

Marks of a Saving Change

by William Guthrie

The sermon discusses the marks of a saving change, including a preparatory law work, being called from the womb, and being called in a sovereign gospel-way.

Scripture: Proverbs 1:24, Matthew 20:16, Luke 19:3, Luke 23:39, John 16:8, Acts 16:14, Romans 3:15, Romans 6:14, Romans 7:9, 2 Corinthians 5:14

Topics: "Salvation Assurance", "Spiritual Conversion"

Description

William Guthrie preaches about the marks by which a person may know if they are in covenant with God and have a special interest in Christ. He discusses the preparatory work of the law, emphasizing its role in leading souls to the 'Spirit of adoption.' Guthrie highlights three main ways in which individuals are called to Christ: some from the womb, some in a sovereign gospel-way, and some graciously at the hour of death. He also delves into God's more ordinary way of calling sinners through a discernible work of the law and humiliation, leading to a gracious work of God's Spirit.

Transcript

Having premised these things, it now follows that we give some marks by which a man may know if he be savingly in covenant with God, and has a special interest in Christ, so that he may warrantably lay claim to God's favour and salvation. We shall only pitch upon two great and principal marks, not willing to trouble people with many. A preparatory law work But before we begin to these, we will speak of a preparatory work of the law, of which the Lord does ordinarily make use, to prepare His own way in men's souls.

This may have its own weight as a mark, with some persons. It is called the Work of the Law, or the Work of Humiliation. It has some relation to that 'spirit of bondage,' and does now under the New Testament answer unto it, and usually leadeth on to the 'Spirit of adoption.' (Rom. 3: 15.) Only here, let it be remembered--1. That we are not to speak of this preparatory work of the law as a negative mark of a true interest in Christ, as if none might lay claim to God's favour who have not had this preparatory work, in its several steps, as we are to speak of it; for, as we shall see, the Lord does not always observe the same plan with men. 2.

The great reason why we speak of it is, because the Lord deals with many, whom He effectually calls by some such preparatory work; and to those, who have been so dealt with, it may prove strengthening, and will confirm them in laying more weight on the marks which follow. 3. It may help to encourage others, who are under such bondage of spirit, as a good indication of a gracious work to follow; for, as we shall point

out, it will be rarely found to miscarry and fail of a gracious issue. 4.

Where God uses such a preparatory work, He does not keep one way or measure in it, as we shall see. For the more distinct handling of this preparatory work, we shall shortly hint the most ordinary ways by which the Lord leads people savingly into His covenant, and draws them unto Christ. I.--Some called from the womb There are some called from the womb, as John the Baptist was (Luke 1); or in very early years, before they can be actively engaged in Satan's ways, as Timothy. (2 Tim. 3: 15.)

It cannot be supposed that these have such a preparatory work as we are to speak of. And because some persons may pretend to this way of effectual calling, we offer these marks of it whereby those who have been so called may be confirmed. 1. Such are usually from their childhood kept free from ordinary pollutions, as swearing, lying, mocking of religion and religious persons, etc., with which children are often defiled. Those whom God calleth effectually, He sanctifieth from the time of that effectual calling: 'Sin cannot have dominion over them,' as over others, 'Because they are under grace.' (Rom. 6: 14.) 2.

Religion is, as it were, natural to them; I mean, they need not to be much pressed to religious duties even when they are but children; they run willingly that way, because there is an inward principle of 'love constraining them' (2 Cor. 5: 14), so that they yield themselves servants of righteousness, without outward constraint. (Rom. 6: 16.) 3. Although such know not when they were first acquainted with God, yet they have afterwards such exercises of spirit befalling them as the saints in Scripture, of whose first conversion we are not told.

They are, upon some occasions, shut out from God, and are again admitted, in their apprehension, to come near; their heart is also further broken up by the ordinances, as is said of Lydia. (Acts 16: 14.) And ordinarily they remember when some special subject of religion and duty, or when some sin, of which they were not taking notice before, was discovered to them. They who can apply these things to themselves, have much to say for their effectual calling from their youth. II.--Some called in a sovereign gospel-way Some are brought to Christ in a sovereign gospel-way, when the Lord, by some few words of love swallowing up any work of the law, quickly taketh a person prisoner at the first, as He did Zaccheus (Luke 19), and others, who, upon a word spoken by Christ, did leave all and follow Him; and we hear nothing of a law-work dealing with them before they close with Christ Jesus.

