

Sinners Bound to Change Their Own Hearts

by Charles Finney

A change of heart is a change in the controlling preference of the mind, from selfishness to benevolence, and is a necessary step towards salvation.

Scripture: Ezekiel 18:31, Matthew 15:19, John 3:3, Acts 3:19, Romans 12:2, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 6:7-8, Philippians 2:13, James 4:8, 1 Peter 1:22

Topics: "Transformation", "Personal Responsibility"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the necessity for sinners to actively seek a new heart and spirit, as commanded in Ezekiel 18:31. He argues that this requirement is not unreasonable, as it pertains to a moral change rather than a physical one, and that individuals possess the agency to choose their moral disposition. Finney clarifies that while God is the ultimate source of transformation, the act of changing one's heart is a personal responsibility that cannot be done passively. He asserts that true repentance involves a shift in preference from self-interest to the glory of God, and that this change is essential for salvation.

Transcript

Ezek xviii. 31.

MAKE YOU A NEW HEART AND A NEW SPIRIT, FOR WHY WILL YE DIE?

These words were addressed to the house of Israel, who from their history and from the verses in connection with the text, were evidently in a state of impenitency; and the requirement to make them a new heart and a new spirit was enforced by the weighty penalty of death. The death mentioned in the text cannot mean natural death; for natural death is common both to those who have, and to those who have not, a new heart. Nor can it mean spiritual death, which is a state of entire sinfulness; for then it should have read, Why are ye already dead? The death here spoken of must mean eternal death, or that state of banishment from God and the glory of his power into which the soul shall be cast that dies in its iniquities.

The command here addressed to the Israelites is binding upon every impenitent sinner to whom the Gospel shall be addressed. He is required to perform the same duty, upon the same penalty. It becomes, therefore, a matter of infinite importance that we should well understand, and fully and immediately obey, the requirement. The questions that would naturally arise to a reflecting mind on reading this text, are the following:

1. What are we to understand by the requirement to make a new heart and a new spirit?
2. Is it reasonable to require the performance of this duty on pain of eternal death?
3. How is this requirement, that we should make to us a new heart and a new spirit, consistent with the often repeated declarations of the Bible, that a new heart is the gift and work of God?

Does God require of us the performance of this duty, without expecting its fulfillment only, merely to show us our impotency and dependence upon him? Does he require us to make to ourselves a new heart, on pain of eternal death, when at the same time he knows we have no power to obey; and that if ever the work is done, he must himself do the very thing which he requires of us?

In order to answer these questions satisfactorily, I will attempt to show,

I. What is not the meaning of this requirement; and

II. What it is.

It should here be observed, that although the Bible was not given to teach us mental philosophy, yet we may rest assured that all its declarations are in accordance with the true philosophy of mind. The term spirit in the Bible is used in different senses: it sometimes means a spiritual being, or moral agent; in other places it is used in the sense in which we often employ it in conversation. In speaking of the temper of a man, we say he has a good or bad spirit, a lovely or hateful spirit. It is evidently used in this sense in the text. The term heart is also employed in various senses: sometimes it appears to be used as synonymous[sic.] with soul; sometimes it evidently means the will; sometimes the conscience; sometimes it seems to be used in such an extensive sense as to cover all the moral movements of the mind; sometimes it expresses the natural or social affections. The particular sense in which it is to be understood in any place may easily be determined by the connection in which it stands. Our present business is to ascertain its meaning as used in the text; for it is in this sense that we are required to make us a new heart and a new spirit. I begin, therefore, by saying,

1. That it does not mean the fleshly heart, or that bodily organ which is the seat of animal life.
2. That it does not mean a new soul. We have one soul, and do not need another. Nor,
3. Are we required to create any new faculties of body or mind. We now have all the powers of moral agency; we are just as God made us, and do not need any alteration in the substance of soul or body. Nor,
4. Does it mean that we are to bring to pass any constitutional change in ourselves. We are not required to add to the constitution of our minds or bodies any new principle or taste. Some persons speak of a change of heart as something miraculous--something in which the sinner is to be entirely passive, and for which he is to wait in the use of means, as he would wait for a surgical operation, or an electric shock. We need nothing added to the constitution of our body or mind; nor is it true in experience, that those who have a new heart have any constitutional alteration of their powers whatever. They are the same identical persons, so far as both body and mind are concerned, that they were before. The alteration lies in the manner in which they are disposed to use, and do actually employ, their moral and physical powers. A constitutional change, either in body or mind, would destroy personal identity. A Christian, or one who has a new heart, would not be the same individual in regard to his powers of moral agency, that he was before--would not be the same agent, and under the same responsibilities.

Again--a constitutional alteration, and the implantation of a new principle in the substance of his soul, or diffusing a new taste which is incorporated with, and becomes an essential part of his being, would destroy all the virtue of his obedience. It would make obedience to God a mere gratification of appetite, in which there would be no more real virtue than in eating when we are hungry, or drinking when we are thirsty.

Again--The constitutional implantation of a principle of holiness in the mind, or the creation of a constitutional taste for holiness, if such a thing were possible, would render the perseverance of the saints physically necessary, falling from grace would be a natural impossibility, and would thus destroy all the virtue of perseverance.

Again--A constitutional change would dispense with the necessity of the Spirit's agency after conversion. A re-creation of his faculties, the implantation of a holy taste in the substance of his mind, would plainly dispense with any other agency on his part in after life, than that of upholding the creature in being, and giving him power to act; when, in obedience to the laws of his renewed nature, or in the gratification of his new appetite, he would obey of course.

But this implantation of a new principle, which dispenses with the necessity of the special influences of the Spirit in after life, is contrary to experience; for those who have a new heart find that his constant agency is as indispensable to their perseverance in holiness as it was to their conversion.

Again--The idea of a constitutional change is inconsistent with backsliding. For it is manifest, if the constitution of the mind were changed, and a taste for holiness and obedience were implanted in the substance of the soul, that to backslide, or to fall from grace, would be naturally as impossible as to alter the constitutional appetites of the body.

