

George Whitefield

Sermon 13

The Potter and the Clay

Jeremiah 18:1-6, "The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words. Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make [it]. Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the LORD. Behold, as the clay [is] in the potter's hand, so [are] ye in mine hand, O house of Israel.

At sundry times, and in diverse manners, God was pleased to speak to our fathers by the prophets, before he spoke to us in these last days by his Son. To Elijah, he revealed himself by a small still voice. To Jacob, by a dream. To Moses, he spoke face to face. Sometimes he was pleased to send a favorite prophet on some especial errand; and whilst he was thus employed, vouchsafed to give him a particular message, which he was ordered to deliver without reserve to all the inhabitants of the land. A very instructive instance of this kind we have recorded in the passage now read to you. The first verse informs us that it was a word, or message, which came immediately from the Lord to the prophet Jeremiah. At what time, or how the prophet was employed when it came, we are not told. Perhaps, whilst he was praying for those who would not pray for themselves. Perhaps, near the morning, when he was slumbering or musing on his bed. For the word came to him, saying, "Arise." And what must he do when risen? He must "go down to the potter's house" (the prophet knew where to find it) "and there (says the great Jehovah) I will cause thee to hear my words." Jeremiah does not confer with flesh and blood, he does not object that it was dark or cold, or desire that he might have his message given him there, but without the least hesitation is immediately obedient to the heavenly vision. "Then (says he) I went down to the potter's house, and behold he wrought a work upon the wheels." Just as he was entering into the house or workshop, the potter, it seems, had a vessel upon his wheel. And was there any thing so extraordinary in this, that it should be ushered in with the word Behold? What a dreaming visionary, or superstitious enthusiast, would this Jeremiah be accounted, even by many who read his prophecies with seeming respect, was he alive now? But this was not the first time Jeremiah had heard from heaven in this manner. He therefore willingly obeyed; and had you or I accompanied him to the potter's house, I believe we should have seen him silently, but intensely waiting upon his great and all-wise Commander, to know wherefore he sent him thither. Methinks I see him all attention. He takes notice, that "the vessel was of clay;" but as he held it in his hand, and turned round the wheel, in order to work it into some particular form, "it was marred in the hands of the potter," and consequently unfit for the use he before intended to put it to. And what becomes of this marred vessel? Being thus marred, I suppose, the potter, without the least imputation of injustice, might have thrown it aside, and taken up another piece of clay in its room. But he did not. "He made it again another vessel." And does the potter call a council of his domestics, to inquire of them what kind of vessel they would advise him to make of it? No, in no wise. "He made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it."

"Then," adds Jeremiah, whilst he was in the way of duty ÷ then ÷ whilst he was mentally crying, Lord what wouldst thou have me to do? "Then the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? Saith the Lord. Behold, as the clay is in the hands of the potter (marred, and unfit for the first designed purpose) so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel." At length, then, Jeremiah hath his sermon given to him: short, but popular. It was to be

delivered to the whole house of Israel, princes, priests, and people: short, but pungent, even sharper than a two-edged sword. What! says the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth, must I be denied the privilege of a common potter? May I not do what I will with my own? "Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hands, so are ye in mine hands, O house of Israel. I made and formed you into a people, and blessed you above any other nation under heaven: but, O Israel, thou by thy backslidings hast destroyed thyself. As the potter therefore might justly have thrown aside his marred clay, so may I justly unchurch and unpeople you. But what if I should come over the mountains of your guilt, heal your backslidings, revive my work in the midst of the years, and cause your latter end greatly to increase? Behold, as the clay is in the hands of the potter, lying at his disposal, either to be destroyed or formed into another vessel, so are ye in my hands, O house of Israel: I may either reject, and thereby ruin you, or I may revisit and revive you according to my own sovereign good will and pleasure, and who shall say unto me, what dost thou?"

