

The Chief of Sinners Saved

by Stephen Charnock

"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief."—1 Tim. 1:15

Observation. I. The salvation of sinners was the main design of Christ's coming into the world. II. God often makes the chiefest sinners objects of his choicest mercy.

To show that God does so, observe,

God has formally made *invitations* to such. See what a black generation they were, Isa. 1, by the record of their sins. They were rebels, and rebels against him that had nursed them. "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me," ver. 2. And in this respect worse than the beasts they were masters of; the stupid ox and the dull ass outstripped them in intelligence. "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider," ver. 3. He calls upon heaven and earth to judge between them, ver. 2. He appeals to men and angels, as a jury, to give their verdict, whether these people had not been the most disingenuous and ungrateful people in the world. Or if by heavens and earth be meant magistrates and people, as in the prophetic style they are usually taken, God then appeals to themselves, to let their own natural consciences and the common intelligence their sins had left them, to judge between them. He comes to charge them, "laden with iniquity," ver. 4. They had such great weights lying upon them, that they were not able to stir; or laden with it, as some crabtree is with sour fruit. They had sprouted from a wicked stock; they had corrupted one another by their society and example, as rotten apples putrefy the sound ones that be near them.

They had been incorrigible under judgments; God had used the rod again and again; but seeing there was no reformation, he was even weary of whipping them any longer; "Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more," ver. 5. They were also so universally infected, that there was no sound part about them, but running sores all over; both

head and heart were infected; corrupt notions in the one, and corrupt affections in the other. Or if you take it prophetically, head signifies the chief magistrate; heart, the judges; feet, the common people. The fire which had burnt their cities had not consumed their lusts, and dried up their sins; "Your country is desolate, your cities are burnt with fire, your land strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers," ver. 7. And had it not been for a small remnant, they had been as bad as Sodom and Gomorrah, ver. 9. Their services were polluted, vain, and an abomination to him, ver. 13. They were a trouble to him, his soul hated them, he was tired with them, ver. 14, for they came with their bloody murderous hands into God's presence.

Yet though he justly charged them with these horrid crimes, he gives them assurance of being received if they would return to him; "Come now, and let us reason together," ver. 18. He would condescend to debate the case with them, when one would have thought he should have said, I'll have nothing to do with such a crew as they; God loves to discourse with men about this argument of pardon; and he loves that men should hear him speak concerning it. He would dispute them out of their sins, into good and right apprehensions of his mercy. So, "Turn ye unto him from whom the children of Israel have deeply revolted," Isa. 31:6. Revolted, there is their sin; deeply, there is the aggravation of it; and being also children of Israel, a people of much mercy and miracles, there is another aggravation; yet turn unto him against whom you have thus sinned. The great objection of a penitent is, I have sinned, and I know not whether God will receive me: consider, God knows your sin better than you do, yet he kindly calls to you, and promises you as good a reception as if you had never sinned.

So, "They say, if a man put away his wife, and she go from him and become another man's, shall he return unto her again? Shall not that land be greatly polluted? But thou hast played the harlot with many lovers, yet return again to me, saith the Lord," Jer. 3:1. Though you have been a common adulteress, and made all comers, every idol welcome, and been in league with many sins, yet upon your return I'll claim you as my own; and these are God's warrants for encouragement.

2. God has given examples of it in scripture. Adam the ringleader of all rebellions of mankind in the world, had the promise of the seed of the woman to break the serpent's head made to him; and in the genealogy of

Christ, is called the Son of God, Luke 3:38; not only in respect of creation, for so the devil is the son of God, but in a nearer relation. Yet all that deluge of wickedness which has overflowed the world since the fall, sprung out of his loins. Nay, Abraham, the father of the faithful, was probably an idolater in Ur of the Chaldees, and a worshipper of the sun and fire, as his fathers were, Jos. 24:2; yet God makes a particular covenant with this man, presents him with a richer act of grace than any in the world besides him had, namely that the Messiah, the great Redeemer of the world, should come from his seed; this man is set up as the pattern of faith to others, and his bosom seems to be a great receptacle of saints in glory, Luke 16:22, 23. Israel's sins were as a thick cloud, yet this powerful sun did melt them; "I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins," Isa. 44:22. A sullen gloomy morning often ends in a well complexioned noon. Manasseh is an eminent example of this doctrine. His story, 2 Chron. 33, represents him as a black devil, if all the aggravations of his sin be considered.