Again--A constitutional change is unnecessary. It has been supposed by some, that the motives of the gospel had no tendency to move the mind to obedience to God, unless there is something implanted in the mind which answers to the outward motive, between which and the motives of the gospel there is a moral affinity. In other words, they maintain that as the motives of the gospel are holy, there must be a holy taste or principle implanted in the substance of the mind, before these motives can act as motives at all; that there must be a taste corresponding to, and of the same nature with the outward motive, or there is nothing in the motive calculated to move the mind. That is, if the motive be holy, the constitutional taste must be holy; if the motive be sinful, the constitutional taste must be sinful. But this is absurd, and contrary to fact. Upon this principle, I would inquire, How could holy Adam sin? Did God or the devil first implant a constitutional sinful taste within him, answering to the outward motive? How could the holy angels sin? Did God also implant a sinful principle or taste in them? or were Adam and "the angels that kept not their first estate," originally created with sinful tastes, answering to those outward motives? Then they were always sinners, and that by creation. Who then is the author of sin, and responsible for all their wickedness? It is true the constitution of the mind must be suited to the nature of the outward influence or motive; and there must be such an adaptation of the mind to the motive, and of the motive to the mind, as is calculated to produce any desired action of the mind. But it is absurd to say, that this constitutional adaptation must be a holy principle, or taste, or craving after obedience to God. All holiness, in God, angels, or men, must be voluntary or it is not holiness. To call any thing that is a part of the mind or body, holy--to speak of a holy substance, unless it be in a figurative sense, is to talk nonsense. Holiness is virtue; it is something that is praiseworthy; it cannot therefore be a part of the created substance of body or mind, but must consist in voluntary obedience to the principles of eternal righteousness. The necessary adaptation of the outward

motive to the mind, and of the mind to the motive, lies in the powers of moral agency, which every human being possesses. He has understanding to perceive and weigh; he has conscience to decide upon the nature of moral opposites; he has the power and liberty of choice. Now to this moral agent, possessing these faculties, the motives of the gospel are addressed; and there is plainly a natural tendency in these weighty considerations to influence him to obey his Maker.

But I come now to show what we are to understand by the command of the text. The Bible often speaks of the heart, as a fountain, from which flow the moral affections and actions of the soul, as in Matt. xv.19, "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies." The term heart, as applied to mind, is figurative, and recognizes an analogy between the heart of the body, and the heart of the soul. The fleshly organ of the body called the heart, is the seat and fountain of animal life, and by its constant action, diffuses life through the animal system.

The spiritual heart is the fountain of spiritual life, is that deep seated but voluntary preference of the mind, which lies back of all its other voluntary affections and emotions, and from which they take their character. In this sense I understand the term heart to be used in the text. It is evidently something over which we have control; something voluntary; something for which we are to blame, and which we are bound to alter. Now if the requirement is, that we are to make some constitutional change in the substance of the body or mind, it is evidently unjust, and enforced by a penalty no less than infinite, as obedience is impossible, the requirement is infinite tyranny.

It is evident, that the requirement here is to change our moral character; our moral disposition; in other words, to change that abiding preference of our minds, which prefers sin to holiness; self-gratification to the glory of God. I understand a change of heart, as the term is here used, to be just what we mean by a change of mind in regard to the supreme object of pursuit; a change in the choice of an end, not merely in the choice of means. An individual may change his mind, and prefer, at one time, one set of means, and at another time, another set, to accomplish the same end: a man who proposes to himself as the supreme object of pursuit his own happiness, may at one time imagine that his highest happiness lies in the possession of worldly goods, and in pursuit of this end, may give himself wholly to the acquisition of wealth, in pursuing which he may often change his choice of means; at one time he may pursue merchandise; at another, the profession of law; and still again, the profession of medicine; but all these are only changes of mind in regard to the means of accomplishing the same selfish end.

Again, he may see that his happiness does not consist in the abundance of wealth; that he is to exist forever; that he therefore has a higher interest in the things of eternity than in those of time; he may accordingly enlarge his selfish aims, carry forward his interest into eternity, and propose as the supreme object of pursuit, the salvation of his soul. It is now an eternal, instead of a temporal interest that he seeks; which he proposes as the supreme object of pursuit; but still the end is his own happiness; the end is substantially the same, it is only the exercise of selfishness on a more ample and extended scale; instead of being satisfied with the happiness of time, selfishness aims at securing the bliss of eternity.

When confining his views and desires to the acquisition of worldly good, he aimed at engrossing the affections, the services, the honors, and the wealth of the world; he now "lengthens the cords, and strengthens the stakes" of his selfishness; carries forward his aims, his desires, and exertions towards eternity; sets himself to pray, to read his Bible, and become marvelously religious; and would fain engross the affections, and enlist the powers, and command the services of all heaven, and of the eternal God.

While his views were confined to earthly things, he was satisfied that men should be his servants; but now, in the selfish pursuit of his own eternal happiness, he would fain call in all the attributes of Jehovah to serve him. But in all this there is no change of heart; he may have often changed in the choice of means, but his end has been always the same; his own happiness has been his idol.

A change of heart, then, consists in changing the controlling preference of the mind in regard to the end of pursuit. The selfish heart is a preference of self-interest to the glory of God and the interests of his kingdom. A new heart consists in a preference of the glory of God and the interests of his kingdom to one's own happiness. In other words, it is a change from selfishness to benevolence, from having a supreme regard to one's own interest to an absorbing and controlling choice of the happiness and glory of God and his kingdom.

It is a change in the choice of a Supreme Ruler. The conduct of impenitent sinners demonstrates that they prefer Satan as the ruler of the world, they obey his laws, electioneer for him, and are zealous for his interests, even to martyrdom. They carry their attachment to him and his government so far as to sacrifice both body and soul to promote his interest and establish his dominion. A new heart is the choice of JEHOVAH as the supreme ruler; a deep-seated and abiding preference of his laws, and government, and character, and person, as the supreme Legislator and Governor of the universe.

Thus the world is divided into two great political parties; the difference between them is, that one party choose Satan as the god of this world, yield obedience to his laws, and are devoted to his interest. Selfishness is the law of Satan's empire, and all impenitent sinners yield it a willing obedience. The other party choose Jehovah for their governor, and consecrate themselves, with all their interests, to his service and glory. Nor does this change imply a constitutional alteration of the powers of body or mind, any more than a change of mind in regard to the form or administration of a human government.