This seems to be the genuine interpretation, and primary intention of this beautiful part of holy writ. But waving all further inquiries about its primary design or meaning, I shall now proceed to show, that what the glorious Jehovah here says of the house of Israel in general, is applicable to every individual of mankind in particular. And as I presume this may be done, without either wire-drawing scripture on the one hand, or wresting it from its original meaning on the other, not to detain you any longer, I shall, from the passage thus explained and paraphrased, deduce, and endeavor to enlarge on these two general heads.

FIRST, I shall undertake to prove, that every man naturally engendered of the offspring of Adam, is in the sight of the all-seeing, heart-searching God, only as a "piece of marred clay."

SECONDLY, That being thus marred, he must necessarily be renewed: and under this head, we shall likewise point out by whose agency this mighty change is to be brought about.

These particulars being discussed, way will naturally be made for a short word of application.

FIRST, To prove that every man naturally engendered of the offspring of Adam, is in the sight of an all-seeing, heart-searching God, only as a piece of marred clay.

Be pleased to observe, that we say every man NATURALLY engendered of the offspring of Adam, or every man since the fall: for if we consider man as he first came out of the hands of his Maker, he was far from being in such melancholy circumstances. No; he was originally made upright; or as Moses, that sacred penman, declares, "God made him after his own image." Surely never was so much expressed in so few words; which hath often made me wonder how that great critic Longinus, who so justly admires the dignity and grandeur of Moses's account of the creation, and "God said, Let there be light, and there was light;" I say I have often wondered why he did not read a little further, and bestow as just an encomium [praise, approval, acclaim] upon this short, but withal inexpressibly august [noble, elegant, superb] and comprehensive description of the formation of man, "so God created man in his own image." Struck with a deep sense of such amazing goodness, and that he might impress yet a deeper sense of it upon our minds too, he immediately adds, "in the image of God made he him." A council of the most adorable Trinity was called on this important occasion: God did not say, Let there be a man, and there was a man, but God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." This is the account which the lively oracles of God do give us of man in his first estate; but it is very remarkable, that the transition from the account of his creation to that of his misery, is very quick, and why? For a very good reason, because he soon fell from his primeval dignity; and by that fall, the divine image is so defaced, that he is now to be valued only as antiquarians value an ancient medal, merely for the sake of the image and superscription once stamped upon it; or of a second divine impress, which, through grace, it may yet receive.

Let us take a more particular survey of him, and see whether these things are so or not: and first, as to his UNDERSTANDING. As man was created originally "after God in knowledge," as well as righteousness and true holiness, we may rationally infer, that his understanding, in respect to things natural, as well as divine, was of a prodigious extent: for he was made but a little lower than the angels, and consequently being like them, excellent in his understanding, he knew much of God, of himself, and all about him; and in this as well as every other respect, was, as Mr. Golter expresses it in one of his essays, a perfect major: but this is far from being our case now. For in respect to NATURAL THINGS, our understandings are evidently darkened. It is but little that we can know, and even that little knowledge which we can acquire, is with much weariness of the flesh, and we are doomed to gain it as we do our daily bread, I mean by the sweat of our brows.

Men of low and narrow minds soon commence wise in their own conceits: and having acquired a little smattering of the learned languages, and made some small proficiency in the dry sciences, are easily tempted to look upon themselves as a head taller than their fellow mortals, and accordingly too, too often put forth great swelling words of vanity. But persons of a more exalted, and extensive reach of thought, dare not boast. No: they know that the greatest scholars are in the dark, in respect to many even of the minutest things in life: and after all their painful researches into the Arcana Natura, they find such an immense void, such an unmeasurable expanse yet to be traveled over, that they are obliged at last to conclude, almost with respect to every thing, "that they know nothing yet as they ought to know." This consideration, no doubt, led Socrates, when he was asked by one of his scholars, why the oracle pronounced him the wisest man on earth, to give him this judicious answer, "Perhaps it is, because I am most sensible of my own ignorance." Would to God, that all who call themselves Christians, had learned so much as this heathen! We should then no longer hear so many learned men, falsely so called, betray their ignorance by boasting of the extent of their shallow understanding, nor by professing themselves so wise, prove themselves such arrant pedantic fools.

