

SERMONS

ON

IMPORTANT SUBJECTS;

BY THE

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LATE OF PEMBROKE COLLEGE, OXFORD, AND CHAPLAIN TO
THE RIGHT HON. THE COUNTESS OF HUNTINGDON.

WITH A MEMOIR OF THE AUTHOR,
BY SAMUEL DREW, A. M.

AND A

DISSERTATION ON HIS CHARACTER, PREACHING, &c.
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SERMON LXII.

REPENTANCE AND CONVERSION.

Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.—Acts iii. 19.

WHAT a pity is it that modern preachers attend no more to the method those took who were first inspired by the Holy Ghost, in preaching Jesus Christ! the success they were honoured with, gave a sanction to their manner of preaching, and the divine authority of their discourses, and energy of their elocution, one would think, should have more weight with those that are called to dispense the gospel, than all modern schemes whatever. If this were the case, ministers would then learn first to sow, and then to reap; they would endeavour to plough up the fallow ground, and thereby prepare the people for God's raining down blessings upon them. Thus Peter preached when under a divine influence, as I mentioned last Wednesday night: he charged the audience home, though many of them were learned and high and great, with having been the murderers of the Son of God. No doubt but the charge entered deep into their conscience, and that faithful monitor beginning to give them a proper sense of themselves, the apostle lets them know, that great as their sin was, it was not unpardonable; that though they had been concerned in the horrid crime of murdering the Lord of life, notwithstanding they had thereby incurred the penalty of eternal death, yet there was mercy for them, the way to which he points out in the text; "Repent ye therefore," says he, "and be converted," and adds, "that your sins may be blotted out." Though they are but few words, they are weighty; a short sentence this, but sweet: may God make it a blessed sweetness to every one of your hearts!

But must we preach conversion to a professing people? Some of you, perhaps are ready to say, Go to America, go among the savages, and preach repentance and conversion there; or, if you must be a field preacher, go to the highways and hedges; go to the colliers; go ramble up and down, as you used to do; preach conversion to the drunkards: would to God my commission might be renewed, that I might have strength and spirit to take the advice! Possibly others will say, Do not preach it to us; pray who are you? I answer, One sent to call you to repentance; and although I might, yet I will not come so close to you at present, as to inquire in my turn, who are you? yet permit me to pray, that while I am preaching, God's Spirit may find you out; and not only let you know who you are, but what you are; and then you will not be easy with yourselves, nor angry with a minister of Jesus

Christ for preaching conversion to your souls. Repentance and conversion are nearly the same. The expression in the text is complex, and seems to include both what goes before and follows “turning to God:” and if the Lord be pleased to honour me so far tonight, to be useful to sinners, as well as saints, I will endeavour to show you,

First, What it is not to be converted: *Secondly*, What it is to be truly converted: *Thirdly*, Offer some motives why you should repent and be converted: and, *Fourthly*, Answer some objections that have been made against persons repenting and being converted; and may God so bless my preaching, and your hearing, that every one may go away and say, Lord, convert me more and more!

First, I shall endeavour to show you what it is not to be converted; for I do verily believe there are thousands, and ten thousands, that think themselves converted, and yet at the same time, if you come and examine them, they know not so much as speculatively what real conversion is: the general notion many have of it is, a person’s being a convert from the church of Rome to the church of England. There is a particular office in the large prayer book, to be used when any one publicly renounces popery in the great congregation. When this is done, that prayer is read, and the person said Amen to the collects upon the occasion, every body wishes him joy, and thanks God he is converted: whereas if this be all, he is as much unconverted to God as ever; he has in words renounced popery, but never took leave of the sins of his heart. Well, after this he looks into the church, and does not like that white thing called a surplice; he looks, and thinks there are some rags of the whore of Babylon left still: now, says he, I will be converted; how? I will turn dissenter; so, after he is converted from the church of Rome to the church of England, he goes to the dissenting church; may be, curiosity may bring him to the Methodists, those monstrous troublesome creatures, and, perhaps, he may then be converted a third time; like their preaching, like their singing; Oh dear, I must have a Tabernacle-ticket, I must have a psalm-book, I will come as often as there is preaching, or at least as often as I can; and there he sits down, and becomes an outside converted Methodist, as demure as possible: this is going a prodigious way, and yet all this is conversion from one party only to another. If the minister give a rub or two, he will take miff perhaps, and be converted to some other persuasion, and all the while Jesus Christ is left unthought of; but this is conversion only from party to party, not real, and that which will bring a soul to heaven.

