

A Call to the Unconverted to Turn and Live: Sermon I

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Reformed · Post-Reformation · Sermon

STROMATA 202

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INTRODUCTION

Baxter preached to Kidderminster with the fervor of a man who believed eternity hinged on the next few minutes. This opening sermon from his 1658 classic *A Call to the Unconverted to Turn and Live* takes Ezekiel's oracle - "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked" - and turns it over relentlessly: sin belongs to the sinner, not to God, and every soul stands between conversion and ruin. Baxter answers the objections of his hearers point by point, then turns pastoral, urging quiet self-examination before it is too late. The prose retains his direct address and rhetorical urgency - readers should expect to be spoken to, not merely informed.

Ezekiel 33:11: "Say to them: 'As I live,' says the Lord GOD, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?'"

It has been the astonishing wonder of many, as well as me, to read in the Holy Scriptures how few will be saved; and that the greatest part, even of those who are "called" by being brought under conviction for their sins, will be everlastingly shut out of the kingdom of heaven, and be tormented in eternal fire. Unbelievers do not believe this when they read it, but those who do believe are forced to cry out with Paul, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!" But nature itself teaches us all to lay the blame of evil works upon the doers, and therefore, when we see any heinous thing done, a principle of justice provokes us to place the evil of the deed upon the one who did it. If we saw a man killed and cut in pieces we would immediately ask, "Who did this cruel deed?" If the town was intentionally set on fire, we would ask, "What wicked person did this?" But when we read that most people will be firebrands in hell for ever, many would say that Satan is the cause! But Satan is not the principal cause: he does not force individuals to sin, but merely tempts them to it, and leaves it to their own wills whether they will do it or not; he does not carry men to an alehouse and force open their mouths, and pour in the drink; nor does he hold them back from attending God's service; nor does he force their hearts from holy thoughts.

On the contrary, sin lies between God himself and the sinner: but God will not take it upon Himself, and the wicked usually denies it. This, then, is the controversy considered here in my text: The Lord lays the blame on the people, and the people think it is the fault of God. This same controversy had been handled in Ezekiel 17, verse 25, where the people openly say, “the way of the Lord is not fair,” and God says, “it is their ways that are not fair.” So here, in chapter 33, they say in verse 9, “If our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how shall we then live?” If we must die, and be miserable, how can we help it? – as if it were not their fault, but God's! But God's response is to clear Himself of it, and tell them how they may help themselves if they desire to, and persuade them to use the means He has provided, and if they will not be persuaded, He will not fail to punish them. It is He who will be their judge; they will not be His, for they do not have the authority, the wisdom, or the fairness for such a responsibility.

The words of this verse contain (1) God's clearing of Himself from the blame of their destruction, which He does not by abandoning the judgments that are necessary according to His law, but merely by professing that he does not take pleasure in their death; on the contrary, He desires that they may live, and He confirms this to them by oath. These words also contain (2) An express exhortation to the wicked to return, in which God doth not only commands, but persuades and condescends to reason the case with them, "why will they die?" The direct end of His message to them is that they may turn and live.

I will consider the substance of the text in the following observations:

- Doctrine 1. It is the unchangeable law of God that wicked men must turn or die.
- Doctrine 2. It is the promise of God that the wicked shall live, if they will only turn from their wickedness.
- Doctrine 3. God takes pleasure in man's conversion and salvation; but not in his death or damnation: He would rather that they return and live, than go on and die.
- Doctrine 4. This is a so certain of a truth that, because God would not leave any question, He has confirmed it to them solemnly by His oath.
- Doctrine 5. The Lord has repeated and emphasized His commands and persuasions to the wicked to turn.
- Doctrine 6. The Lord condescends to reason His case with them, and asks the wicked, "Why will you die?"
- Doctrine 7. If after all this the wicked will not turn, it is not God's desire that they perish, but because their own willfulness is the cause of their damnation, they therefore will die.

Having laid the text open before your eyes in these plain propositions, I shall next speak somewhat of each of them briefly in order.

Doctrine 1. It Is The Unchangeable Law Of God, That Wicked Men Must Turn Or Die.