If we view our understandings in respect to spiritual things, we shall find that they are not only darkened, but become darkness itself, even "darkness that may be felt" by all who are not past feeling. And how should it be otherwise, since the infallible word of God assures us, that they are alienated from the light of life of God, and thereby naturally as incapable to judge of divine and spiritual things, comparatively speaking, as a man born blind is incapacitated to distinguish the various colors of the rainbow. "The natural man, (says an inspired apostle) discerneth not the things of the Spirit of God;" so far from it, "they are foolishness unto him;" and why? Because they are only to be "spiritually discerned." Hence it was, that Nicodemus, who was blessed with an outward and divine revelation, who was a ruler of the Jews, nay a master of Israel, when our Lord told him, "he must be born again;" appeared to be quite grappled. "How (says he) can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born? How can these things be?" Were three more absurd questions ever proposed by the most ignorant man alive? Or can there be a clearer proof of the blindness of man's understanding, in respect to divine, as well as natural things? Is not man then a piece of marred clay?

This will appear yet more evident, if we consider the PERVERSE BENT OF HIS WILL. Being made in the very image of God; undoubtedly before the fall, man had no other will but his Maker's. God's will, and Adam's, were then like unisons in music. There was not the least disunion, or discord between them. But now he hath a will, as directly contrary to the will of God, as light is contrary to darkness, or heaven to hell. We all bring into the world with us a carnal mind, which is not only an enemy to God, but "enmity itself, and which is therefore not subject unto the law of God, neither indeed can it be." A great many show much zeal in talking against the man of sin, and loudly (and indeed very justly) exclaim against the Pope for sitting in the temple, I mean the church of Christ, and "exalting himself above all that is called God." But say not within thyself, who shall go to Rome, to pull down this spiritual antichrist? As though there was no antichrist but what is without us. For know, O man, whoever thou art, an infinitely more dangerous antichrist, because less discerned, even SELF-WILL, fits daily in the temple of thy heart, exalting itself, above all that is

called God, and obliging all its votaries to say of Christ himself, that Prince of peace, "we will not have this man to reign over us." God's people, whose spiritual senses, are exercised about spiritual things, and whose eyes are opened to see the abominations that are in their hearts, frequently feel this to their sorrow. Whether they will or not, this enmity from time to time bubbles up, and in spite of all their watchfulness and care, when they are under the pressure of some sharp affliction, a long desertion, or tedious night of temptation, they often find something within rising in rebellion against the all-wise disposals of divine Providence, and saying unto God their heavenly Father, "what dost thou?" This makes them to cry (and no wonder, since it constrained one of the greatest saints and apostles first to introduce the expression) "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" The spiritual and renewed soul groans thus, being burdened; but as for the natural and unawakened man, it is not so with him; self-will, as well as every other evil, either in a more latent or discernible manner, reigns in his unrenewed soul, and proves him, even to a demonstration to others, whether he knows, or will confess it himself or not, that in respect to the disorders of his will, as well as his understanding, man is only a piece of marred clay.

A transient view of fallen man's AFFECTIONS will yet more firmly corroborate this melancholy truth, These, at his being first placed in the paradise of God, were always kept within proper bounds, fixed upon their proper objects, and, like so many gentle rivers, sweetly, spontaneously and habitually glided into their ocean, God. But now the scene is changed. For we are not naturally full of vile affections, which like a mighty and impetuous torrent carry all before them. We love what we should hate, and hate what we should love; we fear what we should hope for, and hope for what we should fear; nay, to such an ungovernable height do our affections sometimes rise, that though our judgments are convinced to the contrary, yet we will gratify our passions though it be at the expense of our present and eternal welfare. We feel a war of our affections, warring against the law of our minds, and bringing us into captivity to the law of sin and death. So that *video meliora proboque, deteriora foquor* [latin phrase], I approve of better things but follow worse, is too, too often the practice of us all.

