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SERMONS XVII. & XVIII.

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THE NATIVE CHARACTER OF MAN.

I. JOHN, IV. 7.—*Every one that loveth, is born of God.*

THE love here spoken of, is holy love; which assimilates its subject to God. Every one that loveth, is born of God; that is, is a child of God, and bears his image: It is that love which is styled the fulfilling of the law, and which is the principle of evangelical obedience. It is religion. For every one that loveth, knoweth God: but to know God is life eternal; —is religion. This love does not belong to man by nature. It is never a quality of his heart, as a consequence of his birth; but is the result, in all cases, of a special divine interposition. For, if religion were the character first sustained by man, it would not be true that “every one that loveth is born of God.”

It will be the object of this discourse, TO SHOW THAT MAN IS NOT RELIGIOUS BY NATURE. By religion we intend supreme love to God. By man we mean the entire race: and by the proposition, that man is not religious by nature, we mean, that there is nothing in him, of which religion is the natural effect or consequence, without a special divine interposition. When natural objects produce certain effects uniformly, we suppose that there is in them some cause for such results, which we call their nature; and if there be certain effects which they never produce, we say that it is not in their nature to produce them. When it is affirmed of man, therefore, that he is not religious by nature, we mean that there is nothing in his constitution of which religion is the result, without a special divine interposition; and that the first accountable character which he sustains is not a religious character. It will not be denied, that, if religion exists at all in man, it must be found in his heart; it must consist primarily in the state of his affections towards God—must include a predominant friendship for God, complacency in his character, delight in his service, approbation of his law, and resignation to the dispensations of his providence. With this view of the subject, we remark,

I. UNIVERSAL EXPERIENCE AFFORDS EVIDENCE THAT MAN IS NOT RELIGIOUS BY NATURE.

Have religious affections found a place in your hearts, my hearers, from your earliest years? Do all of you, even now, experience them? Do you believe that you are religious, and that you have been from the beginning?

Are you prepared to die? Whatever you may be disposed to hope from the mercy of God, should you be called suddenly out of time, have you any evidence that you now possess, or ever have possessed, those affections of heart, which constitute a religious character, and are necessary to qualify for heaven? Are you conscious of supreme love to God? Do you love his word, his worship, his people? Do you maintain, habitually, secret prayer, and delight in the duty? Are you meek under injurious treatment, self-denied in temptation, and resigned to the will of God in affliction? This is religion. But is this the experience of any one in this assembly who has no reason to believe that he is born of God? If not, *you* certainly are not religious by nature. And if you present this outline of religious experience to your neighbour, you will find that he has nothing that answers to it in his first accountable state of feeling; and if you extend the inquiry through the world, you will find none who possess religious affections in the beginning.

This truth is confirmed also by the uniform experience of awakened sinners. From the day of Pentecost to the present, multitudes have experienced a deep anxiety for their souls. But universally the cause of this anxiety has been the discovery that they had no religion. They have perceived always that the law of God required of them affections of heart which they did not possess; and nothing has been found to aggravate their distress more than the simple direction, to love the Lord their God supremely, and to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. They have always replied, "we cannot love, we cannot repent, we cannot believe;"—a direct confession that they have no religion. We are sensible that there are multitudes who are not thus awakened. But does their stupidity prove that they are religious? or discredit the consciousness of those who are awakened in respect to their own character? This consciousness then of all who are awakened, that they have no religion, is strong presumptive evidence that the fact is the same with respect to those who are not awakened.

To this we may add the testimony of those who furnish evidence of piety. Their testimony is, that their religious experience is a state of the affections, and is something *new*. We are not insensible that some persons profess religion who disclaim the existence of any great change in the state of their affections towards God; who claim that they have always from their earliest years loved God religiously. But it must be remembered, that the religion to which they lay claim, is not such religion as we have described. To this they make no pretensions; but ridicule it, often, as visionary and enthusiastic. We admit then, that men may have *such* religion as these persons profess without a change of heart. But we insist that the outline of religious experience which we have drawn is the religion of the Bible; and that all who are conscious of possessing it, do testify that it is a state of the affections, entirely new; and that this uniform testimony of the pious strengthens the presumption that religion is never the first character of man, but is always the result of a divine interposition.

II. THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD IS UTTERLY INCONSISTENT WITH THE SUPPOSITION OF NATIVE PIETY IN MAN.