Possibly, a person may go further, and be converted from one set of principles to another; he may, for instance, be born an Arminian, which all

men naturally are: and one reason why I think Calvinism is right, is, because proud nature will not stoop to be saved by grace. You that are brought up in an orthodox belief, under an orthodox ministry, cannot easily make an allowance for thousands, that have nothing ringing in their ears but Arminianism; you have sucked in orthodoxy with your mother's milk, and that makes so many sour and severe professors. I knew a rigid man that would beat Christianity into his wife; and so many beat people with their Bibles, that they are likely, by their bitter proceeding, to hinder them from attending to the means God has designed for conversion. What is this but being converted from one set of principles to another? And I may be very zealous for them, without being transformed by them into the image of God. But some go further, they think they are converted because they are reformed: they say, "a reformed rake makes a good husband," but I think a renewed rake will make a better. Reformation is not renovation: I may have the outside of the platter washed; I may be turned from profaneness to a regard for morality; and because I do not swear nor go to the play, as I used to do; have left off cards, and perhaps put on a plain dress; and so believe, or rather fancy, that I am converted; yet the old man remains unmortified, and the heart is unrenewed still. Comparing myself with what I once was, and looking on my companions with disdain, I may there stick faster in self, and get into a worse and more dangerous state than I was before. If any of you think me too severe, remember you are the person I mean; for you think me so, only because I touch your case. The drunkards and sabbath-breakers, cursers and swearers, say to us, You can never preach but you preach against us: as a good man once replied to a person, who complained against us ministers for thus preaching: I will put you in a way, said he, that we shall never preach against you; how is that? Why, leave off cursing and swearing, &c. then your consciences will be clear, and the minister will look over your heads: happy they that are convinced of it! You have not heard me, I hope, speak a word against reformation; you have not heard me speak a word against being converted from the church of Rome; against being converted to the church of England; or, against being good: no; all these are right in their place; but all these conversions you may have, and yet never be truly converted at all. What is conversion then? I will not keep you longer in suspense, my brethren: man must be a new creature, and converted from his own righteousness to the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ; conviction will always precede spiritual conversion; and therefore the Protestant divines make this distinction, You may be convinced and not converted, but you cannot be converted without being convinced; and if we are truly converted, we shall not only be turned and converted