There are certain things in regard to mind, with which we become familiar by experience. For instance, we know by experience that it is the nature of mind to be controlled in its individual exercises and affections, by a deep-seated disposition or preference of a particular course or object. It is not necessary here, to enter into the philosophy of this fact, but simply to recognize the fact itself. For instance, when Adam was first created, and awoke into being, before he had obeyed or disobeyed his Maker, he could have had no moral character at all: he had exercised no affections, no desires, nor put forth any actions.

In this state he was a complete moral agent; and in this respect in the image of his Maker; but as yet could have had no moral character; for moral character cannot be a subject of creation, but attaches to voluntary action. Do not understand me to affirm, that any considerable time elapsed between the creation of Adam and his possessing a moral character. It is presumed, that as soon as he awoke into being, and had knowledge of the existence and character of his Maker, the evidences of which doubtless shone all around him, he chose Him as his supreme ruler, and voluntarily dedicated all his powers to his service.

This preference of God, and his glory, and service, over his own self-interest and every thing else, constituted his disposition, or his moral character; in other words, it was a perfectly holy heart. Out of this heart, or preference, flowed as from a fountain the pure waters of obedience. All the subordinate movements, affections, choices, and purposes of the mind, and all the outward actions, flowed from this strong and governing preference for God and his service. Thus he went forth to dress God's garden, and keep it.

Now, for a time, this preference of Adam was strong and abiding enough to insure perfect obedience in all things; for mind will act in consistency with an abiding preference, according to the strength and permanency of this preference. For instance, the strong preference that a man may have for home, may forbid his entertaining any purpose of going abroad. The strength of his preference for his wife, may prevent his having any desires for improper intimacy with other women; and the probability, and I may say possibility, of betraying him into acts of infidelity to his wife, may depend upon the strength and abiding energy of his preference of her to all other women.

So while the preference of Adam remained unshaken, its energy gave direction and character to all his feeling and to all his conduct; and that which must stamp perfection upon the obedience of heaven, is the great strength and continually abiding energy of their preference for God and his service. Indeed the continued holiness of God depends upon the same cause, and flows from the same fountain. His holiness does not consist in the substance of his nature, but in his preference of right.

His holiness must be voluntary, and he is immutably holy, because he is infinitely so. In other words, his preference of right is infinitely strong, so strong and so abiding as never to admit of change; of any conduct inconsistent with it. Adam was perfectly holy, but not infinitely so. As his preference for God was not infinitely strong, it was possible that it might be changed, and we have the melancholy fact written in characters that cannot be misunderstood, on every side of us, that an occasion occurred on which he actually changed it.

Satan, in the person of the serpent, presented a temptation of a very peculiar character. It was addressed to the constitutional appetites of both soul and body; to the appetite for food in the body, and for knowledge in the mind. These appetites were constitutional; they were not in themselves sinful, but their unlawful indulgence was sin. The proposal of the serpent was, that he should change his mind in regard to the supreme end of pursuit; and thus change his heart, or his whole moral character.

"Yea, hath God said, ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? and the woman said unto the serpent, we may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden, but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, ye shall not surely die: for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil."

Now the foundation of holiness in Adam, and that which constituted his holy heart, was the supreme choice that God should rule; the supreme preference of God and his glory to his own happiness or interest. It is easy to see, therefore, that the object aimed at by the serpent was to affect a change in the supreme end of pursuit. It was to prefer his own gratification to obedience to his Maker; to become as a god himself instead of obeying Jehovah; to pursue as a supreme end self-gratification instead of the glory of God.

In yielding therefore to this proposal, in changing his mind upon this fundamental point, he changed his own heart, or that controlling preference which was at once the foundation, and fountain, of all obedience. Now this was a real change of heart; from a perfectly holy, to a perfectly sinful one. But here was no constitutional change, no change in the substance of either body or mind. It was not a change in the powers of moral agency themselves, but simply in the use of them; in consecrating their energies to a different end.

Now suppose God to have come out upon Adam with the command of the text, "Make to you a new heart, for why will you die." Could Adam have justly answered, Dost thou think that I can change my own heart? Can I, who have a heart totally depraved, can I change that heart? Might not the Almighty have answered him in words of fire, Rebel, you have just changed your heart from holiness to sin, now change it back from sin to holiness.

Suppose a human sovereign should establish a government, and propose as the great end of pursuit, to produce the greatest amount of happiness possible within his kingdom. He enacts wise and benevolent laws, calculated to promote this object to which he conforms all his own conduct; in the administration of which, he employs all his wisdom and energies, and requires all his subjects to sympathize with him; to aim at the same object; to be governed by the same principles; to aim supremely and constantly at the same end; the promotion of the highest interests of the community. Suppose these laws to be so framed, that universal obedience would necessarily result in universal happiness. Now suppose that one individual, after a season of obedience and devotion to the interest of the government and the glory of his sovereign, should be induced to withdraw his influence and energies from promoting the public good, and set up for himself; suppose him to say, I will no longer be governed by the principles of good will to the community, and find my own happiness in promoting the public interest; but will aim at promoting my own happiness and glory, in my own way, and let the sovereign and the subjects take care for themselves. "Charity begins at home." Now suppose him thus to set up for himself; to propose his own happiness and aggrandizement as the supreme object of his pursuit, and should not hesitate to trample upon the laws and encroach upon the rights, both of his sovereign and the subjects, wherever those laws or rights lay in the way of the accomplishment of his designs. It is easy to see, that he has become a rebel; has changed his heart, and consequently his conduct; has set up an interest not only separate from but opposed to the interest of his rightful sovereign. He has changed his heart from good to bad; from being an obedient subject he has become a rebel; from obeying his sovereign, he has set up an independent sovereignty; from trying to influence all men to obey the government, from seeking supremely the prosperity and the glory of his sovereign, he becomes himself a little sovereign; and as Absalom caught the men of Israel and kissed them, and thus stole away their hearts; so he now endeavors to engross the affections, to enlist the sympathies, to command the respect and obedience of all around him. Now what would constitute a change of heart in this man towards his sovereign? I answer, for him to go back, to change his mind in regard to the supreme object of pursuit;--to prefer the glory of his sovereign and the good of the public to his own separate interest, would constitute a change of heart.