And because some may pretend to this way of calling, we shall touch on some things most remarkable in that transaction with Zaccheus, for their clearing and confirmation. 1. He had some desire to see Christ, and such a desire as made him waive that which some would have judged prudence and discretion, whilst he climbeth up a tree that he might see Him. 2. Christ spoke to his heart, and that word took such hold upon him, that presently with joy he accepted Christ's offer, and closed with Christ as Lord, whilst few of any note were following Him. 3.

Upon this his heart was opened to the poor, although it seems he was a covetous man before. 4. He had a due impression of his former ways, evidencing his respect to the law of Moses, and this he signifies before all the company then present, not shrinking from taking shame to himself in such things as probably were notorious to the world. 5. Upon all these things, Christ confirms and ratifies the contract by His word; recommending to him that oneness of interest which behaved to be between him and the saints, and the thoughts of his own lost condition, if Christ had not come and sought him; all which is clear from Luke 19: 3-10.

We grant the Lord calleth some so; and if any can lay claim to the special things we have now hinted, they have a good confirmation of God's dealing with them from Scripture; neither are they to vex themselves because of the want of a distinct preparatory law work, if their heart has yielded unto Christ; for a work of the law is not desirable, except for this end. Therefore Christ offers Himself directly in the Scripture, and people are invited to come to Him; and although many will not come to Him who is the Surety, until the spirit of bondage distress them for their debt, yet if any, upon the knowledge of their lost estate, would flee and yield to Christ, none might warrantable press a work of the law upon them.

As for others, whom Christ persuaded by a word to follow Him, whatsoever He did, or howsoever He spoke to them, at His first meeting with them, we must rationally suppose that then He discovered to them so much of their necessity, and His own fulness and excellency, as made them quit all, and run after Him; and if He do so to any, we crave no more, since there is room enough there for the Physician. So that from all this, as some may be confirmed and strengthened, with whom God has so dealt, so there is no ground for deluded souls to flatter themselves in their condition, who remain ignorant and senseless of their own miseries, and Christ's all-sufficiency, and hold fast deceit.

III.--Some graciously called at the hour of death There are some brought in to Christ in a way yet more declarative of His free grace; and this is, when He effectually calls men at the hour of death. We find somewhat recorded of this way in that pregnant example of the 'thief on the cross.' (Luke 23: 39-45.) Although this seems not very pertinent for the purpose in hand, yet we shall speak a little of it, that, on the one hand, men may be sparing to judge and pass sentence on either themselves or others before the last breath; and we shall, on the other hand, speak so particularly, that none may dare to delay so great a business to the last hour of their life.

We find these remarkable circumstances in the conversation between Christ and the thief. 1. The man falls out with his former companion. 2. He dares not speak a wrong word of God, whose hand is on him, but justifies Him in all that has befallen him. 3. He now sees Jesus Christ persecuted by the world without a cause, and most injuriously. 4. He discovers Christ to be a Lord and a King, whilst His enemies seem to have Him under. 5. He believes a state of glory after death so really, that he prefers a portion of it to the present safety of his bodily life, which he knew Christ was able to grant him at that time, and he might have chosen that with the other thief. 6.

Although he was much abased in himself, and so humbled that he pleaded but that Christ would remember him, yet he was nobly daring to throw himself upon the covenant, on life and death; and he had so much faith of Christ's all-sufficiency, that he judged a simple remembrance from Christ would supply all his need. 7. He acquiesced sweetly in the word which Christ spoke to him for the ground of his comfort. All which are very clear in the case of that poor dying man, and prove a real work of God upon his heart.