If you will believe God, believe this: there is only one of two ways for every wicked person: conversion or damnation. Sadly, I know the wicked will hardly be persuaded either of the truth or fairness of this. It is no wonder if those who are guilty quarrel with the law, for few are likely to believe what they do not desire to be true, and fewer would desire to be true that which they understand to be against them. But it is not quarrelling with the law, or with the Judge, that will save the evil-doer. The law was not made for them to judge, or for any of us, but that we might be ruled and judged by it. But, if there are any so blind as to question either the truth or the justice of this law of God, I shall briefly give you that evidence that should satisfy a reasonable person. And first, if you doubt whether this is the command of the word of God or not, besides a hundred other texts, consider just a few:

- Matt. 18:3: "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.
- John 3:3: "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."
- 2 Corinthians 5:17: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."
- Colossians 3:9-10: "Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him."
- Hebrews 12:14: "Without holiness no one shall see the Lord."
- Romans 8:8-9. "So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God... Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His."
- Galatians 6:15: "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation."
- 1 Peter 1:3: "According to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope."
- Verse 23: "Having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever."
- 1 Peter 2:1-2: "Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby."
- Psalm 9:17: "The wicked shall be turned into hell, And all the nations that forget God."

If you are one who claims to believe the Word of God, you should at least agree that the wicked must be converted or condemned. Indeed, you must either confess that this is true, or say plainly you will not believe the Word of God. And, once you come to that place, there is but little hope for you: look to yourselves as well as you can, for, it is likely you will not be long out of hell. If you tell God plainly that you will not believe Him, do not blame Him if He never warns you again, or if He forsakes you, and gives you up as hopeless! For what purpose should He warn you, if you will not believe him? Even if He were to send an angel from heaven to you, it seems you would not believe, for an angel can do nothing but the word of God, and, if an angel should bring you any other gospel, Galatians 1:8 commands you not to receive it, but to hold him accursed! Surely no angel is to be believed before

the Son of God, who came from the Father to bring us this doctrine, and if God the Son is not to be believed, then all the angels in heaven are not to be believed. And if you stand on these terms with God, I shall leave you until He deals with you in a more convincing way.

Answers to a Common Objection

But let us hear your reasons why you will not believe this word of God, which tells us that the wicked must either be converted or condemned. I know your reason: it is because you think it is unlikely that God would be so unmerciful. You think it would be cruel of Him to damn a soul everlastingly for so small a thing as a sinful life. In response, I will justify the fairness of God in His laws and judgments.

I think you will agree that it is most suitable for an immortal soul to be ruled by laws that promise an eternal reward and threaten an endless punishment, for the heart of man is such that he will not be fully ruled by anything less than the hopes or fears of everlasting things. When you find it in the word of God that so it is, and so it will be, do you think yourselves fit to contradict this word?—Will you call your Maker to the bar, and examine His word upon the accusation or falsehood? Will you set upon Him, and judge Him by the law of your own imagination? Are you wiser, and better, and more righteous than He? Must the God of heaven come to you to learn wisdom? Must infinite wisdom learn of folly, and infinite Holiness be corrected by a selfish sinner who cannot keep himself an hour clean? Must the Almighty stand at the bar of a worm? O! horrid arrogance of senseless dust! Shall every mole, or clod, or dunghill, accuse the sun of darkness, and undertake to illuminate the world? Where were you when the Almighty made these laws, that He did not call you to His counsel? Surely He made them before you were born, without desiring your advice, and you came into the world too late to reverse them.

If you could have done so great a work, you should have stepped out of your nothingness, and have contradicted Christ when he was on earth, or Moses before him, or have saved Adam and his sinful progeny from the threatened death, that so there might have been no need of Christ! For if sin be such an evil that it requires the death of Christ for its atonement, no wonder if it deserves our everlasting misery. And what if God withdrew his patience, and let you drop into hell while you are quarrelling with his word?—Will you then believe that there is no hell?

It seems to me that it is not possible for the best of human beings, much less for the wicked, to be competent judges of the desert of sin. Alas! We are both blind and partial. We judge by feeling, which blinds our reason. We see, in common worldly things, how most people think their own cause is right and that all which is done against them is wrong, and though the wisest or most impartial friends persuade them to the contrary, it is all in vain. Besides, you know that the offender is too partial to judge the law or the proceedings of the judge. Thus, you can never know fully the just penalty for sin until you fully know the great evil of sin: and you can never fully know the evil of sin till you fully know (1) the excellency of the God-given soul that it deforms; (2) the excellency of holiness, which it offends; (3) the excellency of the glory which it despises; (4) the excellency and authority of reason, which it treads down: and (6) the infinite almightiness and holiness, of that God, against whom it is committed! When you fully know all these, you shall fully know the just penalty of sin.