Now this is the case with the sinner; God has established a government, and proposed by the exhibition of his own character, to produce the greatest practicable amount of happiness in the universe. He has enacted laws wisely calculated to promote this object, to which he conforms all his own conduct, and to which he requires all his subjects perfectly and undeviatingly to conform theirs. After a season of obedience, Adam changed his heart, and set up for himself. So with every sinner, although he does not first obey, as Adam did; yet his wicked heart consists in setting up his own interest in opposition to the interest and government of God. In aiming to promote his own private happiness, in a way that is opposed to the general good. Self-gratification becomes the law to which he conforms his conduct. It is that minding of the flesh, which is enmity against God. A change of heart, therefore, is to prefer a different end. To prefer supremely the glory of God and the public good, to the promotion of his own interest; and whenever this preference is changed, we see of course a corresponding change of conduct. If a man change sides in politics, you will see him meeting with those that entertain the same views and feelings with himself; devising plans and using his influence to elect the candidate which he has now chosen. He has new

political friends on the one side, and new political enemies on the other. So with a sinner; if his heart is changed, you will see that Christians become his friends--Christ his candidate. He aims at honoring him and promoting his interest in all his ways. Before, the language of his conduct was, "Let Satan govern the world." Now, the language of his heart and of his life is, "Let Christ rule King of nations, as he is King of saints." Before, his conduct said, "O Satan, let thy kingdom come, and let thy will be done." Now, his heart, his life, his lips cry out, "O Jesus, let thy kingdom come, let thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

In proof that the change which I have described constitutes a change of heart, if any proof is necessary--I observe, first, that he who actually does prefer the glory of God, and the interest of his kingdom, to his own selfish interest, is a Christian; and that he who actually prefers his own selfish interest to the glory of God, is an impenitent sinner.

The fundamental difference lies in this ruling preference, this fountain, this heart, out of which flows their emotions, their affections, and actions. As the difference between them consists not in the substance of their minds or bodies, but in the voluntary state of mind in which they are, it is just as unphilosophical, absurd, and unnecessary, to suppose that a physical or constitutional change has taken place in him who has the new heart, as to infer, that because a man has changed his politics, therefore his nature is changed. Further, this new preference needs only to become deep and energetic enough in its influence, to stamp the perfection of heaven upon the whole character. From long cherished habits of sin, and acting under the dominion of an opposite preference, when it comes really to be changed, it is often weak and measurably inefficient; and consequently the mind often acts in inconsistency with this general preference. Accordingly, God says to Israel, "How weak is thine heart!" Like a man who is so little under the influence either of principle or of affection for his wife, that although upon the whole, and in general, he prefers her to any other woman, yet he may occasionally be guilty of an act of infidelity to her. Now what is needed in the case of a Christian is, that his old habits of thought, and feeling, and action, should be broken up; that his new preference should gain strength, stability, firmness, and perpetuity; and thus take the control of the whole man. This process constitutes sanctification. Every act of obedience to God strengthens this preference, and renders future obedience more natural. The perfect control of this preference over all the moral movements of the mind, brings a man back to where Adam was previous to the fall, and constitutes perfect holiness.

Once more--If a change of heart was physical, or a change in the constitution of the mind, it would have no moral character. The change, to have moral character, must be voluntary. To constitute a change of heart, it must not only be voluntary, but must be a change in the governing preference of the mind. It must be a change in regard to the supreme object of pursuit.

Finally, it is a fact in the experience of every Christian, that the change through which he has passed is nothing else than that which I have described. In speaking from experience, he can say, Whereas I once preferred my own separate interest to the glory of my Maker, now I prefer his glory and the interests of his kingdom, and consecrate all my powers to the promotion of them forever.

2. The second inquiry is, whether the requirement of the text is reasonable and equitable. The answer to this question must depend upon the nature of the duty to be performed. If the change be a physical one, a change in the constitution or substance of the soul, it is clearly not within the scope of our ability, and the answer to the question must be, No, it is not reasonable nor equitable. To maintain that we are under obligation to do what we have no power to do, is absurd.

If we are under an obligation to do a thing, and do it not, we sin. For the blame-worthiness of sin consists in its being the violation of an obligation. But if we are under an obligation to do what we have no power to do, then sin is unavoidable; we are forced to sin by a natural necessity. But this is contrary to right reason, to make sin to consist in any thing that is forced upon us by the necessity of nature. Besides, if it is sin, we are bound to repent of it, heartily to blame ourselves, and justify the requirement of God; but it is plainly impossible for us to blame ourselves for not doing what we are conscious we never had any power to do.

Suppose God should command a man to fly; would the command impose upon him any obligation, until he was furnished with wings? Certainly not. But suppose, on his failing to obey, God should require him to repent of his disobedience, and threaten to send him to hell if he did not heartily blame himself, and justify the requirement of God. He must cease to be a reasonable being before he can do this. He knows that God never gave him power to fly, and therefore he had no right to require it of him.

His natural sense of justice, and of the foundation of obligation, is outraged, and he indignantly and conscientiously throws back the requirement into his Maker's face. Repentance, in this case, is a natural impossibility; while he is a reasonable being, he knows that he is not to blame for not flying without wings; and however much he may regret his not being able to obey the requirement, and however great may be his fear of the wrath of God, still to blame himself and justify God is a natural impossibility.

As, therefore, God requires men to make to themselves a new heart, on pain of eternal death, it is the strongest possible evidence that they are able to do it. To say that he has commanded them to do it, without telling them they are able, is consummate trifling. Their ability is implied as strongly as it can be, in the command itself. From all this it will be seen, that the answer to the question, whether the requirement in the text is just, must turn upon the question of man's ability; and the question of ability must turn upon the nature of the change itself.

If the change is physical, it is clearly beyond the power of man; it is something over which he has no more control than he had over the creation of his soul and body. But if the change is moral--in other words, if it be voluntary, a change of choice or preference, such as I have described, then the answer to the question, Is the requirement of the text just and reasonable? clearly is, Yes, it is entirely reasonable and just;

1. Because you have all the powers of moral agency; and the thing required is, not to alter these powers, but to employ them in the service of your Maker. God has created these powers, and you can and do use them. He gives you power to obey or disobey; and your sin is, that while he sustains these powers, you prostitute them to the service of sin and Satan.

Again--These powers are as well suited to obedience as to disobedience. Your wickedness consists in a wrong but obstinate choice of sin. But is it not as easy to choose right as wrong? Are not the motives to a right choice infinitely greater than to a wrong one? Could Adam reasonably have objected that he was unable to change his choice? Could Satan object that he had no power to change the governing preference of his mind, and to prefer the glory of his Maker to rebellion against his throne? If Satan, or Adam, or you, can reasonably bring forward this objection, then there is no such thing as sin in earth or hell.