As this example may encourage some to wait for good from God, who cannot as yet lay clear claim to any gracious work of His Spirit; so we entreat all, as they love their souls, not to delay their soul's salvation, hoping for such assistance from Christ in the end, as too many do,--this being a rare miracle of mercy, in which Christ honorably triumphed over the ignominy of His cross; a parallel to which we shall hardly find in all the Scripture besides. Yea, as there be but few at all saved: 'many be called, but few are chosen' (Matt. 20: 16); and fewest saved this way; so the Lord has peremptorily threatened to laugh at the calamity, and not to hear the cry of such as mocked formerly at His reproof, and would not hear when He called to them: 'Because I have called, and ye refused, I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock

when your fear comes' (Prov. 1: 24-26): which scripture, although it does not shut mercy's door upon any, who at the hour of death do sincerely judge themselves and flee to Christ, as this penitent thief did; yet it certainly implieth that very few, who reject the offer until then, are honoured with repentance as He was; and so their cry, as not being sincere, and of the right stamp, shall not be heard.

IV.--God's more ordinary way of calling sinners to Himself The fourth and most ordinary way by which many are brought to Christ, is by a clear and discernible work of the law, and humiliation; which we generally call the spirit of bondage as was hinted before. We do not mean that every one, whose conscience is awakened with sin and fear of wrath, does really close with Christ; the contrary appears in Cain, Saul, Judas, eta. But there is a conviction of sin, an awakening of conscience, and work of humiliation, which, as we shall point out, rarely miscarries, or fails of a gracious issue, but ordinarily does resolve into the Spirit of adoption, and a gracious work of God's Spirit.

And because the Lord deals with many sinners this way, and we find that many are much puzzled about giving judgment of this law-work, we shall speak of it particularly. This work is either more violent and sudden, or it is more quiet and gradual, so as to be protracted through a greater length of time, by which means the steps of it are very discernible. It is more violent in some, as in the jailer, Paul, and some other converts in the book of the Acts of the Apostles, on whom Christ did break in at an instant, and fell on them as with fire and sword, and led them captive terribly.

And because some great legal shakings are deceitful, and turn to nothing, if not worse, we shall point at some things remarkable in these converts spoken of before, which proves the work of the law on them to have had a gracious issue and result. 1. Some word of truth or dispensation puts the person to a dreadful stand, with a great stir in the soul; some 'are pricked in heart' (Acts 2: 37); some fall a 'trembling' (Acts 16: 29.) And thus it is, that the person is brought to his wits' end: 'What wilt Thou have me to do?' saith Paul (Act: 9: 6.)

'What must I do to be saved' saith the jailer. (Acts 16: 32.) 2. The person is content to have salvation and God's friendship on any terms, as the question implies, 'What shall I do?' As if he had said, What would I not dot what would I not forego? what would I not undergo? 3. The person accepts the condition offered by Christ and His servants, as is clear in the fore-cited Scriptures. 4. The person presently becomes of one interest with the saints, joins himself with that persecuted society, puts respect on those whom he had formerly persecuted, joining and continuing with them in the profession of Christ at all hazards.

Those with whom the Lord has so dealt, have much to say for a gracious work of God's Spirit in them: and it is probable many of them can date their work from such a particular time and word, or dispensation, and can give some account of what passed between God and them, and of a sensible change following in them from that time forward, as Paul giveth a good account of the work and way of God with him afterwards. (Acts 22) Again, the Lord sometimes carries on this work more calmly, softly, and gradually, protracting it so that the several steps of men's exercise under it are very discernible.

It would lead us to a great length to enlarge upon every step of it. We shall touch on the most observable things in it. 1. The Lord lays siege to men, who, it may be, have often refused to yield to Him, when offering Himself in the ordinances; and by some word preached, read, or borne in on the mind, or by some providence leading on unto the word, He does assault the house kept peaceably by the strong man, the devil; and thus Christ, who is the stronger man, comes upon him (Luke 22: 11); and by the Spirit of truth, fastens the word on the man, in which God's curse is denounced against such and such sins, of which the

man knoweth himself guilty.

The Spirit convinces the man, and binds it upon him, that he is the same person against whom the word of God speaks, because he is guilty of sins; and from some sins the man is led on to see more, until usually he comes to see the sins of his youth, sins of omission, etc.! yea, he is led on, until he sees himself guilty almost of the breach of the whole law: he sees 'innumerable evils compassing him,' as David speaks. (Psa. 40: 12.) A man sometimes will entertain alarming views of sin in this case, and is sharp-sighted to perceive himself guilty of almost every sin.

