



“You will know them by their fruits.” Mt. 7:16

ON MAN’S DEPRAVITY AND DANGER IN HIS NATURAL STATE

A dialogue between a Minister and one of his parishioners...

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From: THE WORKS OF THE REVEREND JOHN FLETCHER

PART ONE

Containing an account of the doctrine to be examined.

PARISHIONER. -Though I have hitherto avoided conversing with you on religious subjects, I hear you in the church, and am well acquainted with the doctrines you chiefly enforce. They always appeared to me so singular, (to use no harsher expression,) that I could not help being greatly prejudiced against you; but having at length reason to hope, from the exemplariness of your life, that you mean well, and are open to conviction, I come to lay my objections before you, with the freedom of a well wisher to your ministry, and the simplicity of an inquirer after truth.

Minister. -The motive of your visit makes it doubly agreeable. One of my greatest pleasures is to converse with such of my parishioners as are willing to expostulate, or advise with me about spiritual things: but, alas! Most of them, through strong prejudice or false shame, refuse me this satisfaction and delight.

Parishioner -I never could prevail with myself to wait upon you before last Sunday; as you was then reading the twenty fifth chapter of the Acts, I was struck with the 16th verse, where Festus says, “that it was not the custom of the Romans, [who were but heathens,] to condemn any man, before he had had his accusers face to face, with liberty to answer for himself, concerning the crime laid against him.” And I concluded that I came short of heathen honesty, in condemning you as a (fanatical) preacher, before I had given you an opportunity of answering for yourself.

Minister -You see that “all Scripture is profitable for reproof, or for instruction:” may we in all cases apply it with as much candour as you have done in this! If you please, then, propose your objections; the more frank and open you are, the more I shall account you an advocate of truth, and a friend to me.

Parishioner -Your request agrees with my design; and I shall, without apology, tell you what gives me offence in your doctrine. And to begin with what you often begin with yourself, let me ask, Do you not go much too far when you speak of man’s depravity and danger?

You say that we are all in a fallen, lost, undone state by nature, that our understanding is blind in spiritual things, our reason impaired, our will perverse, our conscience defiled, our memory weakened, our imagination extravagant, our affections disordered, our members instruments of iniquity, and our life altogether sinful. You suppose that till a change pass upon us we remain dead in sin, under the curse of God’s broken law, and exposed every moment to eternal destruction of body and soul. You represent

us as so amazingly helpless, that we can no more, without the power of Divine grace, recover ourselves out of this deplorable state, than we can raise the dead: and, in short, you declare, that unless we are duly sensible of these melancholy truths, we neither can truly repent, nor unfeignedly embrace the Gospel.

Is not this a true account of your doctrine?

Minister -It is: I readily assent to it.

Parishioner -Believe me, the oddity, harshness, and uncharitableness of these tenets disgust the generality of your hearers, as well as myself. We live in an age when people have too much sense to imbibe such dismal notions, and too much wisdom to be frightened into godliness. Let me advise, let me entreat you to give over preaching damnation at this rate. Do but condescend to be more fashionable, and your character will be less offensive.

Minister -I thank you for your advice of becoming fashionable. I will follow it as soon as I am convinced that a preacher is to discard truth, and take fashion for his guide: but till then, “whether you will hear, or whether you will forbear, I must not shun to declare to you the whole counsel of God,” Ezek. 2:7; Acts 20:27. And, if some parts of it do not suit your taste, consider that, as the best medicines may be very unpalatable, so the most necessary doctrines may be extremely unpleasant. You value your physician for consulting your health rather than your taste; blame not me then for what you approve in him, and remember that our Lord himself, though filled with “the meekness of wisdom,” could not avoid offending “many of his disciples;” for St. John says that when they heard him “they murmured and went back,” with the usual complaint, “This is a hard saying: who can bear it?” John 6:60.

Parishioner -If our Lord’s doctrine was disagreeable to the Jews, it was true and salutary: but yours is generally supposed to be false and pernicious.

Minister -If the doctrine of our fallen state, as you have just now represented it, is not true, and conducive to spiritual health, I advise you myself to reject it, though it were preached by an angel from heaven. But, should its truth and importance be asserted by the joint testimony of Scripture, reason, experience, and our own Church, I hope that you will receive it as a good though unpalatable medicine.

Parishioner -Reason and experience will convince a candid Deist, and the declarations of our Church, supported by revelation, will silence the objections of an honest Churchman: you may therefore assure yourself, that if your doctrine is confirmed by this fourfold authority, I shall oppose it no more.

The minister, having expressed the satisfaction which his visitor’s answer gave him, and the pleasure he should feel in being directed right if he were wrong, resumed the subject in the

PART TWO

Wherein the apostasy and misery of man are proved from Scripture.

Minister -Let us first bring the doctrine of the fall to the touchstone of Scripture: “To the law and to the testimony, (says the prophet,) for if we speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in us,” Isa. 8:20.

We read, Gen. 1:26, that God made man not only in his natural image, with life, understanding, and will, which constitute the being of good or bad spirits: but also after his moral likeness, I.e. “in righteousness and true holiness,” according to St. Paul’s definition of it, Eph 4:24. In this moral resemblance of God consists the well being, or Divine life of good spirits. While man continued in it, his spotless soul was actuated by the Spirit of God, as our bodies are by our souls, and eternal truth

itself pronounced him very good, Gen 1:31.

But how soon and how low did he fall! In the third chapter we see him overcome by the tempter in disguise: he wickedly believes the father of lies before the God of truth: he proudly aspires to be equal with his Maker; and, in order to it, madly places appetite on the throne of reason. Thus unbelief, the besetting sin of man; pride, which the apostle calls “the condemnation of the devil,” 1 Tim. 3:6; and sensuality, the characteristic of the beast, invade his unguarded soul. And now, “when lust had conceived, it brought forth sin,” Adam ate of the forbidden fruit, “and sin, when it was finished, brought forth death,” James 1:15. It instantly quenched the Spirit, put an end to the breathings of prayer and praise in man’s heart, defaced the image of God’s moral perfections from his breast, “alienated him from the life of God,” Eph. 4:18, and infected his whole nature with the poisonous seeds of temporal and eternal death.

Parishioner -So small a sin as that of tasting some forbidden fruit, could never have so dreadful an effect.

Minister -If Adam’s transgression were small, as you say, I could put you in mind that the least spark can blow up the greatest ships, or fire the largest cities; and that the smallest drop of poison (for instance, the froth of a mad dog) can infect the whole animal frame, and communicate itself to millions of men and beasts, by means of the smallest bite.

But this is not the case with regard to that sin, under which “the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain until now,” Rom. 8:22. I readily grant the prohibition was small; but this made the sin so much the greater: for it argues the height of rebellion, deliberately to refuse paying so insignificant a homage to so great a Being. Beside, if you consider all the circumstances of our first parents’ disobedience, you will find in it a complication of some of the most heinous crimes.

Not to mention again unbelief, pride, and sensuality: an unreasonable discontent in their happy condition, a wanton squandering away of the richest patrimony, a barbarous disregard of their offspring, a base ingratitude for the highest favours, and an impious confederacy with Satan against the kindest of benefactors, are some of the black ingredients of what you call a small sin, but might justly term the grossest transgression.

Parishioner -Suppose Adam’s offence was as great as you conceive it to be, you should not conclude, without strong proofs, that it totally destroyed God’s moral image, in which his soul was at first created.

Minister -The sad effects which it had upon him, are such proofs as amount to a demonstration. Follow the wretch after the commission of his crime, and you will find him proud and sullen, in the midst of shame and disgrace. So stripped is his soul of original righteousness, that he feels, even in his body; the shameful consequence of his spiritual nakedness, Gen. 3:7. So perverted are his affections that he dreads, hates, and runs away from his bountiful Creator, who was before the object of his warmest love and purest delight, Gen. 3:8. So impaired is his boasted reason, that he attempts to hide himself from Him “who fills heaven and earth, and whose eyes are in every place.” So amazingly weak is his understanding, that he endeavours to cover his guilt and shame with an apron of fig leaves, (verse 7). So impenitent, so stubborn is his breast, that he does not vouchsafe to plead guilty, or once ask forgiveness, (verse 10). So seared is his conscience, and malicious his heart, that he tries to excuse himself, by indirectly accusing his Maker, and turning evidence against the unhappy partner of his crime: “The woman whom thou gavest to be with me,” says he, “she gave me of the tree,” I did not take of it myself, (verse 11). Do you see, through all his behaviour, the least remains of God’s moral image? For my part, I discover in it nothing but the strongest features of the fiend, with the stupidity of one of the silliest creatures upon earth.

