised those in whom the image of His moral perfections appeared. Contrariwise, when “the love of God” was “shed abroad in our hearts” (Rom. 5:5), and we were brought to delight ourselves in Him, His people became highly esteemed by us; and the more evidently they were conformed unto His likeness, the more we loved them. That “love” is of a vastly superior nature from any natural sentiment, being a holy principle. Consequently, it is something very different from mere zeal for a certain group or party spirit, or even an affection for those whose sentiments and

temperaments are like our own. It is a divine, spiritual, and holy love, which goes out unto the whole family of God—not respect to this or that brother, but which embraces “the brethren” at large.

That of which 1 John 3:14 treats is a peculiar love for those saved by Christ. To love the Redeemer and His redeemed is congenial to the spiritual life which has been communicated to their renewed souls. It is a fruit of that holy disposition which the Spirit has wrought in them. It must be distinguished from what is so often mis-termed “love” in the natural realm, which consists only of sentimentality and amiability. The regenerate “love the brethren” not because they are affable and genial, or because they give them a warm welcome to their circle. They “love the brethren” not because they deem them wise and orthodox, but because of their *godliness*; and the more their godliness is evidenced, the more will they love them; and hence, they love *all* the godly—no matter what be their denominational connections. They love those whom Christ loves; they love them for His sake—because they belong to Him. Their love is a spiritual, disinterested, and faithful one which seeks the good of its objects, which sympathizes with them in their spiritual trials and conflicts, which bears them up in their prayers before the Throne of Grace, which unselfishly shows kindness unto them, which admonishes and rebukes when that be necessary.

But that to which we would here direct particular attention is the language employed by the Spirit in describing the great change, namely, “passed from death unto life” (1 John 3:14). The same expression was used by our Lord in John 5:24, though there, its force is rather different: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth [with an inward or spiritual ear] my word, and [savingly] believeth on him that sent me, *hath everlasting life* [the very fact he so heareth and believeth is proof he has it], and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.” The “shall not come into condemnation” brings in the forensic side of things; and therefore, the “passed from death unto life” (which, be it duly noted, is in addition to “hath

everlasting life” in the preceding clause) is *judicial*. The one who has had “everlasting life” sovereignly imparted to him—and who, in consequence thereof, “hears” or heeds the Gospel of Christ and savingly believes—has for ever emerged from the place of condemnation, being no longer under the curse of the Law, but now entitled to its award of “life,” by virtue of the personal obedience or meritorious righteousness of Christ being imputed unto him; for which reason, he is exhorted, “Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through [in] Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:11).

But 1 John 3:14 is not treating of the forensic or legal side of things, but the experimental, that of which God’s elect are made the subjects of in their own persons. Here it is not a relative change (one in relation to the Law), but an actual one that is spoken of. They have “passed from” that fearful state in which they were born—“alienated from the life of God” (Eph. 4:18): a state of unregeneracy. They have been supernaturally and effectually called forth from the grave of sin and death. They have entered “into life,” which speaks of the state which they are now in before God as the consequence of His quickening them. They have for ever left that sepulchre of spiritual death—in which by nature they lay—and have been brought into the spiritual sphere to “walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4). And “love [for] the brethren” is one of the effects and evidences of the miracle of grace of which they have been the favoured subjects. They evince their spiritual resurrection by this mark: they love the beloved of Christ; their hearts are spontaneously drawn out unto—and they earnestly seek the good of—all who wear Christ’s yoke, bear His image, and seek to promote His glory. 1 John 3:14 is not an exhortation, but a factual statement of Christian experience.

Now let the reader most diligently note that in 1 John 3:14, the Holy Spirit has employed the figure of *resurrection* to set forth the great change, and that *it* also must be given due place in our thoughts as we endeavour to form something approaching an

adequate conception of what the miracle of grace consists. Due consideration of this figure should check us in pressing too far that of the new birth. The similitude of resurrection brings before us something distinct, and in some respects, quite different from that which is connoted by “new creation,” “begetting” (James 1:18), or “being born again” (1 Pet. 1:23). Each of the latter denotes the bringing into existence of something which previously existed not; whereas “resurrection” is the quickening of what is there already. The miracle of grace consists of far more than the communication of a new life or nature: it also includes the renovation and purification of the original soul. Because it is a “miracle,” an act of omnipotence, accomplished by the mere fiat of God, it is appropriately likened unto “creation;” yet it needs to be carefully borne in mind that it is not some *thing* which is created in us: for “*we* [ourselves] are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:10). It is the person himself, and not merely a nature, which is born again.

We have now reviewed not less than twenty-five passages from God’s Word, wherein a considerable variety of terms and figures are used to set forth the *different aspects* of the great change which takes place in a person when the miracle of grace is wrought within him; all of which passages, in our judgment, treating of the same. We have not sought to expound or comment upon them at equal length, but, following our usual custom, have rather devoted the most space in an attempt to explain those which are least understood, which present the most difficulty to the average reader, and upon which the commentators often supply the least help. A comparison of those passages will at once show that what theologians generally speak of as “regeneration” or “the effectual call” is very far from being expressed by the Holy Spirit in uniform language; and therefore, that those who restrict their ideas to what is connoted by being born again—or even on the other hand, “a change of heart”—are almost certain to form a very one-sided, inadequate, and faulty conception of what experimental salvation consists. Regeneration is indeed a new birth, or the beginning of a new

life; but that is not *all* it is—there is also something resurrected and renewed, and something washed and transformed!

The Bible is not designed for lazy people. Truth has to be *bought* (Prov. 23:23), but the slothful and worldly-minded are not willing to pay the price required. That “price” is intimated in Proverbs 2:1-5: there must be a diligent applying of the heart, a crying after knowledge, a seeking for an apprehension of spiritual things with that ardour and determination as men employ when seeking for silver; and a searching for a deeper and fuller knowledge of the truth as men put forth when searching for hid treasures—persevering until their quest is successful—if we would really understand the things of God. Those who complain that these articles are “too difficult” or “too deep” for them, do but betray the sad state of their souls and reveal how little they really value the truth; otherwise, they would ask God to enable them to concentrate, and reread these pages perseveringly until they made its contents their own. People are willing to work and study hard and long to master one of the arts or sciences, but where spiritual and eternal things are concerned, it is usually otherwise.

The second of three booklets.