Thus the Spirit comes and convinces of sin. (John 16: 8.) 2. The Lord overcomes a special stronghold in the garrison, a refuge of lies, to which the man betaketh himself when his sins are thus discovered to him. The poor man pretends to faith in Christ, whereby he thinks his burden is taken off him, as the Pharisees said, 'We have one Father, even God.' (John 8: 41.) They pretend to a special relation to God as a common Lord. The Spirit of God drives the man from this by the truth of the Scriptures, proving that he has no true faith, and so no interest in Christ, nor any true saving grace, showing clearly the difference between true grace and the counterfeit fancies which the man has in him; and between him and the truly godly: as Christ laboureth to do with the Jews in John 8: 42, 44 'If God were your father, ye would love Me.

Ye are of the devil, for ye do the lusts of your father.' So, 'fear surpriseth the hypocrite in heart' (Isa. 33: 14); especially when the Lord discovereth to him conditions, in many of those promises in which he trusted most, not easily attainable. He now sees grace and faith to be another thing than once he judged them. We may in some respect apply that word here, The Spirit 'convinceth him of sin, because he has not believed on the Son.' (John 16: 9.) He is particularly convinced of unbelief: he now sees a vast difference between himself and the godly, who, he thought before, outstripped him only in some unnecessary, proud, hateful preciseness: he now sees himself deluded, and in the broad way with the perishing multitude: and so, in this sight of his misery coucheth down under his own burden, which before this time he thought Christ did bear for him: he now begins to be alarmed as to the promises, because of such passages of Scripture as, 'What hast thou to do to take my covenant in thy mouth?' etc. (Psa. 50: 16.) 3.

The man becomes careful about his salvation, and begins to take it to heart as the one thing necessary. He is brought to say with the jailer, 'What shall I do to be saved?' (Acts 16) His salvation becomes the leading thing with him. It was least in his thoughts before, but now it prevails, and other things are much disregarded by him. Since his soul is ready to perish, 'what shall it profit him to gain the world, if he lose his soul?' (Matt. 9: 26.) Some here are much puzzled with the thoughts of an irrevocable decree to their prejudice, and with the fears of uncertain death, which may attack them before their great concern is secured; and some are vexed with apprehensions that they are guilty of the sin against the Holy Ghost, which is unpardonable, and so are driven a dangerous length--Satan still reminding them of many sad examples of people who have miserably put an end to their own lives: but they are in the hand of one who 'knoweth how to succour them that are tempted.' (Heb. 2: 18.) 4.

When a man is thus in hazard of miscarrying, the Lord uses a work of preventing mercy towards him, quietly and underhand supporting him; and this is by infusing into his mind the possibility of his salvation, leading him to the remembrance of numerous proofs of God's free and rich grace, in pardoning gross transgressors, such as Manasseh, who was a bloody idolatrous man, and had correspondence with the devil, and yet obtained mercy (2 Chron. 33: 11, 13); and other scriptures bearing offers of grace and favour indifferently to all who will yield to Christ, whatsoever they have been formerly; so that the man is brought again to this,--'What shall I do to be saved' which supposes that he apprehends a possibility of

being saved, else he would not propound the question.

He applies that or the like word to himself, 'It may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger.' (Zeph. 2: 3.) He finds nothing excluding him from mercy now, if he have a heart for the thing. The man does not, it may be, here perceive that it is the Lord who upholdeth him, yet afterwards he can say that, 'when his foot was slipping, God's mercy held him up,' as the Psalmist speaks in another case. (Psa. 94: 17, 18.) And he will afterwards say, when he 'was as a beast, and a fool, in many respects, God held him by the hand.' (Psa. 73: 22, 23.) 5.