Parishioner -“The stupidity of one of the silliest creatures upon earth!” What do you mean by this?

Minister -You might have read in natural history, that when the ostrich is closely pursued she hides her head in a bush, in hopes that the pursuers will not see her, because she does not see them. That creature, which, Job says, “God hath deprived of wisdom,” is wise, if you compare her to Adam “hid among the trees of the garden;” for by this weak device she endeavours to trick only short-sighted man, but our first parent attempted to impose on the all-seeing God.

Parishioner -You are excessively severe upon Adam!

Minister -Not so severe as the just Judge, who, by driving him out of paradise, deprived him of a privilege which the very beasts enjoyed before the fall. See the apostate flying before the cherub’s flaming sword; and in what a miserable condition! In what a wretched dress! Spiritually dead, according to that irrevocable sentence, “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die,”-dead to God,-“dead while he lives,” 1 Tim. 5:6; “dead in trespasses and sins,” Eph. 2:1; he wears the badge of death, in the skins of those beasts which had probably bled in death in his stead, Gen. 3:21. Happy, if going beyond the type, he apprehends, by faith, the righteousness of “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world,” Rev. 13:8; and covers with that “best robe,” the nakedness and shame of his fallen soul!

Parishioner -If Adam was banished out of paradise, no other punishment was inflicted upon him.

Minister -You forget that beside the spiritual death he had already suffered, he had two deaths more to undergo, the seeds of which already wrought in his breast: for pain, toil, sorrow, and sickness began to ripen his body for temporal death; while sin, guilt, remorse, and tormenting passions (were a foretaste of) the horrors of the “lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death,” Rev. 21:8. Happy, if during his reprieve, the woman’s promised seed took sin, the sting of death, out of his heart, and by regeneration fitted him again for paradise and heaven!

Parishioner -You speak often of a dreadful curse attending sin, but I do not see that any curse seized upon man after his offence. God cursed the serpent and not Adam, Gen. 3:14.

Minister -The Lord had pronounced Adam’s curse beforehand, when in a prophetic manner he uttered the sentence already mentioned, “In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die,” I.e. Thou shalt die spiritually and be filled with the seeds of temporal and eternal death, Gen. 2:17. This heaviest of curses having already taken place, it would have been needless to repeat it. And so far was God from reversing it, that he extended an additional unthreatened curse to all the habitable globe: “Cursed is the ground for thy sake, (said he,) in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life,” Gen. 3:17. From that time “the whole creation was made subject to vanity, and began to groan under the bondage of corruption,” Rom. 8:21; and ever since, “thorns and thistles,” the natural product of a cursed earth, have been lively pictures of the briers of sin, which naturally overspread our apostate souls, Gen. 3:18.

To the “curse of the ground,” you may add “the sorrow of the woman in bringing forth children,” which may be considered not only as a peculiar curse upon her for having been “first in the transgression,” but also as a remarkable intimation of the polluted birth of her offspring, Ezek. 16:5: for if our first parents brought a heavy curse on the earth which they tread upon, how much heavier one did they entail on the immediate fruit of their bodies! Having infected their whole nature, it was impossible that they should not infect their remotest posterity, which they not only represented, as kings do their subjects, but also seminally contained, as an acorn contains all the future oaks that may grow from it.

Parishioner -I cannot believe this. It does by no means follow, that if Adam ruined himself, he ruined also his posterity.

Minister -The Scripture plainly affirms that he did. What says St. Paul? “By one man sin entered into

the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: for by the offence of one judgment came upon all to condemnation,” Rom. 5:12, 18. And so terrible were the effects of the fall on his posterity, “God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart,” unrenewed by grace, “was only evil,” without mixture of good, “and that continually,” without any interruption of the evil; insomuch “that it repented the Lord that he had made man, and it grieved him at his heart,” Gen. 6:5.

Parishioner -This was spoken of the impious generation which was destroyed in the days of Noah.

Minister -The waters of the flood which washed that generation from off the face of the earth, could not wash inbred sin from the hearts of the surviving few; for the Lord charges upon them, after the deluge, what you would confine to the antediluvian world, I.e. “the corruption of the imagination of man’s heart from his youth,” Gen. 8:21; Noah the best of them as it were to prove the charge true, “lies uncovered in his tent;” and that second parent of mankind makes himself so vile by his drunkenness and nakedness, that he becomes a laughing stock even to his accursed son, Gen. 9:41.

Parishioner -The prophets who came after Moses spake more favourably of mankind than he.

Minister -Not at all: they describe the baseness and sinfulness of man as fully and clearly as he does. One of Job’s friends in Job. 11:12 observes, that “man is born like a wild ass’ colt;” like the ass whose stupidity is natural; like the wild ass which is unruly as well as stupid; nay, and like the wild ass’ colt which is still more (unmanageable) and (block-headed) than its dam.

“The Lord looked down from heaven,” says David, “upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand and seek after God: they are all gone aside, they are altogether become abominable: there is none that doeth good, no not one,” Psalm 14:3. And no wonder, for St. Paul informs us that the “carnal mind,” the mind of every natural man, “is enmity with God,” Rom. 8:7. Jeremiah confirms the mournful truth, where he says, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked,” (chap. 17:9); and our Lord himself sets his seal to it where he tells us, “Out of the heart, [as out of their natural source,] proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, blasphemies,” and all moral evil, Matt. 15:19.

Parishioner -I apprehend that these scriptures must be understood of heathens and not of mankind in general, much less of the people of God.

Minister -Your apprehending this to be the case, does not prove it. The words man, mind, and heart, are all unlimited, and belong to every individual of the human race; and God, so far from supposing his people better than others by nature, complains, “The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib, but Israel does not know, my people doth not consider: it is a sinful nation, a nation laden with iniquity, a seed of evil doers” Isa. 1:3: “Jacob is a transgressor from the womb,” Isa. 48:8.

Parishioner -This respects the corrupted state of the Jews, and hath no reference to Christians.

Minister -Suffer the prophet to answer, and the apostle to silence your objection. Isaiah says, in speaking of those for whom the Messiah was wounded, (and I hope you will not exclude Christians from that number,) “All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one unto his own way,” Isa. 53:6; and St. Paul adds, “Are we better than they? No, in no wise, for we have before proved, both Jews and Gentiles,” which make up the whole world, “that they are all under sin; as it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one.” Therefore, till grace comes, “there is no difference, for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God. Every mouth is stopped, and all the world become guilty before God,” Rom. 3:9, 19, 22.

Parishioner -God forbid that there should be no natural difference between me and a heathen! The apostle’s rule is not without exception.

Minister -Jesus Christ, “the Lamb of God, without spot and blemish,” because he was conceived of the

Holy Spirit, is the only exception to the fatal and universal rule: “That which is born of the flesh, is flesh,” John 3:6. Had there been any other, “the man after God’s own heart,” or he who was “separated of God from his mother’s womb,” might have made a better claim to it than you. But hear David’s lamentable confession: “Behold I was shapen in wickedness, and in sin hath my mother conceived me,” Psalm 51:5. Hear St. Paul’s mournful declaration: “I know that in me, that is, in my flesh,” in my natural self, “dwelleth no good thing. I am carnal, sold under sin. O wretched man! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” Rom. 7:18, 24.

Parishioner- The apostle does not complain here of his natural depravity, but of bad habits he had contracted in his youth.

