

Preparations Before Conversion: Part II

by Samuel Rutherford

The sermon emphasizes the importance of a proper understanding of election and free grace, and the need for a balance between law and gospel in the conversion process.

Scripture: Proverbs 28:13, Isaiah 55:1, Acts 2:37, Romans 3:20, Romans 5:8, Romans 7:7, Ephesians 2:8, James 4:6, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "True Conversion", "Law And Gospel"

Description

Samuel Rutherford preaches about the importance of understanding the true nature of faith and conversion, emphasizing the need for genuine humility, despair of salvation in oneself, and reliance on Christ alone for salvation. He refutes the idea that immediate belief in God's eternal love is the first step of conversion for all troubled souls, highlighting the necessity of a law-work to convict and humble sinners before they can fully embrace the gospel. Rutherford addresses objections raised by Antinomians, stressing the balance between the law and the gospel in the process of conversion, and the significance of true confession of sins as opposed to a mere intellectual acknowledgment.

Transcript

Objection by Saltmarsh. But others bid the troubled soul believe, but he must first seek in himself qualifications or conditions. But this is to will them to walk in the light of their own sparks.

Answer. If to bid men abstain from flagitious sins, and from seeking glory of men, that are both neck-breaks of faith, John 5:44, and bring men under eternal displeasure, both before and after we believe, be to walk in the light of our own sparks, then when the Lord forbids these in his law and commandeth both the believer and unbeliever the contrary virtues, he must counsel the same with us. To believe and not be humbled and despair of salvation in yourself, is to presume; he that believeth right is cast on that broken board, like a ship-broken man, Either must I cast myself on the Rock Christ, or then drown eternally and perish. The unjust steward was at What shall I do? ere he came to a wise resolution. To go the roadway that Christ leads all believers is not to walk in the light of our own sparks. It's one thing to seek qualifications of ourselves, trusting in them, and another thing to seek qualifications in ourselves, as preparatory duties wrought by Christ's grace; the former we disclaim, not the latter.

Objection by Saltmarsh. I will relate mine own experience. First, when I was minded to make away myself for my sin, the Lord sent into my mind this word, I have loved thee with an everlasting love. Ah, thought I then, hath God loved me with such an everlasting love, and shall I sin against such a God? Many doubts

and fears arose from the examination of myself, I was afraid of being deluded. The promise, Isa. 55:1, did sweetly stay my heart, Christ in his ordinances witnessed to me that he was mine. I went on for some time full of joy. I was in fears again, that I could not pray, but I had a promise, I will fulfill the desires of them that fear me.

Answer. The method of the conversion of a deluded Antinomian is no rule to others. This man's first step is from nature, and from thoughts of self-murder, up to the Lamb's book of life, the secret of eternal election in the breast of God: I have loved thee with an eternal love. It is utterly false that the gospel faith commanded to all the elect and reprobate is the apprehension of God's eternal love to me in particular. The Scripture saith no such thing. So the Antinomian way of conversion is that every soul troubled for sin, elect or reprobate, is immediately, without any foregoing preparations, or humiliation, or work of the law, to believe that God loved him with an everlasting love. A manifest lie, for so reprobates are to believe a lie, as the first gospel truth. This is I confess a honey-way, and so evangelic that all the damned are to believe that God did bear to them the same everlasting good will and love he had in heart toward Jacob.

The gospel we teach saith eternal election is that secret in the heart of the Lamb, called his book, so as really God first loves and chooses the sinner to salvation. We are blacked with hell, lying amongst the pots, till Christ take us up, and wash and lick the leopard spots off us. But to our sense and apprehension, we first love and choose him as our only liking, and then by our faith and his love on us we know he hath first loved us, with an everlasting love. But there be many turnings, windings, ups and downs, ere it come to this. I have not heard of such an experience, that at the first, without any more ado, forthwith, the Lord saith, Come up hither, I will cause thee read thy name in the Lamb's book of life. Shall the believing of the love of election to glory be the first medicine that you give to all troubled consciences, elect and reprobate?