Again--God only requires of you to choose and act reasonably, for certainly it is in accordance with right reason to prefer the glory of God, and the interest of his immense kingdom, to your own private interest. It is an infinitely greater good; therefore you, and God, and all his creatures, are bound to prefer it. But I said the motives to a right preference are infinitely greater than to a wrong one. Sinners often complain that

they are so influenced by motives, that they cannot resist iniquity. They often excuse their sins, by pleading that the temptation was too strong for them. Sinner, why is it, while you are so easily influenced by motives as to complain that you cannot resist them; that you are too weak to resist their influence to sin; that you are strong enough to resist the world of motives that come rolling upon you like a wave of fire, to do right and obey your Maker?

When the Son of God approaches you, gathering motives from heaven, earth, and hell, and pours them in a focal blaze upon your mind, how is it that you are strong enough to resist? You, whose mind is yielding as air to motives to sin; who are all weakness, and complain that you cannot resist when tempted to disobey God, can exert such a giant strength, I had almost said the strength of Omnipotence, in resisting the infinite weight of motive that rolls upon you from every quarter of the universe, to obey God. It is clear that if you did not exert the whole strength of moral agency to resist, these consideration would change your heart.

3. I come now to the third and last inquiry, viz: How is this requirement, to "make to yourself a new heart," consistent with the often repeated declarations of the Bible, that a new heart is the gift and work of God. The Bible ascribes conversion, or a new heart, to four different agencies. Oftentimes it is ascribed to the Spirit of God. And if you consult the Scriptures, you will find it still more frequently ascribed to the truth; as, "Of his own will begat he us by the word of truth"--"The truth shall make you free"--"Sanctify them through thy truth"--"The law of God is perfect, converting the soul." It is sometimes ascribed to the preacher, or to him who presents the truth; "He that winneth souls is wise:" Paul says, "I have begotten you through the Gospel"--"He that converteth a sinner from the error of his ways, shall save a soul from death, and hide a multitude of sins." Sometimes it is spoken of as the work of the sinner himself; thus the apostle says, "Ye have purified yourselves by obeying the truth;" "I thought on my ways," says the Psalmist, "and turned unto the Lord." Again he says, "When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart replied, Thy face, Lord, will I seek." Now the question is, Are all these declarations of Scripture consistent with each other? They are all true; they all mean just as they say; nor is there any real disagreement between them. There is a sense in which conversion is the work of God. There is a sense in which it is the effect of truth. There is a sense in which the preacher does it. And it is also the appropriate work of the sinner himself.

The fact is, that the actual turning, or change, is the sinner's own act. The agent who induces him, is the Spirit of God. A secondary agent, is the preacher, or individual who presents the truth. The truth is the instrument, or motive, which the Spirit uses to induce the sinner to turn. Suppose yourself to be standing on the bank of the Falls of Niagara. As you stand upon the verge of the precipice, you behold a man lost in deep reverie, approaching its verge unconscious of his danger. He approaches nearer and nearer, until he actually lifts his foot to take the final step that shall plunge him in destruction. At this moment you lift your warning voice above the roar of the foaming waters, and cry out, Stop. The voice pierces his ear, and breaks the charm that binds him; he turns instantly upon his heel, all pale and aghast he retires, quivering, from the verge of death. He reels, and almost swoons with horror; turns and walks slowly to the public house; you follow him; the manifest agitation in his countenance calls numbers around him; and on your approach, he points to you, and says, That man saved my life. Here he ascribes the work to you; and certainly there is a sense in which you had saved him. But, on being further questioned, he says, Stop! how that word rings in my ears. Oh, that was to me the word of life. Here he ascribes it to the word that aroused him, and caused him to turn. But, on conversing still further, he said, had I not turned at that instant, I should have been a dead man. Here he speaks of it, and truly, as his own act; but directly you hear him say, O the mercy of God; if God had not interposed, I should have been lost. Now the only defect

in this illustration is this: In the case supposed, the only interference on the part of God, was a providential one; and the only sense in which the saving of the man's life is ascribed to him, is in a providential sense. But in the conversion of a sinner there is something more than the providence of God employed; for here not only does the providence of God so order it, that the preacher cries, Stop, but the Spirit of God forces the truth home upon him with such tremendous power as to induce him to turn.

Not only does the preacher cry Stop, but, through the living voice of the preacher, the Spirit cries Stop. The preacher cries, "Turn ye, why will ye die." The Spirit pours the expostulation home with such power, that the sinner turns. Now, in speaking of this change, it is perfectly proper to say, that the Spirit turned him, just as you would say of a man, who had persuaded another to change his mind on the subject of politics, that he had converted him, and brought him over.

It is also proper to say that the truth converted him; as in a case when the political sentiments of a man were changed by a certain argument, we should say, that argument brought him over. So also with perfect propriety may we ascribe the change to the living preacher, or to him who had presented the motives; just as we should say of a lawyer who had prevailed in his argument with a jury; he has got his case, he has converted the jury. It is also with the same propriety ascribed to the individual himself whose heart is changed; we should say that he had changed his mind, he has come over, he has repented.

Now it is strictly true, and true in the most absolute and highest sense; the act is his own act, the turning is his own turning, while God by the truth has induced him to turn; still it is strictly true that he has turned and has done it himself. Thus you see the sense in which it is the work of God, and also the sense in which it is the sinner's own work. The Spirit of God, by the truth, influences the sinner to change, and in this sense is the efficient cause of the change.

But the sinner actually changes, and is therefore himself, in the most proper sense, the author of the change. There are some who, on reading their Bibles, fasten their eyes upon those passages that ascribe the work to the Spirit of God, and seem to overlook those that ascribe it to man, and speak of it as the sinner's own act. When they have quoted Scripture to prove it is the work of God, they seem to think they have proved that it is that in which man is passive, and that it can in no sense be the work of man.

Some months since a tract was written, the title of which was, "Regeneration is the effect of Divine Power." The writer goes on to prove that the work is wrought by the Spirit of God, and there he stops. Now it had been just as true, just as philosophical, and just as Scriptural, if he had said, that conversion was the work of man. It was easy to prove that it was the work of God, in the sense in which I have explained it. The writer, therefore, tells the truth, so far as he goes; but he has told only half the truth.