from sinful self, but we shall be converted from righteous self; that is the devil of devils: for righteous self can run and hide itself in its own doings, which is the reason self-righteous people are so angry with gospel preachers; there are no such enemies to the gospel as these: “there were Jews who trusted in themselves that they were righteous,” that set all in an uproar, and raised the mob on the apostles. Our Lord denounced dreadful woes against the self-righteous Pharisees: so ministers must cut and hack them, and not spare, but say woe, woe, woe, to all those that will not submit to the righteousness of Jesus Christ! I could almost say, this is the last stroke the Lord Jesus gave Paul, I mean in turning him to real Christianity; for having given him a blow as a persecutor and injurious, he then brought him out of himself, by revealing his person and office as a Saviour. “I am Jesus.”— Hence says the apostle, “I count all things but loss—that I may win Christ, and be found in him; not having my own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.” You hear him not only speak of himself as injurious, as a blasphemer, but also as a Pharisee; and in vain we may talk of being converted till we are brought out of ourselves; to come as poor, lost, undone sinners, to the Lord Jesus Christ; to be washed in his blood; to be clothed in his glorious imputed righteousness: the consequence of this imputation, or application of a Mediator’s righteousness to the soul, will be a conversion from sin to holiness. I am almost tempted to say, it is perverseness in people to preach against the doctrine of imputed righteousness, because they love holiness, and charge the Calvinists with being enemies to it: how can they be charged with being enemies to sanctification, who so strenuously insist on its being the genuine fruit, and unquestionable proof, of the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, and application of it by the Spirit of grace? They that are truly converted to Jesus, and are justified by faith in the Son of God, will take care to evidence their conversion, not only by the having grace implanted in their hearts, but by that grace diffusing itself through every faculty of the soul, and making a universal change in the whole man. I am preaching from a Bible that saith, “He that is in Christ is a new creature, old things, (not will be, but) are passed away, all things, (not only will, but) are become new.” As a child when born has all the several parts of a man, it will have no more limbs than it has now, if it live to fourscore years and ten; so when a person is converted to God, there are all the features of the new creature and growth, till he become a young man and a father in Christ; till he become ripe in grace, and God translate him to glory. Any thing short of this is but the shadow instead of the substance; and however persons may charge us with being enthusiasts, yet we need not be moved

either to anger or sorrow, since St. Paul says, “I travail in birth till Christ be formed in your hearts.”

The author of this conversion is the Holy Ghost: it is not their own free will; it is not moral suasion; nothing short of the influence of the Spirit of the living God can effect this change in our hearts; therefore we are said to “be born again, born of God, of the Spirit, not of water only, but of the Holy Ghost; that which is born of the flesh is flesh, but that which is born of the Spirit is spirit:” and though there is and will be a contest between these two opposites, flesh and spirit, yet if we are truly converted, the spirit will get the ascendancy; and though for a while nature and grace may struggle in the womb of a converted soul, like Jacob and Esau, yet the elder shall serve the younger, Jacob shall supplant and turn out Esau, or at least keep him under: God grant we may all thus prove that we are converted. This conversion, however it begins at home, will soon walk abroad; as the Virgin Mary was soon found out to be with child, so it will be soon found out whether Christ is formed in the heart. There will be new principles, new ways, new company, new works; there will be a thorough change in the heart and life; this is conversion: at first it begins with terror and legal sorrow, afterwards it leads to joyfulness; first we work for spiritual life, afterwards from it: first we are in bondage, afterwards we receive the Spirit of adoption to long and thirst for God, because he has been pleased to let us know that he will take us to heaven. Conversion means a being turned from hell to heaven, from the world to God. We have not so much as asked a person to sell his all, to leave his shop, to lay any thing at our feet: when we talk of being converted from the world, we mean being converted from the love of it; the heart once touched with the magnet of divine love, ever afterwards turns to the pole. I think it is said of a sunflower, though I question whether it will always hold true, that it turns to the sun; I am sure it is true of the Redeemer’s flowers that grow in his garden, they not only look to the sun, but they find fresh life, warmth, and transforming influence, from him who is their all in all. Here Christianity appears in its glory; here the work done is worthy the Son of God. To be converted only to a party, is that worth Christ’s coming from heaven to earth for—that we might have a set of principles without having them affect the heart? For to be baptized when young, or, as some, to come out of the water at age, and turn out as bad as ever, is a plain proof of the necessity of being baptized by the Holy Ghost.