Minister- You affirm this, but I hope to prove the contrary. “Touching the righteousness of the law, he was so blameless,” that his enemies who “had known his manner of life from his youth,” could lay no immorality to his charge, Phil. 3:6; Acts 26:4. Nevertheless, tracing the streams of his depravity to their source, he declares, that both he and the Christians to whom he wrote, were, not by habit or education, but “by nature, children of wrath even as others,” Eph. 2:3.

Parishioner -You would make us believe that children are born with a sinful nature, as young vipers are with a venomous one; but St. Paul himself says, that the children of believers are holy, 1 Cor. 7:14.

Minister -The word holy often means consecrated to God, and set apart for his service: “ holy Sabbath, holy vessels, holy garments,” are common Scriptural expressions: in this sense the children of believers are holy, having been consecrated to God from the womb, by many prayers, and dedicated to him at their baptism. And if some are holy in a higher sense, I.e. Sanctified by the Spirit, this is not owing to nature, but to grace early subduing their natural corruption, and blessing the endeavours of pious parents, as the case of Timothy, 2 Tim. 1:5, and 3:15.

Parishioner -Our Lord had more favourable thoughts of children than you: “Suffer little children,” says he, “to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.” Now, if the kingdom of God be theirs, how can they be naturally depraved as you suppose?

Minister -The portion of Scripture you quote establishes what you want to overthrow; for if infants must come to Christ, it follows they are lost sinners, through the depravity of their nature, though not yet doubly lost through the corruption of their lives: otherwise they would not stand in need of being brought to the Physician of souls, who “came to seek and to save [only] that which was lost.” And if our Lord added, “Of such is the kingdom of heaven,” I.e. The dispensation of the Gospel and the Church of Christ, it was to show that infants are in as great want of the Gospel, of the advantages of Church fellowship, and as welcome to them as persons of riper years.

Parishioner -If children were naturally sinful, our Lord would never have told his disciples, “Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

Minister -This passage refers no more to the natural state of children, than that where Christ says, “I will come as a thief,” refers to the dishonesty of a thief. If our Lord affirms that we must become as little children, it is not in natural sinfulness and foolishness: but in “desiring the sincere milk of the word, as new-born babes desire the breast,” 1 Peter 2:11; in being conscious of our ignorance and helplessness; in submitting to the teaching of our heavenly Master, without unbelieving reasonings; and in gladly beginning the spiritual life, as children begin the natural one.

Parishioner -Do you really think then that infants are sinful?

Minister -I not only think it, but am persuaded you will make no doubt of it yourself, if you consider three things: FIRST, the providence of a just God who condemns them to drink their daily share of the cup of sorrow and death, which is the “wages of sin,” Romans 6:23. SECONDLY, their early

propensity to do evil, not only before they are taught it, but also when it is expressly forbidden. "They are froward even from their mother's womb," says David. "As soon as they are born they go astray, and tell lies as soon as they can speak," Psalm 58:3. We have a third proof of their depravity in one of the sacraments, both in the Jewish and Christian Church. The Lord, "who knows what is in man," ordered them to be circumcised under the law, because they stand in need of "the circumcision of the heart;" of which that in the flesh was only an emblem: and under the Gospel they are admitted to baptism, both because they want the sprinkling of Jesus' blood, typified in that ordinance; and because the promise of the regenerating Spirit "belongs to us and our children;" who therefore stand in need of it on account of their original corruption, as well as we on account of our actual pollutions, Acts 2:39.

Parishioner -You surely mistake when you say that infants have a sinful disposition: what can look more innocent and harmless than a suckling babe?

Minister -If your argument holds, it will prove, that young vipers have no mischievous disposition, and sucking lions no bent to fierceness, because they are really very harmless, and look exceeding pretty in their kind: but you know that the apparent harmlessness of those dangerous creatures is wholly owing to the feebleness of their organs, and their want of bodily strength.

Parishioner -You love to pour contempt on the dignity of human nature; I would blush to compare my fellow creatures to beasts that perish, -to vipers and lions, some of the worst of them.

Minister -I do not blush to follow the Scriptures; and if you allow me to quote them, you will see that they go much farther in this respect than I do. They inform us that "man is like the beasts that perish," Psalm 49:12; that "he might see that he himself is a beast," Eccles. 3:18, and that till he is taught of God, he is "foolish and ignorant," in spiritual things, "even as it were a beast before him," Psalm 73:22.

They send him to the ant and swallow to learn diligence and wisdom in the things that concern his future welfare, Proverbs 6:6; Jeremiah 8:7. They affirm that he is more stupid, in religious matters, than the ox and ass are in civil affairs, Isaiah 1:3. They compare him to the lion for fierceness, Psalm 58:6. To the bull for madness, Psalm 22:12. To the fox for mischievous craftiness, Luke 7:32. To the dog for baseness, churlishness, and rage, Mark 7:28; Phil. 3:2; Matt. 7:6. To the swine for brutish sensuality, Matt. 7:6. And to "the sow wallowing in the mire, or the dog returning to his vomit," for execrable filthiness, 2 Peter 2:22. In short, they declare, that he is as "venomous as the poison of a serpent, even like the deaf adder that refuses to hear the charmer's voice," Psalm 58:4.

Parishioner -St. James, far from aspersing the human race at this rate, intimates, that men ought not to curse one another, because "they are made after the similitude of God," James 3:9.

Minister -This expression of the apostle agrees exactly with what I said before. In Adam we were originally made after God's moral image; and since the fall we have still glorious remains of his natural likeness in our understanding, will, and the eternal duration of our souls. These grand ruins ought not only to make us avoid cursing each other, but should also induce us to "honour all men," 1 Peter 2:17.

Parishioner -And is it "honouring all men," to say that they are all abominable by nature? Is it not rather slandering all men together?

Minister -The expression you exclaim against is not mine, but David's, who had it from the God of truth, Psalm 14:4. And I hope you will allow your Maker to speak a lamentable truth without being called to your bar (judgment) as a slanderer. If a physician, under pretence of honouring his sick prince, obstinately declared him immortal, and in perfect health, would he hereby do honour either to him or his own judgment? Without waiting for the obvious answer, I conclude, that they who extol the rectitude of our sin-sick nature, far from "honouring all men," pass a bitter jest upon them, and expose their own want of self knowledge.

Parishioner -If this doctrine respecting our fallen state were true, our Saviour would have preached it; but I do not remember that he once touches upon it in all his discourses.

Minister -Inattention and prejudice can veil the plainest truths. Why did our Lord so strongly preach to Nicodemus the necessity of a “new birth,” and to his disciples, that of “conversion,” but because we are all “conceived in sin,” as well as David; and “children of wrath by nature,” as well as St. Paul? John 3:3; Matt. 18:3. Why did he say again and again, that “the whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick,” if it were not to make us deeply sensible that the mortal disease of sin is upon us? Matt. 11:12; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:31. Why did he invite those “that travail, and are heavy laden, to come to him for rest,” if we have not all a burden of iniquity to part with? Matt. 11:28. Why did he declare that he was “come to seek and save that which is lost,” if we are not all in a lost estate? Matt. 18:11. Why did he tell his apostles, that “without him they could do nothing; and that no man can come unto him except the Father draw him,” but to convince them and us of our total inability to do spiritual good? John 15:5; 6:44. In short, why did he affirm, that “except we do eat his flesh, and drink his blood, we have no life in us,” John 6:53; that “he who believeth not on him, is condemned already;” that “the wrath of God abideth on him;” that “he shall die in his sins?” Why? But because the most unblameable and moral, without him, are loaded with guilt, and ripe for destruction, John 3:18, 36; 8:24; Mark 16:16.

Parishioner -It appears, by these scriptures, that our Saviour looked upon all as helpless, guilty creatures; but he made some difference between persons of a decent behavior and notorious offenders; whereas, according to your uncharitable doctrine, both are in equal danger of endless ruin.

Minister -Certainly they are till they be converted; and the difference which our Lord made confirms the doctrine which you oppose. There is no doubt of the lost state of scandalous sinners, for the Father of mercies says of one of them who had repented, “This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found,” Luke 15:24.