1. It was against *knowledge*. He had a pious education under a religious father; an education usually leaves some tinctures and impressions of religion. No doubt but the instructions his father Hezekiah had taught him, and the exemplary holiness he had seen in him, were sometimes awakened in his memory, and recoiled upon his conscience.

2. His *place and station*, as a king; sins of kings are like their robes, more scarlet and crimson than the sins of a peasant. Their example usually infects their subjects. As they are not without their attendance in their progresses and recreations, so neither in their vices and virtues.

3. Restoration of *idolatry*. Had he found the worship of the host of heaven derived to him by succession from his father, and the idols set up to his hand, the continuance of them had less of sin, because more of temptation; but he built again those high places and altars to idols after they had been broken down, ver. 3, and dashed in pieces that reformation his father had completed.

4. Affronting God to *his very face*, He sets up his idols, as it were to insult God, and built altars in the house of the Lord, and in the two courts of his temple, whereof God had said he would have his name there for ever, ver. 4, 5. He brought in all the stars of heaven to be sharers in that worship which was only due to the God of heaven. What, could he find no

other place for his idols, but in the very temple of God? Must God be cast out of his house, to make room for Baal?

6. *Murder*. Perhaps of his children, which he caused to pass through the fire, as an offering to his idol, ver. 6. It may be it was only for purification. But he had the guilt of much innocent blood upon him, the streams whereof ran down in every part of the city. "Moreover, Manasseh shed innocent blood very much, till he filled Jerusalem with blood from one end to the other," 2 Kings 21:16.

6. Covenant with the *devil*. He used enchantments, and witchcraft, and dealt with a familiar spirit, ver. 6; yea, he had acquaintance with more devils than one, and dealt with familiar spirits and wizards, in the plural number.

7. His *other men's sins*. He did not only lead the people by his example, but compelled them by his commands. "So I made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to err, and to do worse than the heathen God had rooted out," 2 Chron. 33:9, to make room for them. Hereby he contracted the guilt of the whole nation upon himself.

8. *Obstinacy* against admonitions,. God spoke to him and his people, but they would not hearken, or alter their course, 2 Kings 21:10.

9. *Continuance* in it. He ascended the throne young, at twelve years old, ver. 1. It is uncertain how long he continued in this sin. Torniellus thinks fifteen years. Bellarmine twenty-seven. Kimchi fifty years, reckoning but five years of his life after his restoration. What a world of sin, and aggravations of it, were there in this man! And yet God was intreated, ver. 19.

3. The *ancestry whereof Christ* came, seems to imply this; God might have kept the stock, whence Christ descended according to the flesh, pure and free from being tainted with any notorious crimes; but we find sins of a crimson dye even among them. There are no women reckoned up in Christ's geneology, but such as in scripture are noted for looseness, Mat. 1:3. Tamar who played the harlot with Judah her father-in-law, Gen. 28. Rahab, Mat. 1:5, the harlot Or Jericho. Ruth, ver. 5, a Gentile and Moabitess the root of whose generation was Lot's son, by incest with his own daughter. Bathsheba, ver. 6, David's adulteress. He chose these repenting sinners, out of whose loins Christ was to come, that the greatest sinners might not be afraid to come to him.

Was David, whose son our Saviour is called, much better? It is true he was a man after God's own heart, but yet very notorious for that act of murder and adultery, and with more aggravating circumstances than usually are met with in acts of the like nature, 2 Sam. 11. Uriah was a godly man, and had a sense of the condition of the church and nation whereof he was a member, ver. 11, and such a man's bed David is not only content to defile, but he pollutes his soul with drunkenness, ver. 13, lays snares for his life, not in a manly, but sly and treacherous manner; for while he does caress him, and show him a fair countenance in his palace, he draws up secret instructions to Joab so to order the business, that Uriah might be thrust into his grave, and makes him the courier to carry the commission for his own death, ver. 15, 16. After all this he has no remorse when he hears of the loss of so godly and valiant a man, but wipes his mouth, and sweeps all the dirt to the door of Providence, ver. 25. Now Christ's stock being thus tainted, was methinks an evidence that penitents, though before of the greatest pollutions, might be welcome to him. And that as he picked out such out of whose loins to proceed, so he would pick out such also in whose hearts to reside.