If man is religious by nature, we should expect to witness the effects of early and universal piety in the history of the world. A world whose inhabitants all begin their accountable course religiously, could not surely furnish the same materials for history as a world whose early character is that of alienation from God. But does the history of the world confirm the supposition that man is religious by nature? Of those who, in adult age, afford credible evidence of piety, three fourths at least continue to do so : and the reasons would be stronger in favour of perseverance, if religion were the first character of all men. But do three fourths of the human race, or one fourth, afford evidence of piety from childhood upward? Is it not a rare event to find it at all among children? Among real Christians religion is a predominant principle of action. But does the history of the world show that religion has been the predominant principle of action in the human race? What is the origin of governments but necessity? Families cannot dwell in safety in this world without protection, and therefore associate in tribes; and tribes, wearied with the action and re-action of violence, coalesce for safety, and form the more extended communities of nations. Until these great associations were formed the world had no rest, and the arts of civilized life were scarcely known. But towards each other nations have displayed the same principles of ambition and violence which marked the conduct of individuals, and families, and tribes. The history of nations is the history of crimes and blood, and not of peace and good will to men. If men were religious by nature, we might expect that the knowledge and worship of the true God would be in every age universal. Instead of this, two thirds of the human family have been idolaters. Notwithstanding the invisible things of God are clearly seen by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; and notwithstanding all that God has done by revelation, and by miracle, and by his Spirit, two thirds of the human family have changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to four-footed beasts and creeping things. Why is this? The evidence of His being is not obscure, and the divinity of idols is not supported by even specious evidence. The service of God is reasonable, pure, and benign; while that of idols is obscene, expensive, and bloody. Could a race, of which every individual commenced his accountable course under the influence of religion, have done thus?

III. IT IS THE UNIFORM TESTIMONY OF THE BIBLE, THAT MEN ARE NOT RELIGIOUS BY NATURE.

1. This is strongly implied in the utter silence of the scriptures in respect to the piety of man by nature. If the first character which man sustains is a religious character, the scriptures could not have failed to recognise it. It would be a commanding fact which would extend its implications through every page, and modify every doctrine. Surely the descriptions of a religious and of an alienated world would not be the same. But we have examined, one by one, all the passages which speak of the heart of man, and there is not *one* which declares or implies that it is the subject of religion by nature. Whence this silence? It is one great object of the Bible to make

man acquainted with his own heart ; and much is disclosed concerning its wickedness. Why is nothing said of its excellence, if religion be one of its native attributes ? This silence, though only negative testimony, corroborates greatly the preceding evidence that man is not religious by nature.

2. The Bible ascribes to the natural heart of man a character utterly incompatible with the existence of religion. Before the flood, every imagination of man's heart is described as being evil only, continually ; and after that event, as evil still, from his youth. This last declaration is made also as a reason why God in all future ages will no more curse the ground for man's sake,—affording testimony, not only that the heart of man was evil then from his youth, but that it would continue to be so through all ages ;—unreclaimed by judgments however numerous or severe. Thirteen hundred years later the hearts of the sons of men are described as “ full of evil.” And still later, as “ deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” The account which is given of the heart by our Saviour is as explicit and forcible as any of the preceding, “ Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, blasphemies.”

Upon this testimony of the Bible we remark, that the heart of man is never described as becoming thus wicked by any change from native goodness to evil since the fall of Adam. But when described as evangelically good, it is always done in terms which imply a change from *evil* to *goodness*.

Whenever men conduct wickedly, they are regarded as illustrating their own natural character—as obeying the dictates of their own hearts. But when they manifest religious affections, these are described as the fruits of the Spirit ; and when they are given up to irreclaimable wickedness, they are given up to their own hearts' lust—to their foolish and darkened hearts—to vile affections through the lust of their own hearts—after their hard and impenitent hearts treasuring up wrath. How then stands the testimony of the Bible concerning the heart of man ? It is silent as to the existence in it of religion : It is described in terms which preclude its existence. It is never represented as becoming bad by the loss of religion, or as being good, except as the effect of a divine interposition ; and when abandoned to itself, it is always represented as being desperately wicked. Will it be alleged that this testimony is ancient, and that the heart of man may have changed for the better ? To break the force of the testimony it must not only be possible that a change may have taken place, but it must be proved that it actually has taken place. Can such proof be found in the Bible ? Is there a passage which asserts or implies that a universal change has taken place in the heart of man since the preceding descriptions of it were placed upon record ?

Will it be alleged that Enoch, and Noah, and Moses, and Abraham, and others are spoken of as righteous, without any *mention* that they had experienced a change of heart ? If it were so, it would not prove that no change had been experienced. The omission to recognise the change in the record, does not prove that it never happened. But it is implied of all these that they did experience a change of character. Faith implies a change of character, and is the gift of God. But by faith Abel offered a

more excellent sacrifice than Cain. By faith Enoch walked with God. By faith Abraham offered his son. By faith Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. Will it be said that the preceding proof is contained in a few detached texts of Scripture? The texts are the testimony of God. They relate to the subject in question; and are direct and explicit. They are not detached from the context, to speak a meaning which they would not be authorized to speak in their connection. And as to their being detached in any other sense, what if they were all contained on one page? would that increase their perspicuity? Or what if they were multiplied an hundred fold? would that increase the evidence of divine testimony? How near together must the declarations of God be placed, and how often must they be repeated, to be entitled to credit? And what is the character of those to whom the Lord speaketh once, yea twice, and they regard it not?