After this discovery of a possibility to be saved, there is a work of desire quickened in the soul; which is clear from that same expression, 'What shall I do to be saved?' But sometimes this desire is expressed amiss, whilst it goes out thus, 'What shall I do that I may work the works of God?' (John 6: 28.) In this case the man, formerly perplexed with fear and care about his salvation, would be at some work of his own to extricate himself; and here he suddenly resolves to do all is commanded, and to forego every evil way (yet much misunderstanding Christ Jesus), and so begins to take some courage to himself, 'going about to establish his own righteousness, but not submitting unto the righteousness of God.' (Rom. 10: 3.)

Whereupon the Lord makes a new assault upon him, intending the discovery of his absolutely fallen state in himself, that so room may be made for the Surety: as Joshua did to the people, when he found them so bold in their undertakings: 'Ye cannot serve the Lord,' saith he, 'for He is a holy God, a jealous God.' (Josh. 24) In this new assault the Lord--1. Shows the man the spirituality of the law; the commandment cometh with a new charge in the spiritual meaning of it. (Rom. 7: 9.)

The law came, saith Paul, that is, in the spiritual meaning of it. Paul had never entertained such a view of the law before. 2. God most holily looseth the restraining bonds which he had laid upon the man's corruption, and suffereth it not only to boil and swell within, but to threaten to break out in all the outward members. Thus sin grows bold, and spurns at the law, becoming exceedingly sinful. 'But sin taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence.

For without the law, sin was dead. For I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. Was then that which is good made death into me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.' (Rom. 7:8-13) 3. The Lord discovers to the man, more than ever, the uncleanness of his righteousness, and the spots of his best things. These things kill the man, and he dies in his own conceit (Rom.7:0), and despairs of relief in himself, if it come not from another source. 6.

After many ups and downs, here ordinarily the man resolves on retirement; he desires to like those in a besieged city, who, when they see they cannot hold out, and would be glad of any good condition from the besieging enemy, go to a council, that they may resolve on something; so the man here retires that he may speak with himself. This is like that 'communing with our own heart.' (Psa. 4: 4.) Thus God leadeth into the wilderness, that He may speak to the heart. (Hos. 2: 14.)

When the person is retired, the thoughts of his heart, which were scattered in former steps of the exercise, do more observably throng in here. We shall reduce them to this method:--1. The man thinks of his unhappy folly in bearing arms against God; and here he dwells at large on his former ways, with a blushing countenance and self-loathing: 'Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight' (Ezek. 36: 31); like that of Psalm 51: 3, 'His sin is ever before him.' 2.

Then he remembers how many fair opportunities of yielding to God he has basely lost; his spirit is like to faint when he remembereth that, as is said in another case 'When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me. O my God, my soul is cast down within me. Deep calleth unto deep, all thy waves are gone over me.' (Psa. 42: 1-7.) 3. He now thinks of many Christians whom he mocked and despised in his heart, persuading himself now that they are happy, as having chosen the better part; he thinks of the condition of those who wait on Christ, as the queen of Sheba did of Solomon's servants: 'Happy are thy servants,' saith she, 'who stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom.' (1 Kings 10: 8.)

'Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house.' (Psa. 94: 4.) He wishes to be one of the meanest who have any relation to God; as the prodigal son speaks, he would be as 'one of his father's hired servants.' (Luke 15: 7, 19.) 4. Then he calls to mind the good report that is going abroad of God, according to that testimony of the prophet, who knew that God was a 'gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness. (Jonah 4: 2.) The free and large promises and offers of grace come in here; and the gracious dealings of God with sinners of all sorts, as recorded in Scripture. 5.

He thinks with himself, 'Why has God spared me so long and why have I got such a sight of my sin? And why has He kept me from breaking prison at my own hand? Why has He made this strange change in me? It may be it is in His heart to do me good; O that it may be so!' Although all these thoughts be not in the preparatory work of every one, yet they are with many, and very promising where they are. 7. Upon all these thoughts and meditations the man, more seriously than ever before, resolveth to pray, and to make some attempt with God, upon life and death; he concludes, 'It can be no worse with him; for if he sit still he perisheth;' as the lepers speak. (2 Kings 7: 3, 4.)

He considers, with the perishing prodigal son, 'that there is bread enough in his father's house and to spare, whilst he perisheth for want;' so he goes to God, for he knows not what else to make of his condition, as the prodigal son does. And it may be, here he resolves what to speak; but things soon vary when he is present before God, as the prodigal son forgot some of his premeditated prayers. 'I will arise, and go to my Father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants.