The question is, whether Christ spake more favourably of those who depended upon their morality and forms of piety, that is, the scribes and Pharisees: let his own words decide it: “Ye are of your father the devil.” “Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers; how can ye escape the damnation of hell?” “Publicans and harlots shall enter into the kingdom of heaven before you,” John 8:44; Matt. 23:33; 21:31. Thus, in our Lord’s account, both those who are seemingly virtuous, and those who are openly vicious, till they “are in him new creatures,” travel, though by different roads, to the same mansions of horror: and if the one way is more apt to deceive the traveller than the other, it is that of the Pharisee.

Parishioner -Shocking! At this rate the notorious sinner hath an advantage over persons of a reputable character. How do you account for this strange paradox in our Lord’s doctrine?

Minister -You must not suppose that gross sinners can be saved without conversion, or that we must be guilty of enormities to be proper subjects for converting grace. Far be these wild notions from us, as they were from our Saviour. His meaning is, that those who depend on the imaginary rectitude (moral correctness) of their nature, and the chimerical merit of their works, look at him with as much indifference as a healthy man looks at the physician; while those who have no seeming merit to cover their guilt and depravity with, see them without a veil, and stoop more readily to the Saviour of the lost.

Parishioner -I do not blame you for affirming that all are sinners, and stand in need of Divine mercy: but what you say of our misery and danger in a state of nature, is enough to provoke any one.

Minister -What the Scriptures say of it is enough to provoke anyone, -not to anger,-but to repentance. O that it had that happy effect upon us! They represent the unrenewed man as “the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt,” Isaiah 57:20. They paint him as either “weaving the spider’s web,” working out a useless and filthy righteousness, or “hatching cockatrice eggs, (scorpion)

till the viper break out,” contriving vanity or mischief in his heart, till it break out in his conversation, Isa. 59: 5.

Parishioner -How can the natural man be always sinning, as you suppose he is?

Minister -He is not always doing what is evil, but the uninterrupted depravity of his heart corrupts those actions which otherwise are good or indifferent in themselves: therefore all that he does is sin. (1.) His natural actions are sin, “whether he eats or drinks, or does any thing else,” he sins, by not doing it to the glory of God, 1 Cor. 10:31, compared with Zechariah 7:6. (secondly) His civil actions, having no higher principle or end than self-interest or his own glory, are sinful: “The ploughing of the wicked is sin,” Prov. 21:4. (thirdly.) His religious duties are sin, because he performs them not “in spirit and in truth,” John 4:24. “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord: therefore, if he offers an oblation, it is as if he offered swine’s blood; because he hath chosen his own ways,” Prov. 15:8; Isaiah 66:3; and if he receives the Lord’s Supper, “he eats and drinks his own condemnation, not discerning the Lord’s body,” 1 Cor. 11:29. In short, he is lost; for, says St. Paul, “If our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost, in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ should shine unto them,” 2 Cor. 4:3, 4. Whence you see, that previous to our being savingly acquainted with the Gospel, we are all, without exception, in a lost estate, and blinded by Satan, the god of this world. And as blind Samson did grind for the Philistines, so we work for our spiritual enemies, the world, the flesh, and the devil: “We are the servants of sin, and yield our members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin,” Rom. 6:19, 20: “Making provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.” “Yea, the lusts of our father the devil we do,” Rom. 13:14; John 8:44.

Parishioner -If the natural man sins in all that he does, he is not bound either to pray or work, for no one is bound to sin.

Minister -He is bound to pray and work, though he is not bound to sin in doing either.

As it is a less offence to do one’s duty badly than to omit it entirely, of two evils he is to choose the least. Or rather he ought, with the next breath, to apply to the Saviour of the lost for pardon and strength; and “He that justifies the ungodly” will forgive and help him “for his own name’s sake.”

Parishioner -Notwithstanding all that you say of the natural man’s misery, he often thrives in the world better than those who make much ado about their souls.

Minister -This thriving proves an addition to his misery; “his eyes may swell out with fatness and he may do even what he lusts; but how suddenly will he perish, and come to a fearful end,” if he become not a new creature! Psalm 73:7, 18. So long as he remains “an enemy in his mind by wicked works,” Col. 1:21, “the curse of the Lord is in his house,” Prov. 3:33. “I have cursed his blessings,” says the Lord, Mal. 2:2: “his basket and store are cursed,” Deut. 28:17: “his table is a snare to him,” Rom. 11:9: he abuses alike the rod and staff of the Lord, adversity and prosperity: as on one hand temporal chastisements harden him, as they did Pharaoh; so, on the other, “the good things he receives in this life” make him venture upon the next, thoughtless as the wealthy farmer, and unprepared as the rich glutton, Luke 12:20; 16:25. Thus he fearfully evidences the truth of Solomon’s saying, “The prosperity of fools shall destroy them,” Prov. 1:43.

Parishioner -If the unconverted man hath the fatal art of extracting poison out of every dealing of Providence, he can also extract a remedy out of every dispensation of Divine grace.

Minister -Just the contrary: he hath the wretched skill to turn every spiritual blessing into a curse.

(1.) Does the Lord send his “law as a school master to bring him to Christ?” Gal. 3:24. It is to him a dead letter. Ignorant of its spiritual meaning, he contents himself with performing the outward duties it

requires, and like the Pharisees, whose leaven has infected his soul, Mark 8:15, “he goes about to establish his own righteousness,” by the law, instead of fleeing, before it, to “Christ who is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth,” Rom. 10:2.

(2.) Does Jesus bless him with a written or preached Gospel? He “rejects the counsel of God against himself;” and what should be “a savour of life unto life” unto him, proves a “savour of death unto death,” Luke 7:30; 2 Cor. 2:16.

(3.) Christ himself, “the precious corner stone laid in Zion,” for lost sinners to build their hopes upon, becomes to him “a stumbling stone, and a rock of offence,” 1 Pet. 2:8; Rom. 8:33.

He sins on without fear, because “God is merciful” to those who forsake their sin; and he “blesses himself in his iniquity,” because Christ died to redeem him from all iniquity, Tit. 2:14.

Is it any wonder then if “God is angry with him every day,” and declares that “if he will not turn, he will whet his sword; he hath bent his bow, made it ready, and prepared for him the instruments of death; even the worm that dieth not, and the fire which is not quenched,” Mark 9:44; Psalm 7:12.

Parishioner -You are very forward in sentencing people to eternal death. God is more merciful than you; and I hope none of us shall go into everlasting burnings. It is barbarous to doom to unquenchable fire people who never were guilty of any notorious crimes.

Minister -If there be any barbarity in the case, I am not chargeable with it. I simply tell you what I see in the Scriptures, and quote the chapter and verse that you may not think I impose my sentiments upon you. With regard to your objection, I make no doubt but the righteous Judge will punish those sinners, whose iniquities have peculiar aggravations, with torments peculiarly aggravated: but though the unconverted man’s sins should not have been of the scandalous sort, his doom will be most fearful.

Parishioner -This requires a solid proof, and you produce only a bare assertion.

Minister -Every wilful sin (and the natural man commits some such daily) hath in it the principle of all iniquity; viz. The contempt of that sovereign authority which is equally stamped upon all the commandments of God. You know that, even according to the civil law, he who genteelly robs a traveller of one piece of silver, forfeits his life, as well as he who barbarously murders him and carries off a thousand pieces of gold; because both equally break the law which forbids robbery, though one does it with less horrible circumstances than the other.

Parishioner -But shall we say the law of God is upon the same plan as the law of the land, in this respect?

Minister -Yes, exactly, as to the tenor of it, it is: “The soul that sinneth,” and not the soul that committeth a crime of such or such a blackness, “it shall die,” Ezek. 8:3.

“The wages of sin,” whether it be scandalous or fashionable, “is death,” Rom. 6:23; “for the wrath of God is revealed from heaven, against all unrighteousness of men,” and not only against offences of the grosser kind, as you fondly suppose, Rom. 1:18.