4. It was Christ's employment in the world to court and gain such kind of creatures. The first thing he did, while in the manger, was to snatch some of the devil's prophets out of his service, and take them into his own, Mat. 2:1, some of the Magi, who were astrologers and idolaters. When he fled from Herod's cruelty, he chose Egypt, the most idolatrous country in the world, for his sanctuary; a place where the people worshipped oxen, crocodiles, cats, garlic, *putida numina* [unclean spirits], all kind of riff-raff; to show that he often comes to sojourn in the blackest souls. The first people he took care to preach to were the seamen, who usually are the rudest and most debauched sort of men, as gaining the vices as well as the commodities of those nations they traffic with, Mat. 4:13. The inhabitants of those sea coasts are said to sit in darkness, ver. 16; in darkness both of sin and ignorance, just as the Egyptians were not able to stir in that thick darkness which was sent as a plague upon them. And the country, by reason of the vices of the inhabitants, is called the region and shadow of death; a title properly belonging to hell itself. To call sinners to repentance was the errand of his coming. And he usually delighted to choose such that had not the least pretense to merit, Mark 2:17. Matthew, a publican, Zaccheus, an extortioner, examples of the

majority of that generation of men and harlots, and very little company besides.

He chose his attendants out of the devil's rabble; and he was more Jesus, more a Saviour, among this sort of trash, than among all other sorts of people, for all his design was to get his people out of hell itself. What was that woman that he must needs go out of his way to convert? A harlot, John 4:18, an idolater, for the Samaritans had a mixed worship, a linsey-woolsey religion, and upon that account were hateful to the Jews. She continued in her adultery up to the very time Christ spoke to her, yet he makes her a monument of his grace; and not only so, but the first preacher of the gospel to her neighbours. "Is not this the Christ?" ver. 29, and an instrument to conduct them to him; "Come, see a man which told me all things," &c. Was any more defiled than Mary Magdalene? Seven devils would make her sooty to purpose, and so many did Christ cast out of her. "Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene," Mark 16:9, out of whom he cast seven devils. This lustful devil he turns into a weeping saint.

What was that Canaanitish woman who had so powerful a faith infused? One sprung of a cursed stock, hateful to God, rooted out of the pleasant land, a dog, not a child: she comes a dog, but returns a child; Christ made this crab-apple in a wilderness to bring forth fruit, even the best that heaven could afford, viz. the fruit of faith; and larger and better bunches of it than that time sprouted out of any branches of the Jewish vine, so well planted, and so often watered by Christ himself. When he comes to act his last part in the world, he saves a thief who was next to the hell-gates, ready to be pushed in by the devil. Do you find examples among the Pharisees? No. Dunghill-sinners take heaven by violence, while the proud Pharisees lose it by their own righteousness. Scribes and theologians continue devils in the chair, while harlots come out saints from the brothels, and the thief goes onward a convert from the cross.

Since there was but one that in his own person he converted after he went to heaven, what was he? One that had "breathed out threatenings and slaughters against the church," Acts 9:1. To do so was as common with him, and natural to him, as to inhale air, and breathe it out again: this man, galloping to hell as fast as his mad rage and passion could carry him, Jesus stops in his charge, ordains a preacher of a persecutor; gives him as large a commission as he had given any of his

favourites; for he makes him the chiefest apostle of the Gentiles. What bogs and miry places did Christ drain and make fruitful gardens? What barren and thorny wildernesses did he change into pleasant paradises? He made subjects of vengeance objects of mercy: he told the woman of Samaria who lived in fornication, that he was the Messiah; "The woman saith to him, I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ." "Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am he," John 4:25, 26; which he never disclosed to the self-righteous Pharisees, nor, indeed, in so many words to his disciples, till Peter's confession of him.

5. The commission Christ gave to his apostles was to this purpose. He bids them proclaim the promise free to all; "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature;" Mark 16:15. All the world, every creature. He put no difference between men in this respect, though you meet with them in the likeness of beasts, and devils never so wicked, never so abominable; as long as they are creatures, reach out the cup of salvation to them, if they will drink; open the treasures of grace to them, if they will receive them; agree with them for nothing but faith for justification, and profession of it for their salvation.