I am sensible, that many are offended, when mankind are compared to beasts and devils. And they might have some shadow of reason for being so, if we asserted in a physical sense, that they were really beasts and really devils. For then, as I once heard a very learned prelate, who was objecting against this comparison, observe, "a man being a beast would be incapable, and being a devil, would be under an impossibility of being saved." But when we make use of such shocking comparisons, as he was pleased to term them, we would be understood only in a moral sense; and in so doing, we assert no more than some of the most holy men of God have said of themselves, and others, in the lively oracles many ages ago. Holy David, the man after God's own heart, speaking of himself, says, "so foolish was I, and as a beast before thee." And holy Job, speaking of man in general, says, that "he is born as a wild ass's colt," or take away the expletive, which as some think ought to be done, and then he positively asserts, that man is a wild ass's colt. And what says our Lord, "Ye are of your father the devil;" and "the whole world is said to lie in him, the wicked one, who now rules in the children of disobedience," that is, in all unrenewed souls. Our stupidity, proneness to fix our affections on the things of the earth, and our eagerness to make provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof, evidence us to be earthly and brutes!; and our mental passions, anger, hatred, malice, envy, and such like, prove with equal strength, that we are also devilish. Both together conspire to evince, that in respect to his affections, as well as his understanding and will, man deservedly may be termed a piece of marred clay.

The present BLINDNESS OF NATURAL CONSCIENCE makes this appear in a yet more glaring light; in the soul of the first man Adam, conscience was no doubt the candle of the Lord, and enabled him rightly and instantaneously to discern between good and evil, right and wrong. And, blessed be God! Some remains of this are yet left; but alas, how dimly does it burn, and how easily and quickly is it covered, or put out and extinguished. I need not send you to the heathen world, to learn the truth of this; you all know it by experience. Was there no other evidence, your own consciences are

instead of a thousand witnesses, that man, as to his natural conscience, as well as understanding, will and affections, is much marred clay.

Nor does that great and boasted Diana, I mean UNASSISTED UNENLIGHTENED REASON, less demonstrate the justness of such an assertion. Far be it from me to decry or exclaim against human reason. Christ himself is called the "LOGOS, the Reason;" and I believe it would not require much learning, or take up much time to prove, that so far and no farther than as we act agreeably to the laws of Christ Jesus, are we any way conformable to the laws of right reason. His service is therefore called "a reasonable service." And however his servants and followers may now be looked upon as fools and madmen; yet there will come a time, when those who despise and set themselves to oppose divine revelation, will find, that what they now call reason, is only REASON DEPRAVED, and an utterly incapable, of itself, to guide us into the way of peace, or show the way of salvation, as the men of Sodom were to find Lot's door after they were struck with blindness by the angels, who came to lead him out of the city. The horrid and dreadful mistakes, which the most refined reasoners in the heathen world ran into, both as to the object, as well as manner of divine worship, have sufficiently demonstrated the weakness and depravity of human reason: nor do our modern boasters afford us any better proofs of the greatness of its strength, since the best improvement they generally make of it, is only to reason themselves into downright willful infidelity, and thereby reason themselves out of eternal salvation. Need we now any further witness, that man, fallen man, is altogether a piece of marred clay?