The Scriptures agree that “they are cursed who do err,” more or less, “from God’s commandments,” Psalm 119:21; that “cursed is every one who continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them,” Gal. 3:10; and that “whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, is guilty of all,” James 2:10.

Parishioner -The passages you quote are very express; but I hope the curse which they mention is not so terrible as you imagine.

Minister -“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God,” Heb. 10:31. “Our God is a consuming fire,” to unbelievers, Heb. 12:29: he declares, by his servants, that “they all shall be damned

that believe not the truth, but have pleasure in unrighteousness;" that "the wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the people that forget God;" that "the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those that know him not, and obey not his Gospel;" that "they shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;" and lastly, that the fearful curse will be fixed, for ever, by Christ the Judge of all, who will say to the unconverted, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels," 2 Thess. 2:12; Psalm 9:17; 2 Thess. 1:8; Matt. 25:41.

Thus you see that it is not ministers who condemn impenitent sinners to eternal death, but God's unchangeable law, which passes sentence upon them in this world, and the loving Jesus himself, who will ratify and execute it in the world to come. Nor is there any other place of refuge from this dreadful curse, but the shadow of the Saviour's wings, who vouchsafes to "redeem us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us," Gal. 3:13.

Here the minister ceased to speak, and his opponent, instead of making a quick reply, sat pensive some moments, as if he were at a loss to find new objections; but soon recovering himself, he began the third part, in which the fall and misery of man are proved from reason.

PART THREE

In which the apostasy and misery of man are proved from reason.

Parishioner -I confess you have silenced me by Scripture: but does reason agree here with revelation? Many say that the doctrine of original sin is "original nonsense."

Minister -It is easy to cavil (make petty objections) against, but difficult to overturn the truth. If the oracles of God maintain this doctrine, reason is not against it. Sound reason is for it, as I hope to prove by a variety of rational arguments.

FIRST ARGUMENT.

Reason tells us that some mystery of iniquity lies hid under the shocking circumstances of the labour of women and birth of children; and that if our nature were not sinful, the gracious God could not, in justice, suffer millions of infants, who never actually sinned, to go through the miseries of a lingering life, and the agonies of an untimely death.

Parishioner -Your argument would seem to me unanswerable if it did not prove too much; but it unhappily proves that beasts also are sinful, for they are brought forth with sorrows and end a toilsome life by a painful death, as well as the children of men.

Minister -Your objection, far from overturning my argument, gives me an opportunity of strengthening it by three considerations.

1. Search the whole earth, and you will not find in it one species of creatures that brings forth its young ones, in general, with half the pangs and dangers wherewith women bring forth their children; and is not this a call to look for the cause of this evil where it is most sensibly felt?
2. The curse of fallen man having seized upon the whole creation, caused a general degeneracy in every species of living creatures. The majesty of the lion sunk into cruelty, and the courage of the tiger into fierceness. All the ranks of milder animals were stamped with dullness, wildness, or untractableness, and this fatal change made them hasten to their dissolution. Remember, therefore, that it is only in consequence of our curse rebounding upon beasts, and causing them to degenerate from their original perfection, that toil follows, and death overtakes them.

3. Though this degeneracy cannot be called sinfulness in beasts, it can in man, not only because it came from him, and is much stronger in him; but also because he is naturally a moral agent; whereas beasts are not. Therefore, the degeneracy, sufferings, and death of beasts prove the depravity and misery of man, as strongly as the effect proves the existence of its cause.

Parishioner -You surprise me in affirming that the death of beasts is a consequence of their degeneracy, and their degeneracy a consequence of our curse and sinfulness: I thought that beasts would have died even in paradise.

Minister -This thought seems to want both the sanction of reason and that of revelation: reason dictates that as a wise artist will never make a watch to get it bruised in pieces under the smith's hammer; so the wise God never originally made an animal for the stroke of death: and revelation informs us, that "by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin;" and that "by one man's offence, death reigned by one," Romans v. 12, 16. As therefore no creature would have died, if man had not brought sin and death into the world, so the death of every creature proves the sinfulness of man; and if even the death of an insect proves this, how much more man's own death!

Parishioner -The force of your argument depends, in great measure, on a pretended degeneracy of beasts, which I am not bound to admit upon your bare assertion.

Minister -You may safely admit it upon the following proofs:-

1. Reason tells us that the bad properties of beasts never came from a good God: and as beasts were not created with them, it necessarily follows that they have degenerated.
2. Moses confirms this, when he says, that "God saw every thing that he had made, and behold it was VERY GOOD:" but the cruelty of tigers, and the poison of serpents, are not good at all: therefore tigers were not cruel, nor asps venomous, when they came out of their Creator's hands.
3. We read that God "gave Adam dominion over every living thing that moveth upon the earth; and brought every beast of the field to him, to see what he would call them," Genesis 1:26; 2:19. But had then been wild, untractable, and ravenous as they are now, far from governing them, or staying to give them names, he would have wished for the swiftness of the hind to run out of paradise, before they had torn him in pieces.
4. Isaiah, describing the paradisiacal state of the earth, after the restitution of all things, informs us that "the wolf shall [again] dwell with the lamb, the leopard lie down with the kid, and the calf with the lion, which shall eat straw [or grass] like the ox." He adds, that "the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child put his hand on the cockatrice's (scorpion's) den;" and that "they shall not hurt nor destroy in all God's holy mountain," Isaiah 11:6, &c. In this picture of the restitution, we clearly see what the animal creation once was, by what it will be when it is restored to its original state; and we may well conclude from this, that if beasts themselves must undergo a change, it is not contrary to reason to affirm, that man must also be born again, that is, be totally changed.
5. St. Paul confirms Isaiah's prophecy of the restitution of the animal world, when he assures us, that the creature degenerated, or, as he expresses it, was "made subject to vanity," but not without hope of recovery; for, adds he, "it shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption, into the glorious liberty of the children of God," Romans 8:21, compared with Psalm 104:30, and Acts 3:21.

Parishioner -You have so cleared your first argument from my objections, that I desire to hear a few more of your rational proofs of our depravity and misery.

Minister

SECOND ARGUMENT.-Our vicious inclinations, which too often lead us out of the path of duty, in spite of all the remonstrances of conscience; and our sensual appetites, which impel us forward in the ways of sin, notwithstanding the clearest dictates of reason, prove that human nature hath suffered as great a revolution as these realms did, when a king was seen bleeding on the scaffold, and a usurper placed in the seat of majesty.

THIRD ARGUMENT.-The universal corruption of the morals of mankind, and the innumerable crimes committed in all parts and ages of the world, notwithstanding the restraint of human and Divine laws, are such bitter fruits as could never universally grow without a bitter root: and unprejudiced reason tells us that this root can be no other than our natural depravity.

Parishioner -I apprehend you give way to prejudice yourself: we can easily account for the corruption of mankind, from a particular constitution, bad education, or ill example: there is no need of supposing it natural.

Minister -I grant that a peculiar habit of body, and a bad education, or ill example, will, like rich soil and rank manure, cause the weeds of natural corruption to shoot the higher: but, that we bring the seeds of it into the world with us, is evident, from the wilfulness, selfishness, greediness, anger, revenge, or obstinacy, which little children betray, before they can take notice of ill examples, understand bad counsels, or be at all wrought upon by youthful temptations: and these vices break out even in the presence of the most pious parents, who too often complain that the evil propensities of their children baffle the force of the earliest precepts and best examples.

Parishioner -You are very apt to make the worst of a bad matter. Immorality is not so general as you suppose. Thousands, I hope, live free from bad inclinations and bad practices.

Minister -None live so exemplarily as God's children, and none are so ready to acknowledge, with the prophet, "the deceitfulness of our desperately wicked heart," Jeremiah 17:9. As they see by the light of Divine grace, "the abominations that" every man hath "portrayed in the dark chambers of his imagery," Ezekiel 8:10, 12, they can say with David, that "their heart sheweth them the wickedness of the ungodly," Psalm 36:1: and, discovering their natural depravity more clearly, they lament it also more deeply than the rest of mankind. See Jeremiah 9:1.