This *commission* is set out by the parable of a king commanding his servants to fetch the maimed, halt, and blind, with their wounds, sores, and infirmities about them, Luke 14:21, 23. "Bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind." Yea, and go out into the highways, and hedges, and those loathsome persons, those dregs of mankind, which you shall find swarming with vermin, and cleansing themselves under every hedge, bring them in; if they pretend their rags and nastiness as unsuitable to my rank and quality, compel them, force them against their own natural inclinations and doubts, that my house may be filled. God will have heaven filled with such, when self-righteous persons refuse him. When you come to heaven to sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, you will find some and a great many, that were once as filthy morally, as these hedge-birds were naturally, who had once as many lusts creeping about them as there were frogs in Egypt. Such a compulsion as this spoken of, there was in the primitive times by the power of the Spirit of grace. Two stage-players, that in their acting scoffed at the Christian religion, were converted, and proved martyrs; one under Dioclesian, the other under Julian.

6. The practice of the Spirit *after Christ's ascension*, to lay hold of such persons.

1. Some out of the *worst families* in the world; one out of Herod's, Acts 13:1. "Now there were in the church that was at Antioch, certain prophets, and teachers, as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the Tetrarch, and Saul." Either Herod Antipas, who ridiculed Christ before Pilate; or Herod Agrippa, who put James to death; which of these Herods it was, it was not likely that in such a family he should imbibe any principles advantageous to the Christian religion. For being brought up with him, he was either his playfellow when young, or his confidant when grown up; yet out of this family of this wicked prince he calls out one, to make not only an object of his mercy, but an instrument of it to others, contrary to the force of education, which usually roots bad principles deep in the heart. It is likely to this intent the Holy Ghost takes particular notice of the place of Manaen's education, when the families, where the rest named with him were bred up, are not mentioned.

Some rude and rough stones were taken out of Nero's palace; some that were servants to the most abominable tyrant, and the greatest monster of mankind; one that set Rome on fire, and played on his harp while the flames were crackling about the city; ripped up his mother's belly to see the place where he lay; would any of the civiller sort of mankind be attendants upon such a devil? Yet some of this monster's servants became saints. Phil. 4:22. "All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Caesar's household." To hear of saints in Nero's family, is as great a prodigy as to hear of saints in hell.

God before had promised his grace to Egypt, the most idolatrous country; there God would have an altar erected: "In that day shall five cities in the land of Egypt speak the language of Canaan, and swear to the Lord of hosts; in that day shall there be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt," Isa. 19:18, 19, 20. And indeed the gospel was famous in Egypt, both at the Christian school at Alexandria, and for many famous lights.

2. Some of the *worst vices*. The Ephesians were as bad as any, such that Paul calls darkness itself; For "ye were sometimes darkness," Eph. 5:8. There was not only an eclipse, or a dark mask upon them, but

they were changed into the very nature of night. Great idolaters; the temple of Diana, adored and resorted to by all Asia, and the whole world, was in that city, Acts 19:27. "That the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth." And they cry up this statue they pretended fell down from Jupiter, above Christ, who was preached by Paul. They were given to magic, and other diabolical arts; yet many of these were weaned from their idol and their magic. They who were of darkness were made light in the Lord, which is more than if you saw a black piece of pitch changed into a clear piece of crystal, or a stone ascend into the nature of a glittering star.

Take a view of another assembly at Corinth of as filthy persons as ever you heard of; "Such were some of you," 1 Cor. 6:11. After he had drawn out a catalogue of their sins against the light of nature, and made the enumeration so perfect, that very little can be added, he adds, *such were some of you*. Not all, but some. *But you are washed, &c.* Not □□□□□□□□, such sinners; but □□□□□, such sins. Persons not only committing some few acts of them, but so habituated in them, that they seemed metamorphosed into the very nature of these sins themselves; so that they were become the very dirt, mud, and rubbish of hell. Yet you see devils he really turned into angels of light. Well then, how many flinty rocks has God dissolved into a stream of tears? How many hard hearts has he made to bleed and melt? That which is now pure gold, had been earthy and polluted.

I shall only add this to the whole. Great sins are made preparations by God to some men's conversion, not in their own nature, that is impossible: but by the wise disposal of God, which Mr Burges illustrates thus: As a child whose coat is but a little dirty, has it not presently washed, but when he comes to fall over head and ears in the mire, it is taken off, and washed immediately; the child might have gone many a day with a little dirt, had not such an accident happened. Peter might have had his proud and vain-glorious humour still, had he not fallen so foully in the denial of his Master; but when he fell into the privy, it promoted his conversion: for so Christ calls it. "And when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren," Luke 17:32. It was conversion in a new edition; and you do not find him in the same boasting vanity again.