3. The scriptural account of childhood and youth implies that mankind are not religious by nature. "Every imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." "Childhood and youth are vanity." "Folly is bound up in the heart of a child." "The wicked are estranged from the womb."

Could all this be said of childhood and youth, if the first accountable character they sustain were a religious character? Is every imagination of the pious evil? Is religion vanity, or folly, or estrangement from God? It must be remembered also that the preceding are not specific descriptions of some children and youth, but generic descriptions of the entire race of man in the early periods of life.

4. The generic descriptions of man contained in the Bible are such as preclude the supposition that he is religious by nature.

The term *man* includes all men of all nations. One nation is not man. All nations but one are not man. Every individual of the race is included; and whatever is declared of the *genus*, is declared concerning every individual as such. Is the lion ferocious? It is the character of all the race. Is the asp venomous? It is true of every asp. Is man born to trouble as the sparks fly upward? none then escape trouble. Does he die and waste away? there is no discharge then from that war.

When it is demanded, then, what is man that he should be clean, or he that is born of a woman that he should be righteous? it is a positive declaration that man is not clean—is not righteous—as a natural consequence of his birth. He possesses strength, and intelligence, and memory, and will, and affections, and appetites, and passions, as the result of a constitution with which he is born. But moral purity—righteousness—it is expressly declared, is not, like these, the consequence of natural birth.

The *world*, is another generic term by which the human race is characterized; and always in a manner which excludes the supposition of religion as being the first or natural character of man. We know that we (Christians) are of God; [that is, are born of God,] and the whole world lieth in wickedness. He (Christ) was in the world, and the world knew him not. O, righteous Father, the world hath not known thee. Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? If the world hate you, ye

know that it hated me before it hated you. I have given them thy word, and the world hath hated them. If ye [my disciples] were of the world, the world would love his own ; but because ye are not of the world, therefore the world hateth you. In these passages the world is contrasted with the pious ; and both together, like the ancient terms, Jew and Gentile, include all men. There is no middle class which belongs neither to the pious nor to the world. But the world is described as ignorant of God ; as alienated from God ; as opposed to Jesus Christ, and his cause and people ; as lying in wickedness ; as dead in trespasses and sins. Is this the description of a race whose first accountable character is that of loyalty to God ?

The term *flesh* is also a generic term, descriptive of man in his native state. " My Spirit shall not always strive with man, for that, (or because) he also is *flesh*." His being an animal, furnished no reason, surely, why the Spirit of God should not strive with him. It is his moral nature, therefore, which is called *flesh* ; and which is described in other places as alienated from God, and as lusting against the Spirit ; furnishing an obvious reason why the Spirit might abandon man. In his discourse with Nicodemus, our Saviour speaks of the *flesh* as being that *moral* nature of man which is the consequence of his natural birth. " That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." Our Saviour would not surely undertake to convince Nicodemus that the animal body is *flesh*. *Flesh* and *spirit* are therefore moral qualities contrasted : the one, forming the first character of man ; the other, the result of a special interposition of the divine Spirit. The one disqualifying, and the other fitting a man for the kingdom of heaven. The one, that moral nature of man which renders regeneration indispensable : the other, that holy nature which is produced by the Spirit of God, when he renews the heart.

The *flesh* is in other places described as the comprehensive principle of moral evil in man, as the Spirit is described as being the efficient cause of all good. The works of the *flesh* are adultery, fornication, idolatry, hatred, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelings, and such like : But the fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. The *flesh* comprehends the depravity which remains in the Christian after he is renewed. I know that in me, in my *flesh*, there dwelleth no good thing. All my goodness is the result of regeneration ; all my sin, the remains of my corrupt nature, called the *flesh*. The *flesh* lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit lusteth against the *flesh* ; and these two are contrary the one to the other, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. The *flesh*, then, being the first character of man, and the comprehensive principle of evil in him, is so described as to preclude the possibility of religion as his first moral nature. For the carnal or fleshly mind is enmity against God. To be carnally minded, is death ; and they that are in the *flesh* cannot please God ; and they that live after the *flesh* shall die.

5. All those terms which divide the race of man into two great moral divisions : such as the righteous and the wicked, the holy and the unholy, the godly and the ungodly, the just and the unjust, imply that, not a reli-

giōus, but a depraved character, is first sustained. That these terms of contrast include all men is certain. From the nature of free agency, and from the declaration of God, we know that neutrality cannot exist among accountable beings. Where men are qualified to obey, and love is required, neutrality would be disobedience. To regard God with indifference, compared with the creature, would be adding insult to rebellion. But such a state of mind is impossible. No man can serve two masters—nor be indifferent towards them. He will love or hate, obey or despise. All men, then, are holy or unholy, righteous or wicked. But which is the first character sustained by man? the holy or the unholy? Not the holy, but the unholy. There is no intimation in the Bible, that men become unholy by any change from good to bad; but Christians are continually described as becoming holy by a change from bad to good. They are begotten again. They are born of God. They are created anew. They are raised from the dead. The old man is put off, and the new man is put on. By all this variety of language it is implied, that the evil nature of man is first, and that his holy nature is the result of a special divine interposition.