And he arose and came unto his father, and said unto him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.' (Luke 15: 17-21.) And now, when he cometh before God, more observable than ever before-- 1. He beginneth, with the publican, afar off, with many thorough confessions and self-condemnings, in which he is very liberal, as (Luke 15: 21)--'I have sinned against Heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy,' etc. 2. Now his thoughts are occupied as to the hearing of his prayers, which he was not wont to question much: he now knows what those expressions of the saints concerning the hearing of their prayers do import. 3.

It is observable in this address, that there are many broken sentences, like that of Psa. 6: 3--'But Thou, O Lord, how long?' supplied with sighs and 'groanings which cannot be uttered,' and anxiously looking upward, thereby speaking more than can be well expressed by words. 4. There are ordinarily some interruptions, and, as it were, diversions; the man speaking sometimes to the enemy, sometimes to his own heart, sometimes to the multitudes in the world, as David does in other cases-- 'O thou enemy, destructions are come to a perpetual end.' (Psa. 9: 6.)

'Why art thou cast down, O my soul and why art thou disquieted in me? Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise Him, who is the help of my countenance.' (Psa. 42: 6.) 'O ye sons of men, how long will ye turn my

glory into shame?' (Psa. 4: 2.) 5. It is observable here that sometimes the man will halt, and be silent, to hear some indistinct whisperings of a joyful sound glancing on the mind, or some news in some broken word of Scripture, which, it may be, the man scarcely knoweth to be Scripture, or whether it is come from God, or whether an insinuation from Satan to delude him; yet this he has resolved, only to 'hear what God the Lord will speak,' as upon another occasion. (Psa. 85: 8.) 6.

More distinct promises come into the man's mind, on which he attempts to lay hold, but is beaten off with objections, as in another case the Psalmist is--'But thou art holy--But I am a worm.' (Psa. 22 3, 6.) Now it is about the dawning of the day with the man, and faith will stir as soon as the Lord imparteth 'the joyful sound.' (Psa. 84: 15.) This is the substance of the covenant, which may be shortly summed up in these words, 'Christ Jesus is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.' (Matt. 17: 5.)

We can speak no further of the man's exercise as a preparatory work; for what followeth is more than preparatory; yet that the exercise may appear complete and full, we shall add here, that after all these things, the Lord, it may be, after many answers of divers sorts, mightily conveyeth the knowledge of His covenant into the heart, and determines the heart to close with it; and God now draweth his soul so to Christ (John 6: 44), and so layeth out the heart for Him, that the work cannot miscarry; for now the heart is so enlarged for Him, as that less cannot satisfy, and more is not desired; like that of Psa. 73: 25--'Whom have I in heaven but Thee?

Or whom have I desired on earth beside Thee?' The soul now resolves to die if He shall so command, yet at His door, and looking towards Him. We have stated this preparatory work at some length, not tying any man to such particular circumstances: only we say, the Lord dealeth so with some; and where He so convinceth of sin, corruption, and self-emptiness, and makes a man take salvation to beset as the one thing necessary, and sets him to work in the use of the means which God has appointed for relief; I say, such a work rarely shall be found to fail of a good issue and gracious result.

V.--Objections and difficulties considered (1) Object. Hypocrites and reprobates have great stirrings of conscience, and deep convictions about sin, setting them to work sometimes; and I do suspect any preparatory work of the law I ever had, to be but such as they have. Ans. It will be hard to give sure essential differences between the preparatory work in those in whom afterwards Christ is formed, and those legal stirrings which are sometimes in reprobates. If there were not some gracious result of these convictions and awakenings of conscience in the Lord's people, and other marks, of which we shall speak afterwards, it were hard to adventure upon any difference that is clear in these legal stirrings.