The sweet witnessing of the Spirit, from Isa. 55:1: Ho, everyone that thirsts, come to the waters, is gospel honey; but consider if there were no law-work preparing, no needle making a hole before Christ should sew together the sides of the wound. It's but a delusion. 1. Because, Isa. 61:1, no wholehearted sinners meet with Christ; none come at first laughing to Christ. All that come to Jesus for help, come with the tear in their eye. 2. To come dry and withered to the waters, Isa. 55:1, is the required preparation. 3. The gold in a beggar's purse in great abundance is to be suspected for stolen gold, because he labored not for it. This I say not, because preparations, and sweatings, and running, that go before conversion, are merits or such as deserve conversion, or that conversion is due to them. Antinomians impute this to us, but unjustly. That I may clear us in this, let these propositions speak for us.

Proposition 1. We cannot receive the Spirit by the preaching of the law and covenant of works, but by the hearing of the promises of the gospel, Gal. 3. The law, it's alone, can chase men from Christ, but never make a new creature, nor can the letter of the gospel, without the Spirit do it.

Proposition 2. When we look for anything in ourselves, or think that an unrenewed man is a confiding person to purchase Christ, we bewilder ourselves, and vanish in foolishness. This wrong Libertines do us, from which we are as far as the east from the west.

Proposition 3. It is not our doctrine, but the weakness of sinners and of the flesh, that we should be shy to Christ, and stand aloof from the Physician, because of the desperate condition of our disease. This is as if one should say, It is not fit for the naked to go to him who offereth white linen to clothe him, nor that the poor should go to him who would be glad you would take his fine gold off his hand, or to say, Set not a

young plant, but let it lie above earth, till you see if it bear fruit. Unworthiness in the court of justice is a good plea why Christ should cast us off. But unworthiness felt, though not savingly, is as good a ground to cast yourself on Christ, as poverty, want, and weakness, in place of a statute and act of parliament to beg, though the letter of the law forbid any to beg.

Proposition 4. Acting and doing, though neither savingly nor soundly, is not merit of grace, yet not contrary to grace. To obey the law of nature, to give alms, is not against grace. Libertines should not reject this, though it be not all, but a most poor all to engage Christ.

Proposition 5. Faith is a moral condition of life eternal, and wrought in us by the free grace of God. I never saw a contradiction between a condition wrought by irresistible grace, and the gift or free grace of life eternal. For life eternal given in the law, and Adam's doing and performing by the irresistible acting and assisting of God, are not contrary; yet the former was never merit but grace, the latter was legal doing.

Proposition 6. We do receive the promise of willing and doing, wrought immediately in us, according to the good will and most free grace of Christ, and yet we are agents, and work under Christ.

Proposition 7. Luther (for I could fill a book with citations), Calvin, and all our Protestant Divines, are for qualifications void of merit or promise before conversion, and for gracious conditions after conversion under the gospel. Antinomians belie Luther.

Proposition 8. Immediate resting on Christ for all we do, and drawing of comfort from the testimony of a good conscience, are not contrary.

Proposition 9. Holiness idolized or trusted in, is to make Christ, the alone Savior, no Savior.

Proposition 10. God is not provoked to reprobate whom he elected from eternity, by new sins; yet is he displeased with David's adultery so far, as to correct him for it, and Solomon for his backsliding, with the rod of men.

Proposition 11. Works before justification please not God. But it follows not that God keeps not such an order, as sense of sin, though not saving, should go before pardon and conversion, no more than because Adam's sin pleased not God, therefore it should not go before the Son taking on our flesh. If we are not to do nor act anything before conversion, neither to hear, confer, know, our sinful condition, nor be humbled for sin, despair of salvation in our selves, because these are not merits before conversion, nor can they procure conversion to us, then neither are we after conversion to believe, for believing cannot merit righteousness and life eternal, nor are we to hear, pray, be patient, rejoice in tribulation, for not any of these can procure life eternal to us. And why is not the doing of the one, as well as the other, a seeking righteousness in ourselves?

Proposition 12. There is no faith, no act of Christ's coin, or of the right stamp, before justification.