2. The more you are acquainted with yourself, with the history of the dead, and the transactions of the living; the more you will be persuaded that the distemper is universal, affecting all ranks of people, in every age and country, and working, more or less, through all sorts of constitutions.
3. Some, it is true, boast of their harmlessness, and the goodness of their hearts: they suppose they have no vice, because they live outwardly in none; they fancy that the tree of sin is dead, because it is stripped of its leaves, and the fruit does not appear; they imagine that the fountain of corruption is dried up, because the main stream runs underground, or in a new channel: but experience and time will convince them that their innocence is only like the seeming harmlessness of Paul's viper; as soon as the fire of temptation comes near enough to stir it, it will unexpectedly bite, if grace do not interpose, even to eternal death.

This melancholy truth is confirmed by striking examples. The apostles, after they had "left all to follow Jesus," needed to take heed of such beastly sins as "surfeiting and drunkenness," Luke 21:34. Peter, the oldest of them, after the strongest protestations of fidelity, lied, cursed, swore, and denied his Lord. And good-natured Hazael was at last guilty of that barbarity, the bare mention of which made him say, "Am I a dog that I should do this thing?" 2 Kings 8:12. So true is Solomon's saying, "that he that trusteth his own heart is a fool!" Prov. 28:26. So just is that observation of David, "The children of men are deceitful upon the weights, they are altogether lighter than vanity itself!" Psalm 62:9.

Parishioner -If all the children of Adam are naturally depraved, their depravity must be equal, for the same cause will produce the same effect: but as this is not the case, our depravity cannot be natural.

Minister - “They are altogether become abominable,” says David, Psalm 14:4. But they do not all remain so. The renewing grace of God makes a real difference in those who receive it: “For if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature,” 2 Cor. 5:17. With regard to the harmlessness, for which some of the unregenerate are remarkable, it is not owing, I am afraid, to a better nature, but to a happier constitution, a cooler blood, a stricter education, or a greater measure of restraining grace: perhaps also to the want of natural boldness, and of a fair opportunity, or suitable temptation to sin. As for the seeming virtues of the unconverted, a little attention will show you that they spring from real vices. The fear of contempt, the desire of praise and popularity, or, it may be, secret envy, excite the (well-endowed) to generous actions: the thirst of money, or of a title, stirs up the indolent to industry and diligence: cowardice, or the love of pleasure, keeps the ambitious loyal and quiet; and while ostentation makes the miser or spendthrift charitable, self righteousness renders the Pharisee religious. But the richest spring of the natural man’s morality, if he is moral at all, is a sense of decency, a particular regard for his character, a desire to make a figure by his goodness among his fellow creatures; or, at most, the impious conceit of making amends for his sins, purchasing heaven by his works, and so becoming his own saviour. By these antichristian motives, his depravity is confined to his heart, as a wild beast is confined to his den by the light of the sun: but, as the resting lion is a lion still, though he appears quiet as a lamb, so the natural man remains abominable, though he seems as moral as a Christian. Our Lord confirms this by comparing him to a “whited sepulchre, which indeed appears beautiful outwardly, but within is full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness,” Matt. 23:27.

Parishioner -If we are all depraved, and have brought this depravity with us into the world, it is as natural to us as a black complexion to the Ethiopians; nor can we be blamed for not being virtuous, with any more justice than a negro for not being white.

Minister -Your objection hath more subtilty than strength. Though we cannot help our being born corrupted, we can often choose whether we will let our natural corruption break out into external sins, or not; and we may use or neglect those means which God hath appointed, under Christ, to remedy it.

2. A moral depravity which we have increased ourselves, by the wilful commission of sins which were avoidable, leaves us as accountable for it as an Ethiopian would be for his blackness, if he contrived to bathe in ink daily.
3. Suppose a negro were credibly informed that his natural complexion would cost him his life, and that nothing in the world could change it but a liquid made with his prince’s blood; and suppose, that being presented with the precious wash, he were obstinately to reject it, and roll himself in a heap of soot, would he not be justly punished for remaining black, suppose he were excusable for being born so? This is exactly the case of every natural man: he wilfully rejects the blood of Christ, and obstinately wallows in the filth of sin. Therefore “the wrath of God [justly] abideth on him,” John 3:36.

Parishioner -Your answers to my objections are satisfactory: return, I pray you, to your rational proofs of our apostasy.

Minister

FOURTH ARGUMENT.-The present disordered ruinous state of the globe shows, to an impartial inquirer, that its chief inhabitant is disgraced by the God of nature and providence. Murder and battle, plagues and famine, lightning and thunder, burning heat and piercing cold, cities and mountains on fire, together with storms, inundations, and earthquakes, concur to make this earth a vast prison for rebels, who are already “tied and bound with the chain of their sins,” a boundless scaffold for their execution,

an immense “field of blood,” and, if I may be allowed the expression, the charnel house of the universe.

FIFTH ARGUMENT. -Reason agrees with Scripture in deciding that man, as the noblest creature upon earth, should, “according to the fitness of things, bear rule over all the rest.” But “how is the crown fallen from his head!” Worms lodge within his bowels even before his death; and insects too base to be named, but not too base to humble a proud apostate, prey upon his flesh, and feast on his blood, from the cradle to the grave. And would the wise, gracious, and just Governor of the world, suffer despicable vermin (to say nothing of savage beasts) thus to rebel against man, if man were not himself a rebel against God?

SIXTH ARGUMENT. -Reason discovers that the effect cannot rise higher than the cause, and that light will as soon spring from darkness as a pure, heavenly nature from an earthly, sensual one. Our first parents having infected their souls and bodies, by taking the poison of sin, and the seeds of death, could not, without a miracle, transmit to their offspring a better nature than they now had themselves. It would be irrational to expect wholesome streams from a corrupted fountain; and Job, after inquiring “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?” rationally answers, “Not one.”

Parishioner -Your last argument, strong as you may think it, is inconclusive: you do not consider that the body, being only organised matter, is as incapable of sinning as a corpse, because matter is not susceptible of moral defilement: and you forget that our Lord affirms, even “adulteries proceed out of the heart,” or soul, which each of us had immediately from God. Therefore, it is absolutely impossible we should be born in sin: unless you can believe it possible for a holy God to create sinful souls, or for a good God to create pure spirits, in order to send them into impure bodies, that they may be defiled by the contact. The last of these notions is not less repugnant to philosophy, than the first is to divinity, for if a dung hill cannot defile the light of the sun, much less can matter defile a spirit.

Minister -Your subtle objection is entirely founded on the odd notion that children derive nothing from their parents but a body; and that their soul comes immediately from God, who continually creates and emits spirits into bodies, at the beck of every fornicator and adulterer; but that this is a mistake, appears from the following considerations:-

1. It is said that “God rested on the seventh day from all his work” of creation, Gen. 2:3: but upon this scheme he is hourly creating new souls.
2. All living creatures, “after their kind,” received power to propagate their species in its whole nature; and it does not appear why beasts should be more privileged than man in this respect.
3. When God blessed our first parents, and bade them “be fruitful and multiply,” he addressed himself to the soul as well as to the body, which, without the soul, can neither receive nor execute a command. Therefore, by the force of the Divine blessing and appointment, the whole man can multiply, and the soul may light the flame of life, under proper circumstances, as one taper can light another.
4. All agree, that, under God, we receive life from our parents; and if life, then certainly our spirit, which is the principle of life, and without which the body is nothing but a lump of refined clay. Gen. 46:26.
5. The regeneration of our souls is insisted upon, by our Lord, as absolutely necessary; and if they are to be regenerated, it follows, that they were first generated, John 3:6; Ephesians 4:23.
6. Lastly. The Scripture informs us that fallen “Adam begat a son in his own likeness, and after his image,” Genesis 5:3: but had he generated only a body without a soul, he would have been the father of a corpse, and not of a man; for what is man but an embodied spirit?

Parishioner -What you advance would carry great weight, if it were not written, that “God is the Father of the spirits of all flesh,” and that “the spirit returns to God who gave it.” From these passages I always concluded that the soul is not propagated, but immediately created.