Who could reasonably think that an unholy soul is fit for heaven? Alas! they cannot love God there, nor do Him any service which He can accept. They are contrary to God; they loathe that which He loves, and love that which He abhors. If they are incapable of that imperfect communion with Him which his saints on earth partake of, how then can they live in that perfect love of Him, and full delight and communion with Him, which is the blessedness of heaven? No one would accuse you of lacking mercy for not making your enemy your bosom counselor; yet you will blame the absolute Lord, the most wise and gracious Sovereign of the world, for justly condemning the unconverted to perpetual misery!

Application

I plead now with all of you who love your souls, instead of quarrelling with God, and with His Word, that you will immediately be humbled by it, and use it for good. All humanity must be converted or condemned; there is no other way, but to turn or die. When you hear it from God Himself, who cannot lie, and who is the Maker and Judge of the world, it is time for them that have ears to hear. You are nothing but dead and damned souls, except you will be converted. If I tell you otherwise, I am deceiving you with a lie. If I hide this from you, I aid in your undoing, and am guilty of your blood, as the verse before my text (Ezekiel 33:8) assures me: "When I say to the wicked, 'O wicked man, you shall surely die!' and you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand." You see then, though this may seem a rough and unwelcome doctrine, it is what we must preach, and you must hear, for it is easier to hear of hell than to feel it. If it were not necessary, I would not gall your tender ears with truths that seem so harsh and grievous. Hell would not be so full if people were only willing to know their case, and to hear and think of it. The reason so few escape it is that they do not strive to enter in at the narrow gate of conversion (Matthew 7:13), and go the narrow way of holiness while they have time; and they do not strive because they are not awakened to a genuine sense of the danger they are in; and they are not awakened, because they hate to hear or think of it, and that is partly through a foolish sentimentality and carnal self-love, and partly because they do not really believe the Word of God that threatens it. It seems to me that the weight of this truth should force you to remember it; and it should follow you, and give you no rest, till you are converted. If you had just once heard these words, by the voice of an angel, "You must be converted, or condemned; you must turn, or die," would it not stick in your mind, and haunt you night

and day, so that in your sinning you would remember it, as if the voice were still in your ears, “turn, or die!” O, happy would be your souls if it might thus work with you, and never be forgotten or leave you alone till it has driven home your heart to God. But if you will so lightly cast it out by forgetfulness or unbelief, how can it work to your conversion and salvation? But take this with you to your sorrow: though you may put it out of your minds, you cannot put it out of the Bible; but there it will stand as a settled truth, that there is no other way but, turn, or die.

What is the matter then, that the hearts of sinners will not be not pierced with such a weighty truth! One would think now that every unconverted soul who hears these words would be pricked to the heart, and think within themselves, "This is my own case," and never be quiet until they found themselves converted. Believe it, dear readers, this drowsy careless temper will not last long. Conversion and condemnation are both awakening things. I can foretell it as truly as if I saw it with my eyes, that either grace or hell will shortly bring these matters to life, and make you say, “What have I done? What a foolish wicked course have I taken?” The scornful and the sleepy state of sinners will last but a little while! As soon as they either turn or die, the presumptuous dream will be at an end, and then their wits and feeling will return.

Two Objections Answered

But I foresee there are two things that are likely to harden the unconverted, and make all my efforts futile, except they can be taken out of the way: and that is the misunderstanding on those two words: the wicked and turn. Some will think to themselves, it is true, the wicked must turn or die; but what is that to me? I am not wicked, though I am a sinner, as all people are. Others will think, “it is true that we must turn from our evil ways; but I was saved long ago.” And thus, while the wicked think they are not wicked, but are already converted, all our labor in persuading them to turn seems lost. Therefore, before I go any farther, I will explain what is meant by the wicked, and who it is that must turn or die; and also what is meant by turning, and who they are that are truly converted. It goes without saying that a wicked person and a converted one are opposites. No one is "wicked" who is converted, and no one is "converted" who is wicked; so that to be a wicked person and to be an unconverted man, is all one.

In order to tell you what either wickedness or conversion is, let us fetch up the matter from the beginning. It pleased the great Creator of the world to make three sorts of living creatures. Angels he made pure spirits, without flesh, and therefore he made them only for heaven, and not to dwell on earth. Animals were made flesh, without immortal spirits, and therefore they were made only for the earth, and not for heaven: Man is of a middle nature between both, as partaking of both flesh and spirit, so is he made for earth, but only as his passageway to heaven, and not so that this earth should be his happiness or eternal home. The blessed state that mankind was made for was to behold the glorious majesty of the Lord, and to praise him among God's holy angels; and to love Him, and to be filled with His love forever.