Yet, for answer to the objection, I shall offer some things, which rarely will be found in the stirrings of reprobates, and which are ordinarily found in that law-work which has a gracious issue. 1. The convictions of hypocrites and reprobates are usually confined to some few very gross transgressions. Saul grants no more but the persecuting of David. (1 Sam. 26: 21.) Judas grants only the betraying of innocent blood (Matt. 7: 4); but usually those convictions by which the Lord prepareth His own way in the soul, although they may begin at one or more gross particular transgression, yet they stop not; but man is led on to see many breaches of the law, and 'innumerable evils compassing Him' (Psa. 40: 12), as David speaketh in the sight of his sin.

And withal, that universal conviction, if I may call it so, is not general, as usually we hear senseless men saying, 'that in all things they sin;' but it is particular and condescending, as Paul afterwards spoke of himself: He not only is the chief of sinners, but particularly, he was a blasphemer, a persecutor. (1 Tim. 1:

13.) 2. The convictions which hypocrites have, do seldom reach their corruption, and that body of death which works an aversion to what is good, and strongly inclines to what is evil.

Ordinarily where we find hypocrites speaking of themselves in Scripture, they speak loftily, and with some self-conceit, as to their freedom from corruption. The Pharisees say to the poor man, 'Thou wast altogether born in sin, and dost thou teach us?' (John 9: 34); as if they themselves were not as corrupt by nature as he. They speak of great sins, as Hazael did--'Am I a dog, that I should do this great thing?' (2 Kings 8: 13); and also in their undertakings of duty, as that scribe spoke, 'Master, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest.' (Matt. 8: 19.)

See how the people speak: 'Then they said to Jeremiah, The Lord be a true and faithful witness between us, if we do not even according to all things for the which the Lord thy God shall send thee to us. Whether it be good, or whether it be evil, we will obey the voice of the Lord our God, to whom we send thee; that it may be well with us when we obey the voice of the Lord our God.' (Jer. 42: 5, 6.) They undertake to do all that God will command them: so that they still 'go about,' in any case, 'to establish their own righteousness, not submitting unto the righteousness of God.' (Rom. 10: 3.)

But I may say, that convictions and exercise about corruption, and that body of death, inclining them to evil, and disabling for good, is not the least part of the work where the Lord is preparing His own way. They judge themselves very wretched because of the body of sin, and are at their wits' end how to be delivered as Paul speaks when he is under the exercise of it afterwards--'O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death.' (Rom. 7: 24.) 3. It will generally be found, that the convictions which are in hypocrites either are not so serious, as that some other business will not put them out of mind before any satisfaction is gotten; as in Cain, who went and built a city, and we hear no more of his conviction (Gen. 4); Felix went away until a more convenient time, and we hear no more of his trembling (Acts 14: 25); or, if that work becomes very serious, then it runneth to the other extremity, even despair of relief, leaving no room for escape.

So we find Judas very serious in his convictions, yet he grew desperate, and hanged himself. (Matt. 27: 4, 5.) But where the Lord prepares His own way, the work is both so serious, that the person cannot be put off it, until he find some satisfaction, and yet under that very seriousness he lies open for relief; both which are clear from the jailer's words, 'What must I do to be saved' (Acts 16: 30.) This serious inquiry after relief is a very observable thing in the preparatory work which leadeth on to Christ.

Yet we desire none to lay too much weight on these things, since God has allowed clear differences between the precious and the vile. (2) Object. I still fear I have not had so thorough a sight of my sin and misery as the Lord giveth to many whom He effectually calleth, especially to great transgressors such as I am. Ans. It is true, the Lord discovereth to some clear views of their sin and misery, and they are thereby put under great legal terrors; but as all are not brought in by that sensible preparatory work of the law, as we showed before, so even those who are dealt with after that way are very differently and variously exercised in regard of the degrees of terror, and of the continuance of that work.

The jailer had a violent work of very short continuance; Paul had a work continuing three days; some persons are 'in bondage through fear of death all their lives.' (Heb. 2: 15.) So that we must not limit the Lord to one way of working here. The main thing we are to look unto in these legal awakenings and convictions of sin and misery is, if the Lord reach those ends in us for which usually these stirrings and convictions are sent into the soul; and if those ends be reached, it is well; we are not to vex ourselves

about any preparatory work further.