Minister -Give me leave to retort, that it is also written, that Job and David “were fearfully and wonderfully made; and fashioned by the hands of God in their mother’s womb,” Job 10:8; Psalm 139:4, etc; and that “we are the offspring of Him who made of one blood all nations of men,” Acts 17:26, 28. If you think that these scriptures prove that Job, David, and “all nations of men” had their bodies from God, without the instrumentality of any parents, I will agree, that the passages you quote prove also that we have our souls immediately from God. Nevertheless, I do not deny that the Lord is peculiarly “the Father of the spirits of all flesh,” because “he breathed into Adam’s nostrils the breath of life,” and gave him the spirit by which he became immediately, and in time, every other man, a living soul, Gen. 2:7.

Parishioner -This hypothesis affects, I am afraid, the doctrine of the immortality of the soul; for if the spirit is generated with the body, it will also perish with it.

Minister

1. Chaff is, in some respects, to the wheat what the body is to the soul; it is formed, and subsists awhile with it: but would you conclude from thence that the wheat cannot subsist when the chaff is destroyed? You know the contrary, though wheat and chaff are material substances, growing from the same clod. How much more can the soul subsist, in a separate state, after the corruption of the body, seeing it is of a nature so diametrically opposite to flesh and blood! That essential, vital breath, which came from heaven, -from God himself, cannot then be destroyed by the fall of a little dust of the earth that clogs it for awhile.
2. The immortality of the soul is no more affected, nor the nature of a spirit impaired, by spiritual traduction (involvement?), than the eternity of God the Father is affected by the generation of his “only begotten Son,” Hebrews 1:5; John 1:18; or his glorious Godhead impaired by the continual emanations of his Holy Spirit, Psalm 104:30; 1 John 5:18.
3. So far is dissolution from being a necessary consequence of the propagation of our souls, that it would not so much as have followed the generation of our bodies, if Adam had not brought sin and death into the world. Yea, the beasts themselves, as I proved just now, enjoyed, in the paradise -like state, the power of propagating their species, together with immortality.

Parishioner -Now that you have proved the traduction of human souls, what inference do you draw from it?

Minister -A very remarkable one: viz. That according to the previous appointment of God, and the law of our nature, Genesis 1:28, “Adam begat a son,” with whatsoever was essential to his own wretched likeness and fallen image, Genesis 5:3; that is to say, with a body tainted all over with mortality, and a soul polluted and infected with sin. Thus your objections are answered, and the propagation of sin and death are, not only Scripturally, but rationally and philosophically accounted for.

Parishioner -If Adam repented and became holy, as it is supposed he did, he could not impart a sinful nature to his posterity, for our Lord tells us that “a good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit.”

Minister -Your objection can be answered various ways.

1. The holiness which Adam regained was not free from mixtures of corruption.
2. Imperfect as it was, it could not be attained by any of the children of men, in any other way than that in which Adam himself, and Abel his son got it: that is: by faith in the promised seed, Hebrews

11:4.

3. As a tree, naturally growing from the seed of the best crabapple, can produce nothing but mere crabs, till it is ingrafted; so the children of the best parents can have, by nature, nothing but sinful dispositions, till grace ingrafts holy ones.
4. Lastly: good men beget their children as men, not as good men; they cannot impart to their children what they never receive from their parents; therefore, by generation all are naturally “children of wrath;” when any become “children of light,” it is supernaturally by regeneration. And then they “are not born of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God,” John 1:13.

Parishioner -It seems to me both absurd and unjust, that we should be born in sin, because Adam chose to sin: by what law are we bound to suffer for the faults of another? We had no hand in our first parents’ transgression, why should the consequences of it fall so heavy upon us?

Minister -You do not think parallel cases either absurd or unjust.

1. Adam was the general head, representative, and father of mankind, and we suffer for his rebellion -as justly as the children of a bankrupt suffer for their parent’s imprudence, or those of a traitor for their father’s treason, -as naturally as subjects suffer for the public faults of their prince, -as necessarily as the offspring of one who hath ruined his constitution by intemperance, partakes of the parent’s enfeebled habit of body. -and as unavoidably as an unborn child shares the fate of its desperate mother, when she hath poisoned herself.
2. As we are all seminally (in seed form) contained in the loins of Adam, it would have been as impossible to save us from the defilement of sin, as to preserve part of your blood free from all infection, if you were dying or dead of a fever.
3. If Adam had stood, and the happy consequences of his obedience had reached down to you, you would not have thought it unjust to enjoy them; yet, as he fell, it is reasonable that you should submit to the sad alternative.
4. Did God appoint, for our representative and head, the first Adam, who ruined us without our fault? He hath also graciously appointed the second Adam, Jesus Christ, who redeemed us without any merit on our part: it ill becomes, therefore, those who talk of salvation by the cross of the Son of God to speak against the doctrine of our natural depravity through the fall of Adam: for, if the one be rational, the other can never be absurd.
5. If any perish now, it is by their own choice, for “there is help laid on one mighty to save,” Psalm 89:19. “The soul that sinneth,” (unto death,) by rejecting, to the end, the life offered in Jesus, “it shall die” eternally, and only that soul: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it, “The son shall not [finally] bear the iniquity of the father,” Ezekiel 18:20.
6. Do sin and misery abound without our choice by the fall of Adam, grace and glory abound much more by the free, unsought redemption that is in Jesus Christ, Romans 5:20; and “it must be owing to our own perverseness and our own negligence,” says the ingenious Mr. Hervey, “if we do not levy a tax upon our loss, and rise even by our fall.”

Parishioner -Did not God foresee Adam’s sin, and its fatal consequences? And if he foresaw them, why did he not, as the wise Governor of the world, prevent them all together?

Minister -It is not right for creatures who cannot account for the most common things in the natural world, such as the colour of the grass, or that of flowers, to call their Creator to the bar (to account) for his transactions in the moral world. That God permitted sin to enter into the world, we know by sad

experience; and that he does all things in wisdom, we are no less certain; therefore we are sure that wisdom subscribed the awful permission, and till he unfold to us the mysteries of his providence, a modest inquirer will, I apprehend, be satisfied with the following reflections:-

1. God made man in his natural image, part of which consists in liberty of choice; and if God's making a free agent is not against his wisdom, the wrong choice or sin of a free agent is no impeachment of that Divine attribute.
2. God, it is true, might have made man as the good angels are now; but then they would not have been men, but angels: and he was no more bound to do it, than to make all his creatures of a size, or all horses men. On the contrary, a variety in the works of creation becomes "the manifold wisdom of God."
3. He did all that a wise and good ruler of rational creatures could do to prevent sin. (1.) He gave to Adam a strong propensity to obedience. (2.) He forbade sin. (3.) He enforced the prohibition by the fearful threatening of present death. (4.) He promised to crown his continuance in duty with eternal life, Rom. 10:5. To have gone farther, would have been as inconsistent with the nature of a moral agent, and that of the Divine law, as the confining or chaining down every one who may turn thief, is contrary to the liberty of Englishmen, and the laws of the realm. Perhaps also,
4. God permitted, not ordered sin, because he both would and could overrule it to the glorious display of several of his attributes, which must otherwise have remained unknown to, and unglorified by his creatures: such as his boundless mercy, his wonderful patience, his inflexible justice, and admirable wisdom in bringing good out of evil.
5. As those who never knew what sickness and want are, do not half value the blessings of health and plenty, it is not unlikely that God saw it expedient to suffer, not procure; the apostasy and misery of this world; or, (to use a Scriptural expression,) to permit the loss of his hundredth sheep, that the ninety nine who never were lost might be more sensible of, and thankful for preserving grace. And lest there should be any reason to impeach his goodness, he sent his only begotten Son to take the curse of the law upon him, to destroy the works of the devil, and, as "a good Shepherd, to bring back the lost sheep," the world that had strayed from the path of pious obedience, Luke 15.
6. Lastly. The contrast between sin and holiness, between earthly misery and heavenly bliss, will heighten to all eternity the beauty of holiness, and the joys of the blessed: so that the wickedness and wretchedness of this earth, which is but a point with regard to the universe, when they shall have been overruled by Divine wisdom, mercy, justice, and power, will answer the end of shades properly thrown into a piece of painting, or that of night tempering the day of paradise. They will make the light of God's perfections appear unspeakably brighter, and the day of heaven shine infinitely more glorious.