Because this was the purpose for which man was made, God gave him two primary means of attaining it: first, the right disposition of his heart, and second, the right ordering of his life. For the first, God

suited the disposition of man to seek his Maker, giving him such knowledge of God as was fit for his present condition, and a heart inclined to God in holy love. Yet He did not fix or confirm him in this condition but, having made him a free agent, he left him in the hands of his own free will. For the second, God did that which He was worthy of: He gave man a perfect law, requiring him to continue in the love of God, and perfectly to obey him. By the willful breach of this law, man not only forfeited his hopes of everlasting life, but also turned his heart from God, and fixed it on these lower fleshly things, and hereby did blot out our spiritual image of God from the soul, so that man not only fell short of the glory of God, but he put beyond his grasp the means by which he should have attained it.

Thus, he lost the holy inclination and love of his soul to God, and in its place, he inherited an inclination and love to the pleasing of his flesh by earthly things, growing alienated from God, so that the entire course of this life was to follow the inclination of his own heart. With this nature, we are all now born into the world, as the Scripture says: "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" (Job 14:4). As a lion has a fierce and cruel nature before it devours, and an adder has a venomous nature before she stings, so in our infancy we have those sinful natures, or inclinations, before we think, or speak, or do wrong, and from that source springs all the sin of our lives. And not only so, but when God through His mercy provided us a remedy, the Lord Jesus Christ, to be the Savior of our souls, and bring us back to God again, because we naturally love our present condition, and hate to be brought out of it, we therefore are set against the means of our recovery. And, though custom has taught us to thank Christ for His good will, yet carnal self persuades us to refuse His remedies, and to desire to be excused when we are commanded to take the medicines which he offers, and to forsake all and follow him to God and glory. I pray that you read over these words again, and mark them: for in these few words you have a true description of our natural state, and thus of a wicked person. For everyone who is in this state of corrupted nature, according to Scripture, is "wicked," and in a state of death.

By this you may also understand what it is to be converted, to which end the mercy of God, not willing that man should perish in his sin, provided a remedy, by causing His Son to take our nature, and being both God and man in one Person, to become a Mediator between God and man; and, by dying for our sins on the cross, to ransom us from the curse of God and the power of the devil; and finally, having thus redeemed us, the Father has delivered His children into His hands as His own. Upon this truth, the Father and the Mediator make a new law and covenant for man, not like the first, which gave life only to the perfectly obedient, and condemned man for every sin; but Christ has made a law of grace, or a promise of pardon and everlasting life to all, that, by true repentance and by faith in Christ, are converted unto God. Furthermore, because the Lord knows that the heart of mankind is grown so wicked that for all God's grace, they will not accept the remedy if left to themselves, that the Holy Ghost has undertaken it as His office to inspire the apostles, and seal up the scriptures by miracles and wonders, and to illuminate and convert His elect.

Thus, we see how the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost each have their works, which are eminently attributed to them. The Father's works were to create us, to rule us, by His law, as His rational creatures and to judge us thereby, and in mercy to provide us a Redeemer when we were lost, and to send his Son, and accept his ransom. The works of the Son for us were to ransom and redeem us by his sufferings and righteousness, to give out the promise or law of grace, to rule and judge the world as their Redeemer (on terms of grace), and to make intercession for us, that the benefit of His death may be communicated; and to send the Holy Spirit, which the Father also does by the Son. The works of the Holy Ghost for us are the writing of the Holy Scriptures by inspiring and guiding the prophets and apostles, and sealing the word by his miraculous gifts and works; the illuminating ordinary ministers of the gospel, and so enabling them and helping them to publish that word; and, by the same word, illuminating and converting the souls of individuals. So that, as you could not have been reasonable creatures if the Father had not created you; nor have had any access to God if the Son had not redeemed you; neither can you have a part in Christ, or be saved, unless the Holy Spirit sanctifies you. All this is to repair the image of God upon the soul, and to set the heart upon God again, and so turn the current of the life, which was formerly earthly, into a heavenly course, and take it off the carnal self to which it is enslaved.

Characteristics of the Unconverted and the Converted

Before we proceed, I will explain the difference between one who is converted and one who is not.