6. The avowed object of the death of Christ decides that mankind are not religious by nature. It was rendered necessary by a character sustained by all men. And what was the character sustained which awakened the compassion of God, and called from heaven his only begotten Son to die for man? The character sustained was that of alienation from God. Herein is the love of Christ commended, in that while we were yet enemies, he died for us. He suffered, the just for the unjust. "He died for all;" but it was because they "were all dead." In accordance with these representations, men are addressed by the gospel as *dead*; and are commanded to arise from the dead—as blind; and are commanded to see—as wicked; and are commanded to forsake their wicked way and turn to God. They are addressed as impenitent; and are called upon to repent; as in unbelief; and are commanded to believe. Every condition of pardon, proposed to men in the gospel, implies that they do not by nature possess it. The apostles, in their great commission, were directed to address every creature as impenitent: and Paul, in particular, was sent to the heathen, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to the living God.

When men obey the gospel, they are described as renewed—as reconciled—as sustaining new affections. Old things are passed away; behold all things are become new. The entire Christian character is described in the Bible as the work of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, faith, &c. But the Spirit operates only in the application of the redemption purchased by Christ, in carrying into effect the objects of his death. Before he renews the hearts of men, therefore, for whom Christ died, they are enemies, unjust, and dead in sin.

Those who reject the gospel, and perish, are represented as sustaining their own original character—as despising the riches of the goodness of God, and after their hard and impenitent heart, treasuring up wrath:—as

refusing when the Saviour called, and disregarding when he stretched out his hand. In short, men are described as becoming wicked, as a consequence of the fall of Adam, and religious, in consequence, and only as the consequence, of the interposition of Jesus Christ, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost.

7. It is declared in direct terms, expressly and unequivocally, that mankind are not religious in their first character. The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men to see if there were any that did understand and seek God. To know and to seek God implies religion. The investigation, therefore, was instituted to decide the question, whether there was an individual of the human race who was religious by nature.—Not whether any had returned, of those who had gone astray; for of such we read in the context, and throughout the Bible; but to ascertain whether there were any of the race of man who had never turned away from God, but remained, like Abdiel, “faithful among the faithless.” The result of this omniscient scrutiny is, “They are all gone aside; they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good; no, not one.” This is the declaration of God concerning the children of men: the result of an omniscient investigation, made expressly to decide whether the effects of the fall were universal, or whether any religious affection remained. The apostle Paul quotes this declaration of the Most High to prove, and he says that it does prove, both Jews and Gentiles, (terms which then included all men,) that they are all under sin. But to be under sin is to be under its dominion, and under condemnation: for he proves the fact, that all are under sin, to cut off the hope of justification by the deeds of the law, and to establish the doctrine of justification by faith. But to be under the dominion of sin, and in an *unjustified* condition is surely inconsistent with the existence of religion. To corroborate his argument, the apostle quotes the following passage from the Old Testament, and he quotes it, that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world become guilty before God.—“Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness; their feet are swift to shed blood; destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace have they not known; there is no fear of God before their eyes.” Now abate from this passage as much as is possible on the ground of metaphor, yet as it is quoted in a regular argument to stop every mouth, and to prove the whole world guilty before God, it does most certainly exclude the supposition of piety in those who are thus characterized. An open sepulchre is not the place of life: the poison of asps is not an emblem of health; and cursing and bitterness are not the fruits of the Spirit: nor are destruction and misery found in the ways of wisdom: nor can it ever be said of the truly pious, that they have no fear of God before their eyes. Language is of no use, and inspiration affords no evidence of truth, if these terms, applied to stop every mouth and prove the whole world guilty before God, do not prove that man in his first character is not religious.

8. There is also in the scriptures much inferential evidence on this sub-

ject. If man, in his first character, is religious, we should expect the fact would be implied in all the doctrines of the Bible, and if he is not religious, that it would also be implied. The difference is so great that the same doctrines cannot be true on either supposition. But to which of the two suppositions are the doctrines of the Bible accommodated? If man is not religious by nature, we should expect to find the necessity of a great moral change inculcated in the Bible. And do we not find it? "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." We should expect to find Christians described as those who had experienced this great change: and thus they are described as born of God, created anew, and passed from death unto life. As there can be no medium between religion and irreligion, we should expect the change would be sudden. And do not all the terms which describe it imply that it is sudden? It is a creation. Is there a point of time in the process of creation, in which a substance is neither in being nor out of being? It is a resurrection from the dead. Is there a moment in which the body is neither dead nor alive? If all men in the beginning withhold from God the homage of the heart, we should expect they would continue to do so, until reclaimed by a divine interposition. And thus we read of those who received Christ, that they were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of man, *but of God.*