But this is not all, we have yet more evidence to call; for do the blindness of our understandings, the perverseness of our will, the rebellion of our affections, the corruption our consciences, the depravity of our reason prove this charge; and does not present DISORDERED FRAME AND CONSTITUTION OF OUR BODES confirm the same also? Doubtless in this respect, man, in the most literal sense of the word, is a piece of marred clay. For God originally made him of the "dust of the earth." So that notwithstanding our boasting of our high pedigrees, and different descent, we were all originally upon a level, and a little red earth was the common substratum out of which we were all formed. Clay indeed it was, but clay wonderfully modified, even by the immediate hands of the Creator of heaven and earth. One therefore hath observed, that it is said "God built the man;" he did not form him rashly or hastily, but built and finished him according to the plan before laid down in his own eternal mind. And though, as the great God is without body, parts, or passions, we cannot suppose when it is said "God made man after his own image," that it has any reference to his body, yet I cannot help thinking (with Doctor South) that as the eternal Logos was hereafter to appear, God manifest in the flesh, infinite wisdom was undoubtedly exerted in forming a casket into which so invaluable a pearl was in the fullness of time to be deposited. Some of the ancients are said to have asserted, that man at the first, had what we call a glory shining round him; but without attempting to be wise above what is written, we may venture to affirm, that he had a glorious body, which knowing no sin, knew neither sickness nor pain. But now on this, as well as other accounts, he may justly be called Ichabod; for its primitive strength and glory are sadly departed from it, and like the ruins of some ancient and stately fabric, only so much less as to give us some faint idea of what it was when it first appeared in its original and perfect beauty. The apostle Paul, therefore, who knew how to call things by their proper names, as well as any man living, does not scruple to term the human body, though in its original constitution fearfully and wonderfully made, a "vile body;" vile indeed! Since it is subject to such vile diseases, put to such vile, yea very vile uses, and at length is to come to so vile an end. "For dust we are, and to dust we must return." This among other considerations, we may well suppose, caused the blessed Jesus to weep at the grave of Lazarus. He wept, not only because his friend Lazarus was dead, but he wept to see human nature, through man's own default, thus laid in ruins, by being subject unto such a dissolution, made like unto the beasts that perish.

Let us here pause a while, and with our sympathizing Lord, see if we cannot shed a few silent tears at least, upon the same sorrowful occasion. Who, who is there amongst us, that upon such a

melancholy review of man's present, real, and most deplorable depravity both in body and soul, can refrain from weeping over such a piece of marred clay? Who, who can help adopting holy David's lamentation over Saul and Jonathan? "How are the mighty fallen! How are they slain in their high places!" Originally it was not so. No, "God made man after his own image; in the image of God made he man." Never was there so much expressed in so few words. He was created after God in righteousness and true holiness.

This is the account, which the sacred volume gives us of this interesting point. This, this is that blessed book, that book of books, from whence, together with an appeal to the experience of our own hearts, and the testimonies of all past ages, we have thought proper to fetch our proofs. For, after all, we must be obliged to divine revelation, to know what we were, what we are, and what we are to be. In these, as in a true glass, we may see our real and proper likeness. And from these only can we trace the source and fountain of all those innumerable evils, which like a deluge have overflowed the natural and moral world. If any should object against the authenticity of this revelation, and consequently against the doctrine this day drawn from thence, they do in my opinion thereby very much confirm it. For unless a man was very much disordered indeed, as to his understanding, will, affections, natural conscience, and his power of reasoning, he could never possibly deny such a revelation, which is founded on a multiplicity of infallible external evidences, hath so many internal evidences of a divine stamp in every page, is so suited to the common exigencies of all mankind, so agreeable to the experience of all men, and which hath been so wonderfully handed and preserved to us, hath been so instrumental to the convicting, converting, and comforting so many millions of souls, and hath stood the test of the most severe scrutinies, and exact criticisms of the most subtle and refined, as well as the most malicious and persecuting enemies, that ever lived, even from the beginning of time to this very day. Persons of such a turn of mind, I think, are rather to be prayed for, than disputed with, if so be this perverse wickedness of their hearts may be forgiven them: "They are in the very gall of bitterness, and must have their consciences seared as it were with a red-hot iron," and must have their eyes "blinded by the god of this world," otherwise they could not but see, and feel, and assent to the truth of this doctrine, of man's being universally depraved; which not only in one or two, but in one or two thousands, in every page, I could almost say, is written, in such legible characters, that runs may read. Indeed, revelation itself is founded upon the doctrine of the fall. Had we kept our original integrity, the law of God would have yet been written in our hearts, and thereby the want of a divine revelation, at least such as ours, would have been superseded; but being fallen, instead of rising in rebellion against God, we ought to be filled with unspeakable thankfulness to our all bountiful Creator, who by a few lines in his own books hath discovered more to us, than all the philosophers and most learned men in the world could, or would, have discovered, though they had studied to all eternity.