First, the unconverted or wicked person is one whose chief interests are on earth. He loves his fleshly prosperity above heavenly things, thus He favors the things of the flesh, but neither discerns nor savors the things of Spirit. Although he may say that heaven is better than earth, he really does not believe it to be true, for if he could be sure of earth, he would let go of heaven, and be content to remain on earth. A life of perfect holiness, in the sight of God, and in God's love and praise forever in heaven, does not find such appeal in his heart as a life of health, wealth, and honor on earth. And though he may falsely profess that he loves God above all, he never felt the power of divine love within him, but his mind is more set on the world or on fleshly pleasures than on God. In a word, whoever loves earth above heaven, and fleshly prosperity more than God, is an unconverted person.

A converted person, on the other hand is illuminated to discern the loveliness of God; and so believes the glory that is to be had with God, that his heart is set more on it than anything in this world. He would rather see the face of God, and live in His everlasting love and praises, than have all the wealth or pleasures of the world. He sees that everything else is vanity, and that nothing except God can fill the soul, and though the world goes whatever way it wants, he lays up his treasures and hopes in heaven, and resolves to let go of all. As the fire mounts upwards, and the compass needle still points to the north, so the converted soul is inclined to God. Nothing else can satisfy him, nor can he find any content and rest but in His love. In a word, all who are converted love God better than all the world; and heavenly things are dearer to them than fleshly prosperity. The proof of what I have said you may find in the following Scriptures: Philippians 3:18, 21; Matthew 6:19-21; Colossians 3:1-5; Romans 8:5-9, 18, 23; Psalm 73:25-26.

Second, a wicked person is one who makes it his principal business to prosper in the world, and attain his fleshly goals. Though he may read and hear and do much in the outward duties of religion, and avoid disgraceful sins, he never makes it the principal business of his life to please God, and attain everlasting glory, and he puts off God with the attractions of the world, and gives God no more service than his own flesh can spare; for he will not part with the earth for heaven.

On the contrary, a converted person makes it the principal business of his life to please God, and to be saved, and he takes all the blessings of this life merely as accommodations in his journey towards another life, and uses the world only in subordination to God. He loves a holy life, and longs to be more holy; he has no sin except that which he hates, longs, prays and strives to be rid of. The drift and bent of his life is for God; and, if he sins, it is contrary to the very bent of his heart and life, and therefore he rises again and laments it, and dares not willfully live in any known sin. There is nothing in this world so dear to him that he cannot give it up to God and forsake it for Him. All this you may see in Colossians 3:1-5; Matt. 6:20, 33; Luke 18:22-23, 29; Luke 14:18, 24, 26-27; Romans 13; Luke 12:21, etc.

Thirdly, the soul of an unconverted person never truly discerns and relishes the mystery of redemption, nor does it thankfully entertain an offered Savior. He is not taken up with the love of the Redeemer, nor willing to be ruled by Him as the physician of his soul, that he may be saved from the guilt and power of his sins, and recovered unto God; but his heart is insensible of this unspeakable benefit, and is quite against the healing means by which he should be recovered. Though he may be willing to be carnally religious, yet his soul is never resigned to Christ, and to Christ's word and spirit.

On the contrary, the converted soul, having felt himself undone by sin, and perceiving that he has lost his peace with God and hopes of heaven, and is in danger of everlasting misery, ponders the truths of redemption with thankfulness, and, believing in the Lord Jesus as his only Savior, resigns himself to Him for wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. He takes Christ as the life of his soul and lives by Him, and uses Him as a salve for every sore, admiring the wisdom and love of God in this wonderful work of man's redemption. In a word, Christ dwells in his heart by faith, and the life that he now lives is by the faith of the Son of God, who loved him, and gave Himself for him. For these truths in Scripture, see Job 1:11-12, and 3:20; John 15: 2-4; 1 Corinthians 1:20, and 2:2.