For while there is a sense in which it is the work of God, as he has shown, there is also a sense in which it is the work of man, as we have just seen. The very title to this tract is a stumbling block. It tells the truth, but it does not tell the whole truth. And a tract might be written upon this proposition, that "conversion or regeneration is the work of man;" which would be just as true, just as Scriptural, and just as philosophical, as the one to which I have alluded. Thus the writer, in his zeal to recognize and honor God as concerned in this work, by leaving out the fact that a change of heart is the sinner's own act, has left the sinner strongly intrenched, with his weapons in his rebellious hands, stoutly resisting the claims of his Maker, and waiting passively for God to make him a new heart.

Thus you see the consistency between the requirement of the text, and the declared fact that God is the author of the new heart. God commands you to do it, expects you to do it, and if it ever is done, you must

do it.

I shall conclude this discourse with several inferences and remarks.

1st. Sinners make their own wicked hearts.

Their preference of sin is their own voluntary act. They make self-gratification the rule to which they conform all their conduct. When they come into being, the first principle that we discover in their conduct, is their determination to gratify themselves. It soon comes to pass that any effort to thwart them in the gratification of their appetites, is met by them with stout resistance, they seem to set their hearts fully to pursue their own happiness, and gratify themselves, come what will; and thus they will successively make war on their nurse, their parents, and their God, when ever they find that their requirements prohibit the pursuit of this end. Now this is purely a voluntary state of mind. This state of mind is not a subject of creation, it is entirely the result of temptation to selfishness, arising out of the circumstances under which the child comes into being. This preference to self-interest, is suffered by the sinner to grow with his growth, and strengthen with his strength, until this desperately wicked heart bears him onward to the gates of hell.

2dly. From what has been said, the necessity of a change of heart is most manifest.

The state of mind in which impenitent sinners are, is called by the apostle the "carnal mind;" or as it should have been rendered, "the minding of the flesh is enmity against God." The child at first gives up the rein to the bodily appetites. God requires him to keep under his body, and to make it the instrument of his soul in the service of God--to subject and subordinate all its passions to the will of its Maker. But instead of this, he makes the gratification of his appetites and passions, the law of his life. It is that law in his members, of which the apostle speaks, as warring against the law of his mind. This state of mind, is the direct opposite of the character and requirements of God. With this heart, the salvation of the sinner is a manifest impossibility.

3d. In the light of this subject, you can see the nature and degree of the sinner's dependence on the Spirit of God.

The Spirit's agency is not needed to give him power, but to overcome his voluntary obstinacy. Some persons seem to suppose that the Spirit is employed to give the sinner power--that he is unable to obey God, without the Spirit's agency. I am alarmed when I hear such declarations as these; and were it not, that I suppose there is a sense in which a man's heart may be better than his head, I should feel bound to maintain, that persons holding this sentiment, were not Christians at all. I have already shown that a man is under no obligation to do what he has no ability to do; in other words that his obligation, is only commensurate with his ability. That he cannot blame himself for not having exerted a power, that he never possessed. If he believes, therefore, that he has no power to obey his Maker, it is impossible that he should blame himself for not doing it. And if he believes that the Spirit's agency is indispensable to make him able; consistency must compel him to maintain, that without this superadded agency, he is under no obligation to obey. This giving the sinner power, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, to obey God, is what the Arminians call a gracious ability, which terms are a manifest absurdity. What is grace? it is undeserved favor; something to which we have no claim in justice. That which may be withheld without injustice. If this is a true definition, it is plain that a gracious ability to do our duty is absurd. It is a dictate of reason, of conscience, of common sense, and of our natural sense of justice, that if God require of us the performance of any duty or act, he is bound in justice to give us power to obey; i.e. he must give us the

faculties and strength to perform the act. But if justice require this, why call it a gracious ability. Natural ability to do our duty cannot be a gracious ability. To call it so, is to confound grace and justice as meaning the same thing. The sin of disobedience then must lie, not in his having broken the law of God, but solely in his not having complied with the strivings of the Spirit. Accordingly the definition of sin should be, upon these principles, not that "sin is a transgression of the law," but that it consists in not yielding to the influence of the Spirit. While therefore he is not sensible that the Spirit is giving him power, he can feel under no obligation to be converted; nor can he, upon any principles of reason, blame himself. How, I would ask, is it possible that with these views he can repent? And how, upon these principles, is he to blame for not having repented and turned to the Lord?

But, to illustrate both the nature and degree of man's dependance on the Spirit, suppose a man to be bent upon self-murder; in the absence of his wife he loads his pistols, and prepares to commit the horrid deed. His little child observes the disorder of his mind, and says, Father, what are you going to do? Be still, he replies, I am going to blow my brains out. The little one weeps, spreads out its little beggar hands, beseeches him to desist, and pours out his little prayers, and tears, and agonizing entreaties, to spare his life.

Now if the eloquence of this child's grief, his prayers, and tears, could prevail to change the obstinacy of his purpose, he would need no other influence to subdue and change his mind. But the parent persisting, the child screams to his mother, who flies at the voice of its entreaty, and on being told the cause of its anguish, hastens, upon the wings of terror, to her husband's apartment, and conjures him to change his purpose. By his love for his family--by their love for him--by their dependence upon him--in view of the torn heart, and distraction of the wife of his bosom--by the anguish, the tears, the helplessness of his babes--by the regard he has for his own soul--by the hope of heaven--by the terrors of hell--by every thing tender and persuasive in life--by all that is solemn in the final judgment, and terrible in the pains of the second death, she conjures him, over and over again, not to rush upon his own destruction.

Now if all this can move him, he needs no other and higher influence to change his mind. But when she fails in her efforts, suppose she could summon all the angels of God, and they also should fail to move and melt him by their unearthly eloquence; here, then, some higher power must interfere, or the man is lost. But just as he puts his pistol to his ear, the Spirit of God, who knows perfectly the state of his mind, and understands all the reasons that have led him to this desperate determination, gathers such a world of motive, and pours them in such a focal blaze upon his soul, that he instantly quails, drops the weapon from his nerveless hand, relinquishes his purpose of death forever, falls upon his knees, and gives glory to God.