If religion in man is the result of a divine interposition, we should expect to find it described as an act of grace which God might grant, or withhold, according to his good pleasure. And do we not read that he hath mercy on whom he will have mercy? If men are without religion, we should expect that they would be required to give the heart to God, and repent, and believe immediately; and that those who perished would be represented as self-destroyers. And is it not so? Repent—believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. And do not all who perish under the light of the gospel, perish by neglecting the great salvation? Turn ye, for why will ye die? I called and ye refused. This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world and men loved darkness rather than light.

If men are not religious in their first character, we should expect to find all their actions charged with sinful defect. And in accordance with this expectation we read, "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord." "The ploughing of the wicked is sin." "So then they that are in the flesh can not please God." And "without faith it is impossible to please him."

In conclusion of the argument, I have only to add, that if the first accountable character of man is a religious character, this entire body of evidence must be reversed. All men must be conscious of supreme love to God in early life; and conviction of sin and a moral renovation must be confined to those who have lost their religion; while the great body of Christians must be supposed to be such without the consciousness of any change. At the same time the history of the world must be found to be a history of the fruits of piety,—idolatry itself being only an aberration of religious affection in children emulous to please their heavenly Father! If

should moreover be found written upon the unerring page, 'Every imagination of man's heart is *good* from his youth. The children of men have *not* gone out of the way. There is none who *doth not* understand and seek God, and do good, no, not one. The heart of the sons of men is full of *goodness*, out of which proceed *holy* thoughts, benevolent deeds, chastity, truth, and reverence for God. What therefore is man that he should be *wicked*? or he that is born of a woman that he should *not* be religious? How *lovely* and pure is man, who drinketh in *righteousness* like water. This is the *approbation* that *darkness* is come into the world, and men have loved *light* more than darkness, because their deeds are *good*. The whole world lieth in *righteousness*. He [Christ] was in the world and the world *knew* him. O righteous Father, the world hath *known* thee. The friendship of the world is *friendship with God*. If the world hath loved you, ye know that it loved *me* before it loved you. Be ye therefore *conformed* to the world, and be ye *not transformed* by any renewing of your mind. My Spirit shall *always* strive with man because *he* is spirit. For that which is born of the *flesh* is *spirit*. Marvel not that I say unto you ye *must not* be born again. For the works of the *flesh* are *love, joy, peace, faith*; and the fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, faith. In me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth *every* good thing. Jesus Christ came to seek and to save those who were *not* lost; and he died *not* for his enemies—*not* the just for the unjust. The Gospel demands of men *no new character*, and all the doctrines of the Bible imply the early and universal piety of the human family.'

And now, who is prepared thus to reverse the whole testimony of *experience*, of *history*, and of the *Holy Scriptures*? In view of such overwhelming evidence to the contrary, will any man pretend to believe, that mankind are religious by nature?

If you had as much evidence that your water was poisoned, as you have that the heart of man by nature is not pious—would you drink it? Were the proof as clear that an assassin would meet you on turning a corner—would you go thither? Were it proved by as various and conclusive evidence that the fire was kindling on your dwelling—would you compose yourself to sleep? Will you then, in opposition to such evidence, still endeavour to persuade yourself of the native goodness of the human heart? If it were merely the body whose life was threatened by the deception, I might still cry earnestly to you to beware: but it is your *soul*, and your future and eternal well-being which you put in jeopardy by setting at naught such evidence. Without religion you cannot be admitted to heaven; and would not enjoy heaven if you were admitted. Without religion you can neither keep the law nor obey the gospel; and cannot escape the condemnation which rests upon transgression and unbelief. Will you then shut your eyes against light, and stop your ears against admonition? It is but for a moment, compared with eternity, that you can thus deceive yourself, and cry, Peace. The overwhelming consciousness must soon press upon your amazed heart, that you are without holiness, and cannot see the Lord; and that the harvest is past, the summer ended, and you not saved. There is no hope in your case while you think your heart is good, and feel no need of a divine

renovation. They that are whole need not the physician, but they that are sick : and Jesus Christ came to call, not the righteous, but sinners to repentance. While the delusion prevails that you are rich, and stand in need of nothing, you will reject the counsel of Christ, to apply to him for eye-salve that you may see, and for white raiment to cover the shame of your nakedness. You will do nothing to save your own soul, and God will do nothing to save it, while, under the concentrated light of evidence, you remain wilfully ignorant of your malady, and wilfully negligent of your only remedy. Admit, then, the painful, alarming fact, that you have no religion, and without delay commence the inquiry what you must do to be saved, and thus escape the coming wrath, and lay hold on eternal life. All who are now in heaven were once like you without God, and without Christ, and without hope ; and all who are now on earth, strangers and pilgrims seeking a better country, were once like you without religion. But He who commanded the light to shine out of darkness has shined in their hearts—and the same blessed Spirit is able and willing to enlighten you : but you must confess, and not cover your sin—you must come to the light, and not shun it—you must be convinced of sin, of righteousness, and of a judgment to come—you must be born again, or you cannot see the kingdom of God.