You see now, in plain terms from the Word of God, who are the unconverted (or wicked) and who are the converted. Uninformed people think if a person is not a swearer, or a verbal abuser, or a drunkard, or a fornicator, or an extortioner, or has not wronged anybody in their dealings, and if they come to church, and say their prayers, take the sacraments, and sometimes extend their hands to the relief of the poor, that such could not be an unconverted person. Or if one has been guilty of drunkenness, or swearing, or gambling, or similar vices, and then forsakes them, they think that this is a converted man. Others think that if one who has been an enemy and scorner at godliness, but then approves it, and joins himself with those who are godly, and is hated for it by the wicked, as the godly are, then this must be a converted person. Some think they are converted by the fact that they have come to a new opinion [or belief]. And some think, if they have come to a fear of hell, and had conviction and struggles of conscience, and because of that have purposed and promised to mend their ways, and follow a life of proper behavior

and religious observance, that this must be true conversion. Indeed, these last ones are the poor deluded souls who are likely to lose the benefit of all our persuasions; for, when they hear that the wicked must turn or die, they think that this is not spoken to them; for they are not wicked, but are turned already. And therefore it is as when Christ told some of the rulers of the Jews who were more dignified than the common people, that “publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of Christ before them” (Matt. 21:31) – not that a harlot or other bold sinner can be saved without conversion, but because it was easier to make these people perceive their sin and misery, and the necessity of a change, than the more righteous ones who delude themselves by thinking that they are converted already, when they are not.

O people, conversion is a different kind of work than most are aware of! It is not a small matter to bring an earthly mind to heaven, and to show man the amiable excellencies of God, till he is overwhelmed by such love to Him that it can never be quenched; to break the heart for sin, and make him fly for refuge to Christ, and thankfully embrace Him as the life of his soul; to have the very drift and direction of the heart and life changed; so that he renounces that which he took for good fortune, and places his treasure where he never did before, and no longer lives for the same purpose, and is not driven by the same love for the world as he formerly was: in a word, he that is in Christ is a “new creation”: “old things are passed away, behold, all things have become new.” (2 Corinthians 5:17). He has a new understanding, a new will and resolution, new sorrows, and desires, and love, and delight: new thoughts, new speeches, new company, (if possible) and new conversation. Sin, which was previously amusing to him, is now so distasteful and terrible to him, that he flees from it as from death. The world, which was so lovely in his eyes, now troubles him and appears as nothing but vanity.

God, who was before neglected, is now his only happiness. Whereas before, God was forgotten, and every lust preferred before Him: now He is set next to his heart, and all things must give place to Him. His heart is now occupied with God, and is grieved when He hides His face, and never thinks itself well without Him. Christ Himself, who was once only slightly thought of, is now his only hope and refuge, and he lives upon Him as on his daily bread; he cannot pray without Him, nor rejoice without Him, nor think, nor speak, nor live without Him. Heaven itself, which once was little more than an escape from hell when he could no longer hold onto the world, is now taken for his home, the place of his only hope and rest, where he shall see, and love, and praise that God who fills his heart already. Hell, which seemed nothing more than a bug-bear to frighten men from sin, now is a real place that is not to be ventured on, nor jested with.

The works of holiness, which he once was weary of, and it seemed concerned some people more than necessary, are now both his recreation and his business. The Bible, which before was to him little more than a common book, is now as the law of God, as a letter written to him from heaven, signed with the name of the eternal Majesty; it is the rule of his thoughts, and words, and deeds; its commands are binding, its threats are dreadful, and the its promises speak life to his soul. The godly, who seemed to him not unlike other people, are now the most excellent and happiest on earth. And the wicked, who were his play-fellows, are now his grief; and he, who could laugh at their sins, is now more ready to weep for their sin and misery (Psalm 16:3 and 15:4; Phil. 3:18).

In short, he has a new purpose in his thoughts, and a new way in his endeavors, and therefore his heart and life are new. Before, his carnal self was his end; his own pleasures and worldly profits were his way; but now, God and everlasting glory are his end; Christ, the Spirit, the Word, holiness to God, righteousness, and mercy to others, these are his way. Before, self was his chief ruler; to which the matters of God and conscience must stoop and give place. Now God in Christ, by the spirit, Word and ministry, have become that chief ruler, and to Him all the matters of self must give place. This conversion, then, is not a change in one, or two, or twenty points, but in the whole soul, and in the very purpose and direction of his life. A person may step out of one path into another, and yet be facing the same way, and be still going towards the same place; but it is another matter to turn completely back again, and take his journey going the opposite way. So it is here: a person may turn from drunkenness to thriftiness, and forsake his evil companions and his blatant, disgraceful sins, and take upon himself some duties of religion, and yet be still going the same way as before, satisfying his carnal self above all else, and still giving it the control of his heart and soul. But, when he is converted, this self is denied and taken down, and God is set up, and his face is turned the other way; and he, who once was addicted to himself, and lived to himself, is now by sanctification devoted to God, and lives unto God. While he once asked himself what he should do with his time, his energy, and his possessions, now he asks God what he shall do with them, and uses them for Him. Before, he would please God only so far as might go along with the pleasure of his flesh and carnal self, but now, he determines to please God, though flesh and self be ever so much displeased. This is the great change that God will make upon all that shall be saved.