Now, those ends which God seeks to accomplish with sinners by these legal terrors and awakenings of conscience are four. First, The Lord discovers a sight of men's sin and misery to them, to chase them out of themselves, and to put them out of conceit of their own righteousness. Men naturally have high thoughts of themselves, and incline much to the covenant of works; the Lord therefore discovers to them so much of their sin and corruption, even in their best things, that they are made to loathe themselves, and despair of relief in themselves; and so they are forced to flee out of themselves, and from the covenant of works, to seek refuge elsewhere. (Heb. 6: 18.)

'They become dead to themselves, and the law,' as to the point of justification. (Rom. 7: 4.) Then 'have they no more confidence in the flesh' (Phil. 3: 3.) This is supposed in the offers of Christ 'coming to seek and save that which is lost' (Luke 19: 10); and 'to be a physician to those who are sick.' (Matt. 9: 12.) The second great end is, to commend Christ Jesus to men's hearts above all things, that so they may fall in love with Him, and betake themselves to that treasure and jewel which only enricheth (Matt. 13: 14); and by so doing may serve the Lord's design in the contrivance of the gospel, which was the manifestation of His free grace through Christ Jesus in the salvation of men.

The sight of a man's own misery and lost estate by nature is a ready way to make him prize Christ highly, who alone can set such a wretch at liberty; yea, it not only leadeth a man to a high esteem of Christ, but also of all things that relate to that way of salvation, as grace, the new covenant, faith, etc., and maketh him carefully gather and treasure up his Michtams, or golden scriptures, for the confirmation of his interest in these things. The third great end is, to deter and frighten people from sin, and make them quarrel with it, and consent to put their neck under Christ's yoke.

God kindles some sparks of hell in men's bosoms by the discovery of their sin, as a ready means to make them henceforth stand in awe, knowing 'how bitter a thing it is to depart from the Lord.' (Jer. 2: 19.) So we find rest offered to the weary, upon condition they will take Christ's yoke: 'Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.' (Matt. 11: 29.) And God offereth to own men as their God and Father, upon condition they will allow no peaceable abode to Belial: 'What fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness and what communion has light with darkness and what concord has Christ with Belial?

Or what part has he that believeth with an infidel? Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord almighty.' (2 Cor. 6: 14-18.) The fourth great end is, to work in men a patient and thankful submission to all the Master's pleasure. This is a singular piece of work: 'Then shalt thou remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth anymore, because of thy shame, when I am pacified towards thee, for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord.' (Ezek. 16: 63.)

The sight of a man's own vileness and deserving makes him silent, and constrains him to lay his hand on his mouth, whatsoever God does unto him: 'I was dumb and opened not my mouth, because Thou didst it.' (Psa. 39: 9.) 'God has punished us less than our iniquities.' (Ezra 9: 13.) 'I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned.' (Mic. 7: 9.) The man carets not what God does to him, or how He deal with him, if only He save him from the deserved wrath to come: also any mercy is great mercy to him who has seen such a sight of himself; 'he is less than the least of mercies.' (Gen. 32: 10.)

'Any crumb falling from the Master's table' is welcome. (Matt. 15: 27.) He thinks it 'rich mercy that he is not consumed.' (Lam. 3: 22.) This is the thing that marvelously maketh God's poor afflicted people so silent under and satisfied with their lot; nay, they think he deserveth hell who openeth his mouth at anything God does to him, since he has pardoned his transgressions. So then, for satisfying the objection, I say, if the Lord have driven thee out of thyself, and commended Christ to thy heart above all things, and made thee resolve, in His strength, to wage war with every known transgression, and thou art in some measure as a weaned child, acquiescing in what He does unto thee, desiring to lay thy hand on thy mouth thankfully; then thy convictions of sin and misery, and whatsoever thou dost plead as a preparatory work, is sufficient, and thou art to debate no more concerning it.

Only be advised so to study new discoveries of the sense of thy lost condition every day, because of thy old and new sins; and also to seek fresh help in Christ, who is a priest forever to make intercession; and to have the work of sanctification and patience with thankfulness renewed and quickened often: for somewhat of that work, which abaseth thee, exalteth Christ, and renders thee conformed to His will, must accompany thee throughout all thy lifetime in this world.

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