Now it was the strength of the man's voluntary purpose of self-destruction alone, that made the Spirit's agency at all necessary in the case. Would he have yielded to all the motives that had been before presented, and should have subdued him, no interposition of the Holy Spirit had been necessary. But it was the wickedness, and the obstinacy of the wretch, that laid the only foundation for the Spirit's interference. Now this is the sinner's case. He has set his heart fully to do evil, and if the prayers and tears of friends, and of the church of God--the warning of ministers--the rebukes of Providence--the commands, the exhortations, the tears, and groans, and death of God's dear Son: if the offer of heaven, or the threatening of hell could overcome his obstinate preference of sin, the Spirit's agency would be uncalled for.

But because no human persuasion, no motive that man or angel can get home upon his mind, will cause him to turn; therefore the Spirit of God must interpose to shake his preference, and turn him back from hell. The degree of his dependence upon the Spirit, is just the degree of his obstinacy; were he but slightly inclined to pursue the road to death, men could change him without calling upon God for help; but just in proportion to the strength of his preference for sin, is it necessary that the Spirit should interpose or he is lost. Thus you see, the sinner's dependence upon the Spirit of God, instead of being his excuse, is that which constitutes his guilt.

4th. Again--You see from this subject the NATURE of the Spirit's agency.

That he does not act by direct physical contact upon the mind, but that he uses the truth as his sword to pierce the sinner; and that the motives presented in the Gospel are the instruments he uses to change the sinner's heart. Some have doubted this, and supposed that it is equivalent to denying the Spirit's agency altogether to maintain that he converts sinners by motives. Others have denied the possibility of changing the heart by motives. But did not the serpent change Adam's heart by motives; and cannot the Spirit of God with infinitely higher motives exert as great power over mind as he can? Can the old serpent change a heart from a perfectly holy to a perfectly sinful one by the power of motives, and cannot the infinitely wise God, do as much as Satan did? Verily, to deny this, looks much like detracting from the wisdom and power of God. But that the Scripture abundantly declares that the Spirit converts sinners by the power of motive is most manifest--"Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth," is one out of the many express declarations upon this subject. The philosophy of this subject is settled by the Bible; it is a subject upon which we are not at liberty to speculate, and form our own philosophical theories, and maintain that by direct physical contact, irrespective of truth, God interposes and changes the sinner's heart. When God says, "Of his own will he has begotten us with the word of truth," this settles the question; and is equivalent to saying, that he has not begotten us in any other manner.

The very terms used by our Saviour in the promise of the Spirit to reprove the world of sin, of righteousness, and of a judgment to come, strongly imply the mode of his agency. The term rendered Comforter in our translation of the Bible, is Parakletos; it is the same term which, in one of the epistles of John, is rendered Advocate. The term is there applied to Jesus Christ. It is there said, "If any man sin, we have a Parakletos, or an Advocate with the Father, even Jesus Christ the righteous." In this passage Jesus Christ is spoken of as the Advocate of men with God. The Parakletos, or Comforter, promised by our Savior, is represented as God's Advocate, to plead His cause with men. The term rendered reprove or convince in our translation is a law term, and signifies the summing up of an argument, and establishing or demonstrating the sinner's guilt. Thus the strivings of the Spirit of God with men, is not a physical scuffling, but a debate; a strife not of body with body, but of mind with mind; and that in the action and reaction of vehement argumentation. From these remarks, it is easy to answer the question sometimes put by individuals who seem to be entirely in the dark upon this subject, whether in converting the soul the Spirit acts directly on the mind, or on the truth. This is the same nonsense as if you should ask, whether an earthly advocate who had gained his cause, did it by acting directly and physically on the jury, or on his argument.

5th. Again--It is evident from this subject that God never does, in changing the sinner's heart, what he requires the sinner to do.

Some persons, as I have already observed, seem disposed to be passive, to wait for some mysterious influence, like an electric shock, to change their hearts. But in this attitude, and with these views, they may

wait till the day of judgment, and God will never do their duty for them. The fact is, sinners, that God requires you to turn, and what he requires of you, he cannot do for you. It must be your own voluntary act. It is not the appropriate work of God to do what he requires of you. Do not wait then for him to do your duty, but do it immediately yourself, on pain of eternal death.

6th. This subject shews also, that if the sinner ever has a new heart, he must obey the command of the text, and make it himself.

But here some one may interpose and say, Is not this taking the work out of God's hands, and robbing him of the glory? No. It is the only view of the subject that gives the glory to God. Some in their zeal to magnify the grace of the gospel, entirely overthrow it. They maintain the sinner's inability, and thereby do away his guilt. Instead of considering him a guilty, voluntary rebel, and worthy of eternal death, they make him a helpless, unfortunate creature, unable to do what God requires of him. Instead of making his only difficulty to consist in an unwillingness, they insist upon his inability, and thus destroy his guilt, and of course the grace displayed in his salvation. For what grace can there be in helping an unfortunate individual? If sinners are unable to obey God, precisely in proportion to their inability, are they guiltless. But if they are unwilling, if their cannot is a will not, we have already seen that their guilt is in proportion to the strength of their unwillingness, and grace in their salvation must be equal to their guilt. Nor does it detract from the glory of God that the act of turning is the sinner's own act. The fact is, he never does, and never will turn, unless God induces him to do it; so that although the act is the sinner's own, yet the glory belongs to God, inasmuch as he caused him to act. If a man had made up his mind to take his own life, and you should, by taking the greatest pains, and at great expense, prevail upon him to desist, would you deserve no credit for the influences you exerted in the case? Though changing his mind and relinquishing his purpose of self-destruction was his own act, inasmuch as you was[sic.] the sole cause of his turning, and as it was certain that had you not interfered he would have done the horrid deed, are you not entitled to just as much praise as if his own agency had not been at all concerned in turning? Might it not in truth be said that you had turned him?

7th. But again--The idea that the Spirit converts sinners by the truth, is the only view of the subject that honors either the Spirit, or the truth of God.