What say you to this change, my dear souls? Is it not godlike, is it not divine, is it not heaven brought down to the soul? have you felt it, have you experienced it? I begin to catechize you already, for I could spend a whole sermon in speaking of conversion; but I am afraid those that sit under the

gospel have more need of heat than light: would to God we had as much warmth in our hearts, as light in our understandings! But if there be any of you here that are not yet converted, upon what grounds do you hope for conversion? Give me leave to say, that you ought to repent and be converted, for till then you never can, never will, never shall, find true rest for your souls. What wrong notions have people got of conversion! they think it is a wretched thing, and dread being converted; not knowing what it is, they think it is a frightful thing. I knew one some time ago that came to some Methodists; dear, says the person, you are cheerful, I could be glad if I were a Methodist too, if there were a majority of them in the land: but God help us to go to heaven with the minority, if the majority will not follow. But, my dear hearers, there is not a single soul of you all that are satisfied in your stations: is not the language of your hearts when apprentices, We think we shall do very well when journeymen; when journeymen, that we should do very well when masters; when single, that we shall do well when married; and to be sure you think you shall do well when you keep a carriage. I have heard of one who began low: he first wanted a house, then, says he, I want two, then four, then six; and when he had them, he said, I think I want nothing else; yes, says his friend, you will soon want another thing, that is, a hearse-and-six to carry you to your grave; and that made him tremble. O if you are Christians, if the Lord love you, he will put a thorn in your flesh. I have often thought of what a good man says in his diary—the Lord put a thorn in my flesh. Among politicians, when they find a man ambitious, they say, kick him up, that he may fall and break his neck: so it is in every condition; there is not one of you fifty years old, but have had many changes: have not you found thorns even on the rose that smelt so sweet, and thorns perhaps that pricked you so closely, that you have forgot the scent of the rose by it? And what is all this for, but to teach you that happiness is only to be found in the Lord. If a soul is truly converted, there will be a battle, and an awful chasm, that will never be filled up but with the love of God; and therefore when we say, Repent and be converted, it is no more than saying, Repent and be happy. Indeed we shall never be completely happy till we get to heaven. O that every man could see the good of every thing of a sublunary nature drop off like leaves in autumn: God grant this may be known by every one of you!

If it be asked, why you should repent and be converted? I answer, because else you can never be happy hereafter. What do you think heaven is? Why, says the covetous man, I think it is a place full of gold: so you think to steal some of the gold, do you? Others would like heaven very well if there were a good gaming table in heaven; if there were card playing in

heaven. I have heard of a lady that was so fond of gaming, that though she had the pangs of death upon her, yet when in the midst of her fits, or just coming out of one, instead of asking after Jesus, where he was to be found, she asked, what is trumps? So the gamester will ask, where is the backgammon table? where is the box? He will want to shake his ungodly hand in heaven; he will say, let us have a gaming table in heaven, where, as he will find, he has lost the game; that God has damned him, without an interest in Christ. "Can two walk together unless they are agreed?" If you die, and do not love God here, if you cannot love praying to God here, and cannot watch one hour, suppose you were to be struck by death and be taken to heaven, there is no such language and amusement there, what would you do? Why, say you, these Methodists are presumptuous people, they can tell us whether we are to go to heaven, or no. Good Mr. Rogers, a Welsh Boanerges, preaching in the mountains, said, Christ is heaven, if I worship God here, and do all to God, and for God, without any hopes of reward upon the earth. My dear brethren, the devils would never be troubled with such a wretch in hell, he would set all hell in an uproar; if a true Methodist were to go to hell, the devil would say, Turn that Methodist out, he is come to torment us: therefore you must be converted, if you will go to heaven. Dr. Scott says, if a natural man were to be put into heaven, it would be such a hell to him, that he would be glad to go to hell for shelter: angels they hate, God they hate; and, as Adam was afraid to meet with God when he first fell from him, so his sons hate God and flee away.