People commonly say that the Holy Spirit is our sanctifier; who have no personal, experiential knowledge of the true sanctification I have just written of. What I have now expressed to you is the work of the Holy Spirit in every true believer that every man and woman in the world must have, or be condemned to everlasting misery. They must turn or die. Now, do you believe all this, or do you not? Surely you dare not say, you do not; for it is past a doubt or denial. These are not controversies in which one learned pious man is of one mind, and another of another; where one party says this, and another says that; indeed, every denomination among us that deserves to be called "Christian" are all agreed in this that I have said; and, if you will not believe the God of truth, and that in a case where every party do believe him, you are utterly inexcusable.

But, if you do believe this, how can it be that you live so quietly in an unconverted state? Do you know that you are converted? Can you find this wonderful change upon your souls? Have you been thus born again, and made anew? Are not these strange matters to many of you, who never personally experienced these things? If you cannot tell the day or week of your change, or the very sermon that converted you, can you at least see in yourselves that the work of conversion is done; that such a change indeed there is, and that you have such hearts as before described? Alas! It seems most just follow their worldly business, and trouble their minds very little with such thoughts. If they merely stay free of scandalous sins, and can say, "I am not a whoremonger, or a thief, or a curser, or an extortioner; I go to church, and say my prayers," they think this is true conversion, and that they will be saved as well as any. Alas, this is foolish cheating of yourselves; this is too much contempt of endless glory, and too great a neglect of your immortal souls! Can you so make light of heaven and hell?

Consider: your corpse will shortly lie in the dust, and angels or devils will presently seize upon your souls, and every man and woman will shortly be among company other than that which you are now.- You will dwell in your earthly houses only a little longer, you will work in your shops only a little longer; you will sit in your seats in church, and dwell on this earth only a little longer; you will see with those eyes, and hear with those ears, and speak with those tongues only a little longer, until the resurrection day: and can you make yourselves not think about this? O what a place you will be in shortly, either of joy or of torment! O what a sights will you shortly see in heaven or hell! O what thoughts will shortly fill your hearts with unspeakable delight or horror! What work will you be employed in – to praise the Lord with saints and angels, or to cry out in fire unquenchable with demons! And should all this be forgotten? All this will be endless, and sealed up by an unchangeable decree! ETERNITY, ETERNITY will be the measure of your joys or sorrows: And can this be forgotten? All this is true, most certainly true. When you have gone up and down a little longer, and slept and awaked a few times more, you will be dead and gone, and find all true that now I tell you. Then, you will remember that you heard this sermon, and were reminded of these things; then, you will know them to be matters a thousand times greater than either you or I could have conceived while on this earth; and yet shall they now be so much forgotten? Beloved friends, if the Lord had not awakened me to believe and to take to heart these things myself, I would have remained in a dark and selfish state, and have perished for ever: but, now that He has truly made me sensible of them, I am constrained to bring them to you. If your eyes were opened that you could see hell, and you saw your neighbors, who were unconverted, dragged there with hideous cries, though on earth they were those you considered honest people, such a sight would make you go home and think of it, and think again, and warn everyone around you, like that miserable rich man in Luke 16:28 who wanted to warn his brethren, lest they come to that place of torment. Faith is a kind of sight; it is the eye of the soul; and if I believe God it is like seeing; and therefore I ask that you will excuse me if I be half as earnest with you about these matters as if I had seen them. If I must die to-morrow, and it were in my power to come again from another world, and tell you what I had seen, would you not be willing to hear me? Would you not believe and regard what I should tell you? If I might preach one sermon to you after I am dead, and have seen what is done in the world to come, would you not ask me plainly to speak the truth, and would you not crowd to hear me? And would you not take it to heart? But this must not be; God has His appointed way of teaching us by through the Scriptures and through ministers, and he will not humor unbelievers so far as to send men from the dead to them, and to alter his established way. If anyone quarrels with the sun, God will not humor him so far as to set up a clearer light.