The work of conversion is spoken of in the Bible as a work of exceeding great power; and I once heard a clergyman, expatiating upon the great power of God in conversion--although he appeared to view it as a physical alteration of the constitution of man, as the implantation of a new principle, or taste--assert that it was a greater exertion of power than that which hung out the heavens. The reason which he assigned for its being such a great exertion of power was, that in the creation of the material universe, he had no opposition, but in the conversion of a soul, he had all the powers of hell to oppose him. Now this is whimsical and ridiculous enough. As if the opposition of hell could oppose any obstacle in the way of physical Omnipotence. The power which God exerts in the conversion of a soul, is moral power; it is that kind of power by which a statesman sways the mind of a senate; or by which an advocate moves and bows the heart of a jury; by which "David bowed the heart of all Israel, as the heart of one man." Now when we consider the deep-rooted selfishness of the sinner; his long cherished habits of sin; his multifarious excuses and refuges of lies; it is a most sublime exhibition of wisdom and of moral power to pursue him step by step with truth, to hunt him from his refuges of lies, to constrain him by the force of argument alone, to yield up his selfishness and dedicate himself to the service of God. This reflects a glory and a lustre over the truth of God and the agency of the Holy Spirit, that at once delights and amazes the beholder.

8th. But again--The idea that the Spirit uses motives to change the heart, is the only view that gives consistency, and meaning to the often repeated injunction, not to resist the Holy Ghost--not to strive with his Maker.

For if the Spirit operated upon the mind by direct physical contact, the idea of effectually resisting physical omnipotence is ridiculous. The same thought applies to those passages that caution us against grieving and quenching the Spirit.

9th. Again--You see from this subject that a sinner, under the influence of the Spirit of God, is just as free as a jury under the arguments of an advocate.

Here also you may see the importance of right views on this point. Suppose a lawyer, in addressing a jury, should not expect to change their minds by any thing he could say, but should wait for an invisible, and physical agency, to be exerted by the Holy Ghost upon them. And suppose, on the other hand, that the jury thought that in making up their verdict, they must be passive, and wait for a direct physical agency to be exerted upon them. In vain might the lawyer plead, and in vain might the jury hear, for until he pressed his arguments as if he was determined to bow their hearts, and until they make up their minds, and decide the question, and thus act like rational beings, both his pleading, and their hearing is in vain.

So if a minister goes into a desk to preach to sinners, believing that they have no power to obey the truth, and under the impression that a direct physical influence must be exerted upon them before they can believe, and if his audience be of the same opinion, in vain does he preach, and in vain do they hear, "for they are yet in their sins;" they sit and quietly wait for some invisible hand to be stretched down from heaven, and perform some surgical operation, infuse some new principle, or implant some constitutional taste; after which they suppose they shall be able to obey God.

Ministers should labor with sinners, as a lawyer does with a jury, and upon the same principles of mental philosophy; and the sinner should weigh his arguments, and make up his mind as upon oath and for his life, and give a verdict upon the spot, according to law and evidence. But here perhaps some one will ask, If truth, when seen in all its bearings and relations, is the instrument of converting the sinner, why will he not be converted in hell, where it is supposed that all the truth will burst upon his mind in all its burning reality?

In answer to this, I observe, that the motive that prevails to turn the convicted rebel to God, will, in hell, be wanting. When the sinner is crowded with conviction and ready to go to despair, and ready to flee and hide himself from the presence of his Maker, he is met by the offer of reconciliation, which, together with the other motives that are weighing like a mountain upon his mind, sweetly constrain him to yield himself up to God. But in hell the offer of reconciliation will be wanting; the sinner will be in despair; and while in despair it is a moral impossibility to turn his heart to God.

Let a man in this life so completely ruin his fortune as to have no hope of retrieving it; in this state of absolute despair, no motive can reach him to make him put forth an effort; he has no motive to attempt it; so if his reputation is so completely gone that he has no hope of retrieving it, in this state of despair, there is no possibility of reclaiming him; no motive can reach him and call forth an effort to redeem his character, because he is without hope. So in hell, the poor dying sinner will be shut up in despair; his character is gone; his fortune for eternity is lost; there is no offer, no hope of reconciliation; and punishment will but drive him further and further from God forever and ever.

10th. But, says the objector, if right apprehensions of truth presented by the Spirit of God convert a sinner, does it not follow that his ignorance is the cause of his sin?

I answer, No! Had Adam kept what truth he knew steadily before his mind, he doubtless would have resisted the temptation; but suffering his mind to be diverted from the reasons for obedience to the motives to disobedience, he failed, of course. When he had fallen, and selfishness had become predominant, he was averse to knowing and weighing the reasons for turning again to God; and if ever he was turned the Spirit of God must have forced the subject upon him. So with every sinner: he at first sins against what knowledge he has by overlooking the motives to obedience, and yielding himself up to the motives to disobedience, and when once he has adopted the selfish principle, his ignorance becomes wilful and sinful, and unless the Spirit of God compel him, he will not see. He knows the truth to a sufficient extent to leave him without excuse, but he will not consider it and let it have its effect upon him.

But the objector may still ask, Is it not true, after all, if a full and sufficiently impressive knowledge of truth is all that is necessary to subdue the sinner, that he only needs to know the true character of God to love it, and that his enmity against God arises out of his false notions of him? Is it not a false and not the true character of God that he hates? I answer, No! it is the true character of God that he hates. He hates God for what he is, and not for what he is not. The sinner's character is selfishness; God's character is benevolence. These are eternal opposites. The sinner hates God because he is opposed to his selfishness. While the man remains selfish, it is absurd to say that he is reconciled to the true character of God. But is not his ignorance the cause of his selfishness? No! he knows better than to be selfish. It is true he does not, nor will he unless compelled by the Holy Spirit, consider the unreasonableness of selfishness. The work of the Holy Spirit does not consist merely in giving instruction, but in compelling him to consider truths which he already knows--to think upon his ways and turn to the Lord. He forces upon his attention and consideration those motives which he hates to consider and feel the weight of. It is probable, if not certain, that had all the motives to obedience been broadly before the mind of Adam or any other sinner, and had the mind duly considered them at the time, he would not have sinned. But the fact is, sinners do not set what truth they know before the mind, but divert the attention and rush on to hell.

Will any one still reply that although it is true that the sinner's wilful inconsideration and diverting his attention lays the only foundation for the necessity of the Spirit's influences, yet, is it not His great business to remove this ignorance occasioned by the sinner's wilful rejection of light? What does consideration do, but to bring the sinner to a juster knowledge of himself, of God, and of his duty, and thus, by force of truth, constrain him to yield? If by ignorance be meant a wilful perverse rejection of light and knowledge, I suppose that it is this state of mind

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