Proposition 13. We are justified

in Christ virtually, as in the public head, when he rose again and was justified in the Spirit.

In Christ, as his merits are the cause of our justification.

In Christ, apprehended by faith, formally, in the Scripture's sense, in the Epistle to the Romans and Galatians. Not that faith is the formal cause, or any merit in justification, but because it lays hold on

imputed righteousness, which is the formal cause of our justification.

We are justified in our own sense and feeling, not by faith simply (because we may believe, and neither know that we believe, nor be sensible of our justification), but as we know that we believe, whether this knowledge result from the light of faith, or from signs as means of our knowledge.

Justification by way of declaration to others is not so infallible as that the Scripture calls it justification, properly so named.

Antinomian objection. I was, in hearing the word, shined upon, by a sweet witnessing of the Spirit. But O how I did strive against this work! I was called upon, but I put away all promises of mercy from me. I may justly say, The Lord saved me, whether I would or no. Sometimes I was dead, and could not pray, sometimes so quickened that me-thought that I could have spent a whole night in prayer to God.

Answer. If the faith of the eternal love of free election was his first conversion, no wonder he was shined upon with light. But it was not Scripture light, but wild fire; for the method of Christ's drawing in the Scripture is not enthusiastical, up at secret election at first. There is no doubt 1. we put Christ away from us after conversion, Cant. 5:1, and that so Christ saves us against our will, and that the principle of saving is free grace, and 2. that free will is neither free nor willing till Christ first draw us, till he renew and work upon the will. But I fear Antinomians will have free will a block to do nothing at all. If Christ will let me sin, say they, let him look to it, upon his honor be it. And, Faith justifies an unbeliever; that is, that faith that is in Christ justifieth me who have no faith in myself. And, It is legalistic to say we act in the strength of Christ. And, To take delight in the holy service of God is to go a-whoring from God. And, A man may not be exhorted to any duty, because he hath no power to do it. And, The Spirit acts most in the saints when they endeavor least. And, In the conversion of a sinner, the faculties of the soul and working thereof are destroyed, and made to cease. Yea, The naked influence of God annihilates all the acts of the soul. Boiling desires after Christ savors too much of action, hindereth the soul to be perfectly illuminated, and to arise to the rosy kisses and chaste embraces of her Bridegroom. And, In place of them the Holy Ghost works. And, The Spirit of adoption works not freely when men are in bondage to some outward circumstances of worship, as time, place, or persons, that they cannot pray but at such hours, or in such places, etc. Protestant divines teach no such thing. But his aim is to set on foot the Familists' doctrine, We are not bound to keep a constant course of prayer in our families, or privately, unless the Spirit strive us up thereunto. And Antinomians have no stomach to marks, nor belongs it to the way of his conversion which he relates. It is true, we cannot tie the Spirit to our hours. But then all the Lord's Day worship, all set hours at morn or at night, in private or in families, set times and hours for the church's praying, preaching, hearing, conference, reading, were unlawful.

Antinomian objection. I seldom desired pardon of sin, till I were fitted for mercies, but now I see we are pardoned freely. O rest not in your own duties.

Answer. To desire pardon of sin before we be fitted for pardon, by no divinity is contrary to free pardon, though such desires be fruitless, as coming from no gracious principles.

Assertion. To believe and take Christ, because I am a needy sinner, is one thing, and to believe, because I am fitted for mercy and humbled, is another thing. This latter we disclaim. Preparations are no righteousness of ours, nor is it our doctrine to desire any to rest on preparations, or to make them causes, foundations, or formal means of faith; they hold forth the mere order and method of grace's working. Not to desire pardon but in God's way of foregoing humiliation is nothing contrary, but sweetly subordinate, to

free pardon. And to cure too suddenly wounds, and to honey secure and proud sinners, and sweeten and oil a Pharisee, and to reach the Mediator's blood to an unhumiliated soul, is but to turn the gospel into a charm, and when by magic you have drawn all the blood out of the sick man's veins, then to mix his blood with sweet poison and cause him drink, and swell, and say you have made him healthy and fat.