David's falling into the sin of murder and adultery is the occasion of the ransacking his soul, which you find him not so hot about another time: he digs all about to the very root. "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me," Psalm 51:5. This sin had stirred and raked up all the mud in his heart, and made him see himself an abominable creature: therefore, he desires God to "hide his face from his sins," ver. 9; he was so loathsome, he would not have any one look upon him (fling all this mud out of my soul), and prays more earnestly for a new heart and a right spirit. So when a wicked man falls into some grievous sin, which his conscience frowns upon him and lashes him for, he looks out for a shelter, which in all his peaceable wickedness he never did.

2. Why God *chooses the greatest sinners*, and lets his elect run on so far in sin before he turns them.

1. There is a *passive disposition* in the greatest sinners, more than in moral or superstitious men, to see their need: because they have not any self-righteousness to boast of. Man's blameless outward carriage and freedom from the common sins of the times and places wherein they live, many times proves a snare of death to them, and makes them more cold and faint towards Christ: because they possess themselves with imaginations that Christ cannot but look upon them, though they never so much as set their faces toward him. And because they are not drenched in such villainies as others are, their consciences sit quiet under this moral carriage, and gall them not by any self-reflections. Therefore when the threatenings of the law are denounced against such and such sins, these men wipe their mouths, being untainted from those sins that are thus cursed, and vainly glory in their gay and gaudy plumes, and bless God with the Pharisee, that they are not sinners of such a scarlet dye, and that they do such and such duties, and so go on without seeing a necessity of the new birth. By this means the strength of sin is more compacted and condensed in them.

Superstitious and formal men are hardly seduced to their right wits: partly because of a defect in reason from whence, those extravagances arise, and partly because of these false habits and spirit of error possessing their faculties, they are incapable of more noble impressions. Besides, they are more tenacious of the opinions they have sucked in,

which have got the empire and command over their souls; such misguided zeal fortifies men against proposals of grace, and fastens them in a more obstinate inflexibleness to any converting motions. This self-righteous temper is like an external heat got into the body, which produces a persistant fever, and is not easily perceived till it be incurable; and naturally it is a harder matter to part with self-righteousness than to part with gross sins; for that is more deeply rooted upon the stock of self-love, a principle which departs not from us without our very nature. It has more arguments to plead for it; it has a natural conscience, as a patron for it. Whereas a great sinner stands speechless at reproofs, an outward law-keeper has the strong reinforcement of natural conscience within his own breast. It was not the gross sins of the Jews against the light of nature, so much as the establishing the idol of their own righteousness, that was the block to hinder them from submitting to the righteousness of God, Rom. 10:8.

Christ came to his own, and his own received him not, John 1:11. Those that seem to have his particular stamp and mark upon them, that had their heads in heaven by some kind of resemblance to God in moral righteousness, being undefiled with the common pollutions of the world: these received him not, when publicans and harlots started ahead of them, and ran before them, to catch hold of the offers of grace. "Publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of heaven before you." Matt. 21:31. Just as travellers that have loitered away their time in an alehouse, being sensible how the darkness of the night creeps upon them, spur on, and outstrip those that were many miles on their way, and get to their stage before them. So these publicans and harlots which were at a great distance from heaven, arrived there before those who, like the young man, were not far off from it.

Great sinners are most easily convinced of the notorious wickedness of their lives; and reflecting upon themselves because of their horrid crimes against the light of nature, are more inclinable to endeavour an escape from the devil's slavery, and are frightened and shaken by their consciences into a compliance with the doctrine of redemption; whereas those that do by nature the things contained in the law, are so much a law to themselves, that it is difficult to persuade them of the necessity of conforming to another law, and to part with this self-law in regard to justification. As metals of the noblest substance are hardest to be

polished; so men of the most noble, natural, and moral endowments are with more difficulty argued into a state of Christianity than those of more drossy modes of living. Cassianus speaks very peremptorily in this case; *frequenter vidimus de frigidis et carnalibus ad spiritualem venisse fervorem, de lepidis et animalibus nunquam*; that is, often have we seen the cold and carnal warmed into a spiritual fervour; the dainty and the brutish never.