I mention one thing more, which is, that you must be converted or be damned, and that is plain English, but not plainer than my Master made use of, "He that believeth not shall be damned." I did not speak that word strong enough that says, "He that believeth not shall be damned;" that is the language of our Lord: and it is said of one of the primitive preachers—he used to speak the word damned, so that it struck all his auditory. We are afraid of speaking the word damned for fear of offending such and such a one; at the same time they despise the minister for not being honest to his Master. Some have said, and stand to it, that hell is only a temporary punishment: who told them so? A temporary punishment! Nothing but a guilty conscience. O go to Bedlam! Do ask a child of God what he feels when his Lord is absent? Ask the spouse what she felt when she cried, "Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?" Ask a child of God, when he is using this plaintive language, "Why standest thou afar off, O Lord?" And he will tell you, It is hell to my soul to be but one moment without the presence of my Beloved. And if his absence for a quarter of an hour can scarce be borne by a child of God, what must that soul undergo that is commanded to depart from him

for ever? And yet these very words were said to those that thought they bid fair for heaven; to these Jesus says, "I know ye not." God grant you may never know the meaning of these words by awful experience! Now, what say you? I could make a hundred heads more, but I choose to make as few as possible, that you may remember them. I say, conversion makes you happy hereafter, and without it you are damned for ever.

"Are these things so?" Why then, my dear hearers, do you think there can be any objection raised against conversion, do you think there can be any argument raised against turning to God directly? Is there any person here, that will give himself time to consider a moment, that will not say, Though you speak in a rough, incoherent manner, yet there is some truth in what you say? I believe men ought to be converted, but the common saying is, I do not care to be converted yet; we think it is time enough to be converted. Is not this acting like the cardinal, when told he was elected pope, and desired to come that night and have the honour of pope conferred on him; because it was pretty late, said, It is not a work of darkness, I will put it off till the morning: before which they chose another pope, and he lost his triple crown. You may think to put it off till the morning, though before the morning you may be damned. Pray why will you not be converted now? If you were in prison, and a person would take you out, you would choose to be let out to-night before morning, that you might sleep the better; why will you not do that for your soul, you would for your body? Well, I would be converted, but I shall be laughed at: suppose you were to have it promised you should have a ten thousand pound lottery ticket, but you must be laughed at all your life-time; there is none but would say, Give me the ten thousand pounds, and call me Methodist as long as I live: so, if you loved God and your souls, you would say, Give me God, and call me what you will. You are afraid of being laughed at and nick-named, and skulk into this and that place, because it does not stink so much of Methodism as this. Put your cockades in your hats, and let the world see that you are not ashamed of God's badge: let the devil and his agents preach to you; they can proclaim their sin like Sodom; they are not ashamed of going to balls and assemblies, to parties of pleasure, and subscribing to horse-races. Is the gospel the glory of the land, and are you ashamed of the gospel? What think you, if you had given a hundred pounds to learn such a trade, would you say, I shall never attain it? no, you will persevere, and by giving diligence make an excellent mechanic, an admirable tradesman; and do you think to go to heaven without some trouble? Do you think the leopard can change his spots, the Ethiopian put his skin entirely off? Can we have any thing to nourish our bodies, without the labour of particular persons? And therefore

we are commanded “to work out our salvation with fear and trembling.” Remember, our Redeemer “will not quench the smoking flax, nor break the bruised reed; he will gently lead those that are with young.” We are like poor swimmers: some people will put one foot in and cry oh! and then another, but a good swimmer plunges in at once, and comes out braced up: would to God we could do so, plunge into God at once, and God will bear up our souls indeed.