SERMON XVIII.

I. JOHN, iv. 7.—*Every one that loveth, is born of God.*

THE preceding discourse furnishes a scriptural account of human depravity. It is comprehended in the fact, that men have naturally no religion. If this has not been proved, we must abandon our confidence in the power of language to express ideas, and of evidence to prove matters of fact.

All which is admirable in intellect, or monitory in conscience, or comprehensive in knowledge, or refined in taste, or delicate in sensibility, or powerful in natural affection, may be found in man as the result of constitution, or the effect of intellectual and moral culture : but religion is not found, except as the result of a special divine interposition. The temple is beautiful, but it is a temple in ruins ;—the divinity has departed, and the fire on the altar is extinct.

This depravity of man, implied in his destitution of religion, may be described briefly in the following particulars :—

1. It is *voluntary*.—A depraved nature is by many understood to mean, a nature excluding choice, and producing sin by an unavoidable necessity ; as fountains of water pour fourth their streams, or trees produce their fruit, or animals propagate their kind. The mistake lies in supposing that the nature of matter and mind are the same ; whereas they are entirely different. The nature of matter excludes perception, understanding, and choice ; but the nature of mind includes them all. Neither a holy nor a depraved nature are *possible* without understanding, conscience, and choice. To say of an accountable creature, that he is depraved by nature, is only to say, that, rendered capable by his Maker of obedience, he disobeys from the

commencement of his accountability. To us it does not belong to say *when* accountability commences, and to what extent it exists in the early stages of life: This is the prerogative of the Almighty. Doubtless there is a time when man becomes accountable, and the law of God obligatory: And what we have proved is, that, whenever the time arrives that it becomes the duty of man to love God more than the creature, he does in fact love the creature more than God—does most freely and most wickedly set his affections on things below, and refuse to set them on things above, and that his depravity consists in this state of the affections. For this universal concurrence of man in preferring the creature to the Creator, there is doubtless some cause or reason: but it cannot be a cause of which disobedience is an involuntary and unavoidable result. Ability to obey, is indispensable to moral obligation; and the moment any cause should render love to God impossible, that moment the obligation to love would cease, and man could no more have a depraved nature, than any other animal. A depraved nature can no more exist without voluntary agency, and accountability, than a material nature can exist without solidity and extension. Whatever effect, therefore, the fall of man may have had on his race, it has not had the effect to render it impossible for man to love God religiously; and whatever may be the early constitution of man, there is nothing in it, and nothing withheld from it, which renders disobedience unavoidable, and obedience impossible. The first sin in every man is *free*, and might have been, and ought to have been avoided. At the time, whenever it is, that it first becomes the duty of man to be religious, he refuses, and refuses in the possession of such faculties as render religion a reasonable service, and him inexcusable, and justly punishable. The supreme love of the world is a matter of choice, formed under such circumstances, as that man might have chosen otherwise, and ought to have chosen otherwise, and is therefore exposed to punishment for this his voluntary and inexcusable disobedience. If, therefore, man is depraved by nature, it is a voluntary and accountable nature which is depraved, exercised in disobedience to the law of God. This is according to the Bible—"They have all *gone* aside,"—each man has been voluntary and active in his transgression. "They go astray as soon as they be born;" that is, in early life:—How early, so as to deserve punishment, God only knows.—"The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God."—Every imagination or exercise of man's heart is evil. **NATIVE DEPRAVITY, THEN, IS A STATE OF THE AFFECTIONS, IN A VOLUNTARY ACCOUNTABLE CREATURE, AT VARIANCE WITH DIVINE REQUIREMENT FROM THE BEGINNING OF ACCOUNTABILITY.**