The *insufficiency* of nature to such a work as conversion is, shows that men may not fall down and idolize their own wit and power. A change from acts of sin to moral duties may be done by a natural strength and the power of natural conscience: for the very same motives which led to sin, as education, interest, profit, may, upon a change of circumstances, guide men to an outward morality; but a change to the contrary grace is supernatural.

Two things are certain in nature. (1.) Natural inclinations never change, but by *some superior virtue*. A loadstone will not cease to draw iron, while that attractive quality remains in it. The wolf can never love the lamb, nor the lamb the wolf; nothing but must act suitably to its nature. Water cannot but moisten, fire cannot but burn. So likewise the corrupt nature of man being possessed with an invincible contrariety and enmity to God, will never suffer him to comply with God. And the inclinations of a sinner to sin being more strengthened by the frequency of sinful acts, have as great a power over him, and as natural to him, as any qualities are to natural agents: and being stronger than any sympathies in the world, cannot by a man's own power, or the power of any other nature equal to it, be turned into a contrary channel.

(2.) Nothing can act *beyond its own principle and nature*. Nothing in the world can raise itself to a higher rank of being than that which nature has placed it in; a spark cannot make itself a star, though it mount a little up to heaven; nor a plant endue itself with sense, nor a beast adorn itself with reason; nor a man make himself an angel. Thorns cannot bring forth grapes, nor thistles produce figs because such fruits are above the nature of those plants. So neither can our corrupt nature bring forth grace, which is a fruit above it. *Effectus non excedit virtutem suae causae* [the effect cannot exceed the power of its cause]: grace is more excellent

than nature, therefore cannot be the fruit of nature. It is Christ's conclusion, "How can you, being evil, speak good things?" Matt. 12:33, 34. Not so much as the buds and blossoms of words, much less the fruit of actions. They can no more change their natures, than a viper can do away with his poison. Now though this I have said be true, yet there is nothing man does more affect in the world than a self-sufficiency, and an independence from any other power but his own. This attitude is as much riveted in his nature, as any other false principle whatsoever. For man does derive it from his first parents, as the prime legacy bequeathed to his nature: for it was the first thing uncovered in man at his fall; he would be as God, independent from him. Now God, to cross this principle, allows his elect, like Lazarus, to lie in the grave till they stink, that there may be no excuse to ascribe their resurrection to their own power. If a putrefied rotten carcass should be brought to life, it could never be thought that it inspired itself with that active principle. God lets men run on so far in sin, that they do unman themselves, that he may proclaim to all the world, that we are unable to do anything of ourselves towards our recovery, without a superior principle. The evidence of which will appear if we consider,

1. Man's *subjection* under sin. He is "sold under sin," Rom. 7:14, and brought "into captivity to the law of sin," ver. 23. "Law of sin:" that sin seems to have a legal authority over him; and man is not only a slave to one sin, but many, Tit. 3:3, "serving divers lusts." Now when a man is sold under the power of a thousand lusts, every one of which has an absolute tyranny over him, and rules him as a sovereign by a law; when a man is thus bound by a thousand laws, a thousand cords and fetters, and carried whither his lords please, against the dictates of his own conscience and force of natural light; can any man imagine that his own power can rescue him from the strength of these masters that claim such a right to him, and keep such a force upon him, and have so often baffled his own strength, when he attempted to turn against them?

2. Man's *affection* to them. He does not only serve them, but he serves them, and every one of them, with delight and pleasure; Tit. 3:3. They were all pleasures, as well as lusts; friends as well as lords. Will any man leave his sensual delights and such sins that please and flatter his flesh? Will a man ever endeavour to run away from those lords which he serves with affection? having as much delight in being bound a slave to

these lusts, as the devil has in binding him. Therefore when you see a man cast away his pleasures, deprive himself of those comfortable things to which his soul was once knit, and walk in paths contrary to corrupt nature, you may search for the cause anywhere, rather than in nature itself. No piece of dirty, muddy clay can form itself into a neat and handsome vessel; no plain piece of timber can fit itself for the building, much less a crooked one. Nor a man that is born blind, give himself sight.

God deals with men in this case as he did with Abraham. He would not give Isaac while Sarah's womb, in a natural probability, might have borne him; but when her womb was dead, and age had taken away all natural strength of conception, then God gives him; that it might appear that he was not a child of nature, but a child of promise. I have been the larger on these two heads (which I design rather as things premised than reasons) because these two principles of civil righteousness and self-sufficiency are the great impediments to conversion, and natural to most men.