Parishioner -In answering my objection you start another, which you will not easily solve.

If sin will answer the end of shades in a picture, it will have its use, and I do not see why we should be punished at all for what will set off the Divine perfections, and in the end redound to the glory of God.

Minister -It is sin properly pardoned, or justly punished, not sin committed with impunity, which will answer this end. Rebellion is always abominable in itself; nevertheless, a wise king overrules it to good purposes; a pardon granted to penitent rebels attaches them for ever to their merciful prince, and endears him to all his faithful subjects; and at the same time, the public execution of the stubborn reflects praise on the steadiness of his government, and makes all stand in awe of his justice.

Parishioner -I do not deny that sin deserves some punishment; but I cannot see how it is consistent with justice to say, as you do, that God will punish the sins of a short life with the torments of a boundless

eternity. Reason discovers no sort of proportion between the offence and the punishment; and I do not wonder if some of our neighbours believe, on that account, that hell is an engine contrived by crafty priests and rulers to keep the superstitious and vulgar in awe.

Minister -I answer,

1. That though short-sighted reason sees no uniting power between the loadstone and iron, it is matter of fact that the mineral attracts the metal, therefore there are realities above the reach of reason in the material world: how much more in the spiritual!
2. You are tempted to disbelieve the existence of a state or place of misery, called hell, because you advert not to the strong intimations of it which Providence gives you daily. Millions of beasts, which never sinned, go through a hell of toil, pain, and misery, because the curse of sinful man rebounds to (subjects) them here! You see this continually, and yet you question whether there will be a hell for impenitent sinners hereafter. Is this reasonable?
3. God is all holiness and happiness in himself; and unconverted sinners, being the reverse of holiness, must of course be the reverse of happiness also: therefore, so long as they remain unholy, they must remain miserable: and what is hell but complete misery?
4. Every unbeliever hath already the ingredients of this misery in his own breast.

What are the chains of sin, the tumults of unruly appetites, the gnawings of fretful tempers, the uproars of turbulent passions, the disappointment of sanguine hopes, the gripings of covetousness, the burnings of lust, the stings of an evil conscience, together with a guilty shame for what is past, and foreboding fears of what is to come! What are all these plagues which the unconverted feel from time to time, but sensible proofs, -proofs which they carry in their own breast, that there is a hell for the ungodly?

5. The dread of various torments after death, hath been in all ages the strongest bulwark against the overflowings of secret ungodliness. The world cannot be ruled without this fear; and were it imaginary, it would follow that God (shocking to think!) keeps mortals in awe by a lie; and that Christ, who is the truth itself, spoke falsehood when he said, "These shall go into everlasting punishment," Matt. 25:46.

Parishioner -You prove the reality of a state of misery for the wicked, but prudently avoid answering what I said of the disproportion there is between momentary sins and eternal torments.

Minister -That part of your objection will fall also, if you let the following arguments have their proper weight on your mind.

1. God, who rewards the godly with endless glory, may justly punish the wicked with endless ruin. Death must be in the balance with life, eternal misery with eternal happiness, or else there is no proportion between the punishment threatened, and the reward promised.
2. A rebel who hath stabbed an earthly prince but once, and deeply repents of his crime, is mercifully dealt with, if he be imprisoned for life, were he to live a thousand years. An impenitent sinner hath risen against the majesty of Heaven a million of times, and "crucified the Prince of life afresh," for it may be ten, twenty, forty years: what is more, he goes on still in his rebellion; and his talk of repenting to-morrow is only a contrivance (strategy) to sin with more cheerfulness today. Now if he die in this state, shall God be unjust in condemning him for life to the prison of hell, and punishing with infinite woe sins committed against an infinite Majesty, -sins from which he should have been deterred by considerations of infinite force, -in short, sins in which he would have lived forever, had not death interposed?

3. When a distemper rages with an immense violence, the remedy ought to have an immense force. But, dreadful as the threatenings of eternal punishments are, they prove not half dreadful enough to deter sinners from their iniquity. Therefore, it does not become us to complain that God's severity toward the impenitent is too great, when our conversation shows that it is too little to bring us to repentance and godly fear.
4. If a man breaks his leg by a fall, and obstinately refuses to have it set, in the nature of things he must feel the consequence of his obstinacy till he drops his lame body into the grave; but as a stubborn sinner cannot drop at death his immortal soul, which is his very self, he must, in the nature of things, bear the consequences of his stubbornness for ever.
5. God does not punish sinners, who die impenitent, barely for the momentary acts of their past sins, but chiefly for the habit of them, which is eternal. As a wolf who hath no lambs to tear remains a wolf, and may justly be chained or killed; so the rich glutton, who hath not "a drop of water to cool his tongue," remains a glutton, and is justly shut up in hell, which is nothing but the prison and death of an immortal soul.
6. Add to this that the sinful habits of the impenitent will eternally produce sinful acts of rage, revenge, malice, despair, and blasphemy; nor will any one say, that uninterrupted acts of sin do not deserve uninterrupted strokes of punishment; or that it is not highly agreeable, both to reason and justice, that the line of Divine vengeance should extend as far as that of human insolence, that is, to all eternity.
7. Lastly. If you consider the inflexible justice of God, as seizing upon the holy Jesus, whose purity, majesty, and power were infinite; and remember how it forced a bloody sweat from all his pores, the most amazing complaints from his lips, and at last his very breath from his tortured body, you will ask yourself, "If these things are done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" Luke 23:31. If stern justice pursued "the Prince of life unto death, even the death of the cross," what will it not do to a sinful worm, who not only rebelled all his life against the infinite goodness, holiness, and majesty of his Creator, but trampled under foot, to the last, the free offers of infinite glory, to the last did despite to (afflict) the Spirit of grace, and rejected, to the last, an interest in the infinite merits of the Redeemer's blood?

Parishioner -You have so cleared my difficulties, and answered my objections, that I begin to think reason is on your side, as well as Scripture.

Minister -As you are candid enough to acknowledge the impression that rational truths make on your mind, I beg you will be patient enough to consider one more argument in favour of the doctrine of our sinfulness, danger, and misery, in a state of nature.

I hope it will weigh so much the more with you because I have it from your own mouth. Did I not hear you this very day call Jesus "SAVIOUR?" Can you deny it?

Parishioner -Deny it!-God forbid! Shall I be ashamed to confess that he came to die for us, and to save us from hell and everlasting ----?

Minister -Enough, sir. You have granted me more than I want to convince a man of sense. If Christ died for us, reason tells us that death is our desert. If he came to save us from hell, it is plain that he saw us in a damnable state: unless you will charge him with the unparalleled folly of coming from heaven to save, from their sins, people that were very good, and bleeding to death to save from hell people who were in no danger of going there.

Parishioner -I never saw things in this light! But now that Christ hath died for us, all danger is over, the bitterness of eternal death is past.

Minister -Yes, for those who are savingly interested in his merit: and who these are the apostle tells us. “They that are Christ’s,” says he, “have crucified the flesh, with its affections and lusts;” for “if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature,” Gal. 5:24; 2 Cor. 5:17. And these will readily acknowledge, that “in them [as considered out of Christ] dwells no good thing, and that they are by nature children of wrath even as others,” Rom. 7:18; Eph. 2:3. As for the rest of mankind, far from being out of danger, our Lord tells us himself, that “the wrath of God abides on them, and that they are condemned already,” John 3:18, 36.

Here the parishioner, unable to stand his ground any longer on the field of reason, attempted to make as honourable a retreat as he could: and that he might not seem to have lost the day, he erected a new battery against the doctrine of our corrupted and lost state, which introduced the fourth part of the dialogue.

Caetera desunt.