2. The depravity of man, implied in his destitution of religion, is *positive* depravity. Multitudes are willing to admit the fact, that they have no religion, who cannot be convinced that they are in a state of positive opposition to God. They are not conscious of opposition to God; they have a respect for his word and worship; and desire, they think, to be religious; and do many things with the hope of obtaining religion. But their transgression of the law and of the gospel, in refusing to love, repent, and believe, is voluntary and positive transgression. Not to love, repent, and believe,

when these duties are required, is positive disobedience, both to the law, and to the gospel. But, can a subject disobey the fundamental laws of the government under which he lives, and not be opposed to the government, and positively wicked? and can a man disobey in his heart the law of God and his gospel, and not be positively opposed to his Maker and Redeemer? The divine requirement is, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God," and the man who has no religion refuses. The prohibition is, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me;" but the man without religion, in defiance of this prohibition, does love the creature more than God. Is not this positive disobedience? Were a course of action persisted in, which God forbids, that would be counted positive disobedience. But the obedience of the heart is of all others the most appreciated, and the disobedience of the heart, of all others, regarded as most evil. Some have admitted that they do not love God supremely; but have insisted, that neither are they opposed to God. But this neutral state, if it were possible, would be adding insult to disobedience: for the command is, Thou shalt not be indifferent,—“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart.” Now, what greater insult can be offered to the glorious God, than to refuse him our *preference*, and hang in equilibrio between the attractions of his infinite glory, and the influence of a perishing world? But neutrality between such objects as God and the world, is impossible. It is the nature of mind to choose, if not prevented by force, as much as it is of matter to be quiescent, if not moved by external powers. To prefer the world, or God, is the unavoidable result of free agency. Not to choose at all, is the attribute of a stock or a stone; but not of a rational, accountable being. Nor is there any practical indication of neutrality. For whatever reverence a man may feel for God, and whatever external respect he may pay to him: his own consciousness will decide, and his course of conduct will confirm the decision, that his affections are set on things below, and his sources of enjoyment are found, not in God, but in the things of time. Here then the great law of the kingdom of God is violated by all who are without religion. But can the fundamental laws of a government be violated without opposition to the government?

This view which we have given of the mind, as excluding neutrality, is confirmed by the Bible. "No man can serve two masters." "He that is not for me is against me." "The friendship of the world is enmity with God." Hence, according to the Bible, men are holy or unholy, just or unjust, righteous or wicked, godly or ungodly, penitent or impenitent, believers or unbelievers, in a state of pardon or of condemnation. Therefore, the depravity of the man, who is destitute of religion, is positive depravity.

3. The depravity of man, which is implied in his destitution of religion, is *great*. Many suppose that although they are not religious, they are not *very* sinful. Provided they are amiable and conscientious in their moral deportment and useful in their lives, they cannot conceive that God should have much reason to be displeased with them. If they had been guilty of great actual crimes, they would be ready to admit that they were great sinners. But so long as the chief that can be said against them is, that they

have no religion, *this*, if it be a crime at all, is so common, and results, (as they think,) so much from unavoidable necessity, as almost to take away guilt, and leave a fair balance of good deeds and virtues to recommend them to God.

Far different from this, is Heaven's estimation of the guilt of being without religion. According to the Bible, whenever it becomes the duty of man to love God religiously, it is a duty of the highest obligation, the violation of which constitutes criminality of the highest order. The Being who demands love is worthy; the beings of whom he demands it are able to love; and the affections of his creatures belong to God. He claims them as his right, and declares that he is robbed when they are withheld. The highest good of his subjects for time and eternity, is found in giving their hearts to God, and ruin is the consequence of refusal. The obligation to love according to the law, is therefore superlatively great. It is also constant; so that the sinfulness of man is great in its nature and great in its amount; for it is the violation, constantly, of the highest possible obligation. And when this is done by those who are favoured with the gospel, their sin is immensely aggravated by the consideration of all that God has done to save them from death. They have perverted the means of grace, the mercies of his providence, and the judgments of his rod—they have despised the riches of his goodness, and the fierceness of his wrath. They have trodden under foot the blood of his Son, and done despite to the Spirit of grace:—and is all this criminality of a low degree and small amount, and so neutralised by human inability, as to be more than balanced by amiable dispositions and good actions? As God views the subject, those who do not love him, are sinful to an astonishing degree. "Hear, oh, heavens! and give ear oh, earth! for the Lord hath spoken it, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me!"

4. The depravity of man implied in his destitution of religion, is *entire*. Most men who admit that they have no religion, resist the conclusion, that they are therefore *entirely* depraved. But to decide the point, we have only to ascertain in what purity of heart or holiness consists, and whether a man who has no religion possesses it. Purity of heart or holiness consists in *conformity of heart to the law of God*, and includes, of course, *supreme love to God*. He, therefore, who has not supreme love to God, possesses no such affections of heart towards God as the law requires; and, so far as his heart is concerned, his depravity is entire. And as to actions, however correct in form they may be, they cannot, without holiness of heart, be regarded as obedience. The entireness of human depravity, therefore, consists in the constant voluntary refusal of man to love the Lord his God, with supreme complacency and good will.