Now Peter, Acts 2, poured vinegar and wine at first on the wounds of his hearers when he said, Ye murdered the Lord of glory, and they were pricked in their heart. This is the law's work, Rom. 3, to condemn and stop the sinner's mouth. And you cannot say that Peter failed in curing too suddenly, because he preached first the law to wound and prick them, for that they crucified the Lord of glory, before he preached the gospel of belief and baptism. And the Lord rebuking Saul from heaven, convincing him of persecution, casting him down to the ground, striking him blind while he trembled, and the Lord's dealing with the jailer, was more sour work than proposing and pouring the gospel oil and honey of freely imputed righteousness in their wounds at the first, and a close unbottoming them of their own righteousness. And the Lord's way of justifying Jews and Gentiles is a law-way as touching the order, Rom. 3; having proved all to be under sin, verses 9-18, he saith, verse 19, Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God. Indeed, if they be convinced of sin by the Spirit, and so converted, and yet under trouble of mind, a pound of the gospel for one ounce weight of the law is fit for them.

But Antinomians err, not knowing the Scriptures,

in dreaming that converted souls are so from under the law that they have no more to do with the law, no more than angels and glorified saints, so as the letter of the gospel doth not lead them, but some immediate acting of the Spirit. And that

there is no commandment under the gospel, but to believe only. That

mortification and new obedience, as Town and others say, is but faith in Christ, and not abstinence from worldly lusts that war against the soul.

That the gospel commandeth nothing, but persuadeth rather; that we may be Libertines, and serve the flesh, and believe and be saved.

That God hath made no covenant with us under the gospel; the gospel is all promise, that we shall be carried as mere patients to heaven, in a chariot of love.

That the way is not strait and narrow, but Christ hath done all to our hands.

That it's legalistic, not gospel, conversation to keep the soul so long under the law for humiliation, contrition and confession, and then bring them to the gospel.

It is true, Peter never preached the law to Cornelius, nor Philip to the eunuch, nor Ananias to Paul, but these were all converted aforehand. We think the unconverted man knows neither contrition nor confession aright.

But I was more confirmed that the way of the Antinomians is for the flesh, not for the gospel, when I read that Crisp, expounding confession, I John 1, maketh it no humble acknowledging that the sinner in person hath sinned, and so is under wrath eternal if God should judge him; he maketh it a part of faith, by which a sinner believeth and confesseth that Christ prayed for his sin and he is pardoned in him. Sure confession

in Scripture is no such thing: Ezra 10:1, Neh. 9:2. In Scripture, confession of sins is opposed to covering of sin and not forsaking of it, Prov. 28. Joshua sought not such a confession of Achan. James commands not such a confession. Daniel's, Ezra's, Peter's, confession were some other thing, John 1:20, Acts 19:18, Heb. 11:13, Prov. 28:13, I John 4:2, Mark 3:6, Josh. 7:19, Dan. 9:4, Rom. 10:10, I Tim. 6:13, Psalm 32:5, James 5:16, Lev. 5:5, 16:21, 26:40, II Chron. 6:24. In which places, faith and confession of sins cannot be one, nor are we justified by confession, as by faith. But these men have learned to pervert the Scriptures.

Assertion. There be more vehement stirrings and wrestlings in a natural spirit under the law, as the bullock is most unruly at the first yoking, and green wood casts most smoke. Paul, Rom. 7, was slain by the law, but this makes more way for Christ, and though it do not morally soften and facilitate the new birth, yet it ripeneth the out-breaking. Preparations are penal, to subdue, not moral, to deserve or merit, nor conditional, to engage Christ to convert or to facilitate conversion.

Assertion. There be no preparations at all required before redemption, I Tim. 1:15, Rom. 5:8. But there is a far other order in the working of conversion. Those who confound the one with the other speak ignorantly of the ways of grace, for though both be of mere grace, without wages or merit, yet we are mere patients in the one, not in the other. Saltmarsh and Antinomians argue from the one to the other, most ignorantly.

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