But, say you, all in good time, I do not choose to be converted yet; why, what age are you now? I will come down to a pretty moderate age; suppose you are fourteen: and do not you think it time to be converted? And yet there are a great many here, I dare say, twenty years old, and not converted. Some are of opinion, that most people that are converted, are so before thirty. There was a young man buried last night at Tottenham-court but seventeen, an early monument of free grace! Are you forty or fifty, is not that time? Is it time for the poor prisoners to be converted, that are to be hanged tomorrow morning? If it is time for them, it is time for you, for you may be dead before them. There was a poor woman, but two or three days ago, that was damning and cursing most shockingly; now she is a dead corpse,—was taken suddenly, and died away. God grant that may not be the case with any of you; the only way to prevent it is, to be enabled to think that “now is an accepted time, that now is the day of salvation.” Let me look round, and what do you suppose I was thinking? Why, that it is a mercy we have not been in hell a thousand times. How many are there in hell that used to say, Lord convert me, but not now? One of the good old Puritans says, hell is paved with good intentions. Now, can you blame me, can you blame the ministers of Christ, if this is the case, can you blame us for calling after you, for spending and being spent for your souls? It is easy for you to come to hear the gospel, but you do not know what nights and days we have; what pangs we have in our hearts, and “how we travail in birth till Jesus Christ be formed in your souls.” Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; God help you, save, save, save yourselves “from an untoward generation.” Tonight somebody sits up with the prisoners; if they find any of them asleep, or no sign of their being awake, they knock and call, and the keepers cry, awake! and I have heard that the present ordinary sits up with them all the night before their execution: therefore, do not be angry with me if I knock at your doors, and cry, poor sinners, awake! awake! and God help thee to take care that thou dost not sleep in an unconverted state to-night. The court is just sitting, the executioner stands ready, and before to-morrow, long before tomorrow, Jesus may say of some of you, “Bind them hand and foot.”

The prisoners tomorrow will have their hands tied behind them, their thumb-strings must be put on, and their fetters knocked off; they must be tied fast to the cart, the cap put over their faces, and the dreadful signal given: if you were their relations, would not you weep? Do not be angry then with a poor minister for weeping over them that will not weep for themselves. If you laugh at me, I know Jesus smiles. I cannot force a cry when I will; the Lord Jesus Christ be praised, "I am free from the blood of you all if you are damned for want of conversion, remember you are not damned for want of warning. Thousands that have no gospel preached to them, may say, Lord, we never heard what conversion is: but you are gospel-proof; and if there is any deeper place in hell than other, God will order a gospel despising Methodist to be put in there. You will have dreadful torments; to whom so much is given, much will be required. How dreadful to have minister after minister, preacher after preacher, say, "Lord God, I preached, but they would not hear." Think of this, professors, and God make you possessors!

You that do possess a little, and are really converted, God convert you and me every hour in the day; for there is not a believer in the world, but has got something in him that he should be converted from; the pulling down of the old house, and building up the new one, will be a work till death. Do not think I am speaking to the unconverted only, but to you that are converted. God convert you from lying a bed in the morning; God convert you from your conformity to the world; God convert you from lukewarmness; God convert us from ten thousand things which our own hearts must say we want to be converted from; then you will have the Spirit of the living God. Do not get into a cursed Antinomian way of thinking, and say, I thank God, I have the root of the matter in me: I thank God, that I was converted twenty or thirty years ago; and once in Christ always in Christ; and though I can go to a public house and play at cards, or the like, yet, I bless God, I am converted. Whether you was converted formerly or not, you are perverted now; and may God convert you all to close Christianity with God!

You that are old professors, do not draw young ones back from God, by saying, Ah! you will come down from the mount by and by; you will not always be so hot: and instead of encouraging poor souls, you will pull them down, because you have left your first love; would you have Jesus Christ catch you napping, with your lamps untrimmed?

O ye servants of the most high God, if any of you are here tonight, though I am the chief of sinners, and the least of all saints, suffer the word of exhortation. I am sure I preach feelingly now; God knows I seldom sleep

after three in the morning; I pray every morning, Lord, convert me, and make me more a new creature today. I know I want to be converted from a thousand things, and from ten thousand more: Lord God, confirm me; Lord God, revive his work.

You young people, I charge you to consider; God help you to repent and be converted, who woos and invites you. You middle-aged people, O that you would repent and be converted. You old gray-headed people, Lord make you repent and be converted, that you may thereby prove that your sins are blotted out. O I could preach till I preached myself dead; I could be glad to preach myself dead, if God would convert you! O God bless his work on you, that you may blossom and bring forth fruits unto God. *Amen* and *Amen*.