The view we have taken of the character of man, as destitute of religion, illustrates both the nature and the necessity of *regeneration*. The language of the Bible is clear and forcible on this subject; but it is claimed by many, that as there is no such moral defect in man as lays a foundation for the necessity of a universal moral change; those passages which might seem to teach it must be restricted, and understood to teach only the necessity

of conversion from paganism, or Judaism, to Christianity. But the course of evidence, in these discourses, has disclosed a universal and appalling moral defect in man, which renders just such a change necessary as the language of the Bible indicates, according to its most direct and obvious import. To be without religion, is to be *dead in sin*: and to be so renewed by the Spirit as to love God supremely, is to be *raised from the dead*, and *born of God*. This is the change without which no man can see the kingdom of God.

This change, so indispensable, must also be a *perceptible* change. The attention to the means of grace and growing seriousness and solicitude which precede it, are progressive, as is the subsequent increase of holiness and evidence of the change. But the change itself from selfishness to holiness—from supreme love of the world, to supreme love of God—is not a progressive, but an instantaneous change. This accords with the representations of the Bible. It is a new creation, a resurrection from the dead, &c. I do not say that every Christian perceives, at the time, the moment of transition; or that, perceiving that a change of some kind has taken place, he perceives at once the evidence that it is a saving change. Not unfrequently days and weeks may pass away, before he will dare to hope: and sometimes the truly pious, from a misapprehension of their evidence, may for years be afflicted with doubts and fears concerning their state. But that the change is real, and great, and instantaneous, when a sinner, who has loved the world supremely, first sets his affections on things above, is self-evident. It would be ridiculous in the relations of life, to talk of unperceived affection for a father or mother, husband or wife; and equally absurd is the supposition of loving God more than the world, without the occurrence of any perceptible change.

There is, I am aware, a general feeling, that men are not quite prepared to die without becoming better. But this emendation, it is thought by many, is to be attained gradually, by moral culture, and imperceptibly, as the grass grows by rain and sunshine. Any great solicitude, or deep conviction of sin, or sudden peace and joy, it is supposed, are not to be expected, but deprecated as delusion. And some, and even ministers, warn their friends not to be alarmed, and not to expect any sudden and happy change in their views and affections. But if there be with every man a time when he is not religious, there must be a time when he becomes religious. Even were religion the result of natural principles duly cultivated, there must be a time when cultivation has produced its results. If it were produced by the cultivation of some low degrees of goodness in man; still there must be a time when it reaches to the degree of goodness which constitutes religion. Or if, as the scriptures teach, there is no religion in the heart of man by nature, then there must be a moment of time when its existence in the heart begins. For that which once had no existence, and comes into being, must have a beginning. There is no medium between existence and non-existence, in matter, mind, or morals; no moment in which a thing is neither created nor uncreated, neither in existence nor out of existence.

It is absurd to speak of love as in a process of gradual formation: for what is half-formed love, repentance, faith, or any other trait of Christian

character? How long must culture operate to produce the simple and indivisible emotion of love to God? And if the obedience of love must be gradual, and cannot be instantaneous, how is it that the requirements of Heaven should so disregard this constitution of mind, as to command man immediately to love and repent, and warn him of growing hardness of heart as the consequence of delay? As all men, then, are destitute of religion by nature, its commencement in the soul is at all times sudden. There is a moment when he who loved the world more than God begins to love God more than the world.

You have now before you the evidence that men are not religious by nature; and that this destitution implies the universal and entire depravity of man, and the necessity of a great and sudden change in the affections, by the special influence of the Holy Spirit. This is not a matter of abstract speculation, of no practical utility. Our being and accountability are eternal, and the law of God, which is the rule of obligation, is eternal. Heaven is a religious world, and the present is our state, and our only state of probation. Here in this morning of our being the elements are formed of an immutable character in the eternal state: and if that which is first formed is one that unfits us for heaven, and fits us for destruction, can we too soon or too clearly perceive it, or too deeply feel it, or too earnestly strive to be conformed in our affections to the requirements of the Gospel, to the conditions of pardon, and to the exigencies of the heavenly state? What then is the improvement which you will make of these discourses, whose hearts tell you that you have no religion? Will you say, that these are *hard sayings*, and that you do not like such doctrine? But is it therefore untrue, because it is painful? And will you, dare you, in the presence of such evidence, reject it in favour of the dictates of mere inclination? Will you apply to such as endeavour to explain away this evidence, and speak to you smooth things, and prophesy deceits? Beware! others before have done this, and "God sent them strong delusions, that they might believe a lie and be damned, because they had no pleasure in the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." You may persuade yourself, or be persuaded, that a change of heart is not necessary to prepare you for death and heaven, and yet,

"This fearful truth will still remain,
The sinner must be born again,
Or drink the wrath of God."

Do you then at length inquire what you must do to be saved? The answer is plain—Repent, and you shall be forgiven; believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved. Neglect then the subject no longer. Resolve that from this time you will make the salvation of your soul your first and great concern. Break off your alliance with vain persons and diverting amusements: read your Bible daily and earnestly alone; and lift up your cry to God, in earnest supplication for mercy; plead guilty, and cry for pardon through a Redeemer's blood.