I am well aware, that some who pretend to own the validity of divine revelation, are notwithstanding enemies to the doctrine that hath this day been delivered; and would fain elude the force of the proofs generally urged in defense of it, by saying, they only bespeak the corruption of particular persons, or have reference only to the heathen world: but such persons err, not knowing their own hearts, or the power of Jesus Christ: for by nature there is no difference between Jew or Gentile, Greek or Barbarian, bond or free. We are altogether equally become abominable in God's sight, all equally fallen short of the glory of God, and consequently all alike so many pieces of marred clay.

How God came to suffer man to fall? how long man stood before he fell? And how the corruption contracted by the fall, is propagated to every individual of his species are questions of such an abstruse and critical nature, that should I undertake to answer them, would be only gratifying a sinful curiosity, and tempting you, as Satan tempted our first parents, to eat forbidden fruit. It will much better answer the design of this present discourse, which is practical, to pass on

II. To the next thing proposed, and point out to you the absolute necessity there is of this fallen nature's being renewed.

This I have had all along in my eye, and on account of this, have purposely been so explicit on the first general head: for has Archimedes once said, "Give me a place where I may fix my foot, and I will move the world;" so without the least imputation of arrogance, with which, perhaps, he was justly chargeable, we may venture to say, grant the foregoing doctrine to be true, and then deny the necessity of man's being renewed who can.

I suppose, I may take it for granted, that all of you amongst whom I am now preaching the kingdom of God, hope after death to go to a place which we call Heaven. And my heart's desire and prayer to God for you is, that you all may have mansions prepared for you there. But give me leave to tell you, were you now to see these heavens opened, and the angel (to use the words of the seraphic Hervey clothed with all his heavenly drapery, with one foot upon the earth, and another upon the sea; nay, were you to see and hear the angel of the everlasting covenant, Jesus Christ himself, proclaiming "time shall be no more," and giving you all an invitation immediately to come to heaven; heaven would be no heaven to you, nay it would be a hell to your souls, unless you were first prepared for a proper enjoyment of it here on earth. "For what communion hath light with darkness?" Or what fellowship could unrenewed sons of Belial possibly keep up with the pure and immaculate Jesus?

The generality of people form strange ideas of heaven. And because the scriptures, in condescension to the weakness of our capacities, describe it by images taken from earthly delights and human grandeur, therefore they are apt to carry their thoughts no higher, and at the best only form to themselves a kind of Mahomitan paradise. But permit me to tell you, and God grant it may sink deep into your hearts! Heaven is rather a state than a place; and consequently, unless you are previously disposed by a suitable state of mind, you could not be happy even in heaven itself. For what is grace but glory militant? What is glory but grace triumphant? This consideration made a pious author say, that "holiness, happiness, and heaven, were only three different words for one and the self-same thing." And this made the great Preston, when he was about to die, turn to his friends, saying, "I am changing my place, but not my company." He had conversed with God and good men on earth; he was going to keep up the same, and infinitely more refined communion with God, his holy angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect, in heaven.

To make us meet to be blissful partakers of such heavenly company, this "marred clay," I mean, these depraved natures of ours, must necessarily undergo an universal moral change; our understandings must be enlightened; our wills, reason, and consciences, must be renewed; our affections must be drawn toward, and fixed upon things above; and because flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven, this corruptible must put on incorruption, this mortal must put on immortality. And thus old things must literally pass away, and behold all things, even the body as well as the faculties of the soul, must become new.

This moral change is what some call, repentance, some, conversion, some, regeneration; choose what name you please, I only pray God, that we all may have the thing. The scriptures call it holiness, sanctification, the new creature, and our Lord calls it a "New birth, or being born again, or born from above." These are not barely figurative expressions, or the flights of eastern language, nor do they barely denote a relative change of state conferred on all those who are admitted into Christ's church by baptism; but they denote a real, moral change of heart and life, a real participation of the divine life in the soul of man. Some indeed content themselves with a figurative interpretation; but unless they are made to experience the power and efficacy thereof, by a solid living experience in their own souls, all their learning, all their labored criticism, will not exempt them from a real damnation. Christ hath said it, and Christ will stand, "Unless a man," learned or unlearned, high or low, though he be a master of Israel as Nicodemus was, unless he "be born again, he cannot see, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

If it be inquired, who is to be the potter? And by whose agency this marred clay is to be formed into another vessel? Or in other words, if it be asked, how this great and mighty change is to be effected?

I answer, not by the mere dint and force of moral suasion [persuasion]. This is good in its place. And I am so far from thinking, that Christian preachers should not make use of rational arguments and motives in their sermons, that I cannot think they are fit to preach at all, who either cannot, or will not use them. We have the example of the great God himself for such a practice; "Come (says he) and let us reason together." And St. Paul, that prince of preachers, "reasoned of temperance, and righteousness, and a judgment to come." And it is remarkable, "that whilst he was reasoning of these things, Felix trembled." Nor are the most persuasive strains of holy rhetoric less needful for a scribe ready instructed to the kingdom of God. The scriptures both of the Old and New Testament, every where abound with them. And when can they be more properly employed, and brought forth, than when we are acting as ambassadors or heaven, and beseeching poor sinners, as in Christ's stead, to be reconciled unto God. All this we readily grant. But at the same time, I would as soon go to yonder church-yard, and attempt to raise the dead carcasses, with a "come forth," as to preach to dead souls, did I not hope for some superior power to make the word effectual to the designed end. I should only be like a sounding brass for any saving purpose, or as a tinkling cymbal. Neither is this change to be wrought by the power of our own free-will. This is an idol every where set up, but we dare not fall down and worship it. "No man (says Christ) can come to me, unless the Father draw him." Our own free-will, if improved, may restrain us from the commission of many evils, and put us in the way of conversion; but, after exerting our utmost efforts (and we are bound in duty to exert them) we shall find the words of our own church article to be true, that "man since the fall hath no power to turn to God." No, we might as soon attempt to stop the ebbing and flowing of the tide, and calm the most tempestuous sea, as to imagine that we can subdue, or bring under proper regulations, our own unruly wills and affections by any strength inherent in ourselves.

And therefore, that I may keep you no longer in suspense, I inform you, that this heavenly potter, this blessed agent, is the Almighty Spirit of God, the Holy Ghost, the third person in the most adorable Trinity, coessential with the Father and the Son. This is that Spirit, which at the beginning of time moved on the face of the waters, when nature lay in one universal chaos. This was the Spirit that overshadowed the Holy Virgin, before that holy thing was born of her: and this same Spirit must come, and move upon the chaos of our souls, before we can properly be called the sons of God. This is what John the Baptist calls "being baptized with the Holy Ghost," without which, his and all other baptisms, whether infant or adult, avail nothing. This is that fire, which our Lord came to send into our earthly hearts, and which I pray the Lord of all lords to kindle in every unrenewed one this day.

As for the extraordinary operations of the Holy Ghost, such as working of miracles, or speaking with divers kinds of tongues, they are long since ceased. But as for this miracle of miracles, turning the soul to God by the more ordinary operations of the Holy Ghost, this abides yet, and will abide till time itself shall be no more. For it is he that sanctifieth us, and all the elect people of God. On this account, true believers are said to be "born from above, to be born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." Their second, as well as their first creation, is truly and purely divine. It is, therefore, called "a creation;" but put ye on (says the apostle) the new man which is created" ÷ And how? Even as the first man was, "after God in righteousness and true holiness."

These, these are the precious truths, which a scoffing world would fain rally or ridicule us out of. To produce this glorious change, this new creation, the glorious Jesus left his Father's bosom. For this he led a persecuted life; for this he died an ignominious and accursed death; for this he rose again; and for this he now sitteth at the right hand of his Father. All the precepts of his gospel, all his ordinances, all his providences, whether of an afflictive or prosperous nature, all divine revelation from the beginning to the end, all center in these two points, to show us how we are fallen, and to begin, early on, and complete a glorious and blessed change in our souls. This is an end worthy of the coming of so divine a personage. To deliver a multitude of souls of every nation, language and tongue, from so many moral evils, and to reinstate them in an incomparably more excellent condition than that from whence they are fallen, is an end worthy the shedding of such precious blood. What system of religion is there now, or was there ever exhibited to the world, any way to be

compared to this? Can the deistical scheme pretend in any degree to come up to it? Is it not noble, rational, and truly divine? And why then will not all that hitherto are strangers to this blessed restoration of their fallen natures, (for my heart is too full to abstain any longer from an application) why will you any longer dispute or stand out against it? Why will you not rather bring your clay to this heavenly Potter, and say from your inmost souls, "Turn us, O good Lord, and so shall we be turned?" This, you may and can do: and if you go thus far, who knows but that this very day, yea this very hour, the heavenly Potter may take you in hand, and make you vessels of honor fit for the Redeemer's use? Others that were once as far from the kingdom of God as you are, have been partakers of this blessedness. What a wretched creature was Mary Magdalene? And yet out of her Jesus Christ cast seven devils. Nay, he appeared to her first, after he rose from the dead, and she became as it were an apostle to the very apostles. What a covetous creature was Zaccheus? He was a griping cheating publican; and yet, perhaps, in one quarter of an hour's time, his heart is enlarged, and he made quite willing to give half of his goods to feed the poor. And to mention no more, what a cruel person was Paul. He was a persecutor, a blasphemer, injurious; one that breathed out threatenings against the disciples of the Lord, and made havoc of the church of Christ. And yet what a wonderful turn did he meet with, as he was journeying to Damascus? From a persecutor, he became a preacher; was afterwards made a spiritual father to thousands, and now probably sits nearest the Lord Jesus Christ in glory. And why all this? That he might be made an example to them that should hereafter believe. O then believe, repent; I beseech you, believe the gospel. Indeed, it is glad tidings, even tidings of great joy. You will then no longer have any thing to say against the doctrine of Original Sin; or charge the Almighty foolishly, for suffering our first parents to be prevailed on to eat such sour grapes, and permitting thereby their children's teeth to be set on edge. You will then no longer cry out against the doctrine of the New Birth, as enthusiasm, or brand the assertors of such blessed truths with the opprobrious names of fools and madmen. Having felt, you will then believe; having believed, you will therefore speak; and instead of being vessels of wrath, and growing harder and harder in hell fire, like vessels in a potter's oven, you will be made vessels of honor, and be presented at the great day by Jesus, to his heavenly Father, and be translated to live with him as monuments of rich, free, distinguishing and sovereign grace, for ever and ever.

You, that have in some degree experienced the quickening influence (for I must not conclude without dropping a word or two to God's children) you know how to pity, and therefore, I beseech you also to pray for those, to whose circumstances this discourse is peculiarly adapted. But will you be content in praying for them? Will you not see reason to pray for yourselves also? Yes, doubtless, for yourselves also. For you, and you only know, how much there is yet lacking in your faith, and how far you are from being partakers in that degree, which you desire to be, of the whole mind that was in Christ Jesus. You know what a body of sin and death you carry about with you, and that you must necessarily expect many turns of God's providence and grace, before you will be wholly delivered from it. But thanks be to God, we are in safe hands. He that has been the author, will also be the finisher of our faith. Yet a little while, and we like him shall say "It is finished;" we shall bow down our heads and give up the ghost. Till then, (for to thee, O Lord, will we now direct our prayer) help us, O Almighty Father, in patience to possess our souls. Behold, we are the clay, and thou art the Potter. Let not the thing formed say to him that formed it, whatever the dispensations of thy future Will concerning us may be, Why dost thou deal with us thus? Behold, we put ourselves as blanks in thine hands, deal with us as seemeth good in thy sight, only let every cross, every affliction, every temptation, be overruled to the stamping thy blessed image in more lively characters on our hearts; that so passing from glory to glory, by the powerful operations of thy blessed Spirit, we may be made thereby more and more meet for, and at last be translated to a full, perfect, endless, and uninterrupted enjoyment of glory hereafter, with thee O Father, thee O Son, and thee O blessed Spirit; to whom, three persons but one God, be ascribed, as is most due, all honor, power, might, majesty and dominion, now and to all eternity. Amen and Amen.