Friends, I beg you to listen to me now as you would do if I had come from the dead to you; for, I can give you as full an assurance of the truth of what I say to you as if I had been there and seen it with my eyes. Jesus Christ can never deceive you, nor can the word of God. given in scripture, and sealed by the miracles and holy workings of the Spirit. Believe this, or believe nothing. Believe and obey this, or you are undone. If you believe the word of God, and care for the salvation of your souls, let me beg of you this reasonable request: that you would, without any more delay, remember what I have spoken, and earnestly search your hearts, and say to yourselves, “Is it so indeed? Must I turn or die? Must I be converted or condemned?

It is time for me, then, to look around me, before it is too late. O why did not I look after this till now? Why did I put off so great a business? O blessed God, it is only through mercy that you did not cut off my life before this, before I had any certain hope of eternal life! God forbid that I should neglect this work any longer. What state is my soul in? Am I converted, or am I not? Was there ever such a change or work done upon my soul? Have I been illuminated by the word and spirit of the Lord to see the wretchedness of sin, the need of a Savior, the love of Christ, and the excellencies of God and glory? Is my heart broken or humbled within me for my former life? Have I with thanksgiving opened my thoughts to my Savior and Lord, who offered Himself with pardon and life for my soul? Do I hate my former sinful life, and the remnant of every sin that is in me? Do I flee from them as my deadly enemies? Do I give up myself to a life of holiness and obedience to God? Do I love and delight in it? Can I truly say that I am dead to the world and carnal self, and that I live for God, and the glory which He promises? Is heaven of any more value to me than earth? Is God the dearest and highest in my soul? Once, I am sure, I lived primarily for the world and the flesh, and gave God nothing but some heartless services which the world could spare, and which my flesh was willing to spare. But now, is my heart now turned another way? Do I have a new focus, and a new purpose, and a new train of holy affections? Have I set my hopes and heart on heaven? Is it not the scope, and design, and direction of my heart and life to find heaven, and see the glorious face of God, and live in His everlasting love and praise? And when I sin, is it against the habitual direction and design of my heart? And do I by nature conquer great sins, and am I weary and willing to be rid of mine weaknesses?

This is the state of a converted soul, and thus it must be with me, or I must perish. Is it thus indeed with me, or is it not? It is time to get this doubt resolved before the dreadful Judge resolves it. I am not so blind about my own heart and life that I cannot perceive whether I am thus converted or not. If I am not, it will do me no good to flatter my soul with false conceits and hopes. I am determined not to deceive myself any longer, but to endeavor to know truly whether I am converted, yes or no. If I am, may I rejoice in it, and glorify my gracious Lord, and determine to go on until I reach the crown: And If I am not, may I set myself to beg and seek after the grace that is able to convert me, and turn without any more delay. For, if I find in time that I am out of the right way, by God's help may I turn and be recovered; for if I remain where I am until either my heart is forsaken of God in blindness or hardness, or until I be taken away through death, it is then too late. There is no place for repentance and conversion then: I know it must be now or never.

Dear people, my request to you is that you will but take your hearts to task, and thus examine them, till you see, if it may be, whether you are converted or not. The matter is important, so let not bashfulness, nor carelessness hinder you. Many thousands are undone by thinking they are in the way to salvation when they are not; and thinking that they are converted when it is not the case. And then, when we call to them to turn from their sins to God, they go away as they came, and do not think that this concerns them for they are turned already, and hope they shall do well enough in the way that they are in; but alas! All this while they live to the world and flesh, and are strangers to God and eternal life, and are quite out of the way to heaven. And all this is much, because we cannot persuade them to a few serious thoughts of their condition, and to spend a few hours in examining the state of their souls.

Are there not many self-deceiving wretches who hear me today, who never gave one hour in all their lives to examine their souls, and test whether they are truly converted or not? O merciful God, who will look after such wretches and will do so much to save them from hell, and help them to heaven, who will do so little for it themselves! If all who were on the road to hell only knew it, they would not dare to continue in it. The greatest hope the devil has of bringing you to damnation without a rescue is to keep you blind-folded and ignorant of your condition, and make you believe you may do well enough in the path you are on. If you knew that you were out of the way to heaven, and were lost forever if you were to die as you are, do you dare sleep another night in the condition that you are in? Do you dare live another day in it? Could you heartily laugh or be happy in such a state, not knowing if you may be snatched away to hell in an hour? Surely it would constrain you to forsake your former company and course, and to put yourselves to the ways of holiness and the communion of saints: Surely it would drive you to cry to God for a new heart, and to seek help of those that are fit to counsel you. Truly there is not one of you who has no concern about being damned. Well then, I plead with you to immediately inquire into your hearts, and give them no rest until you find out your condition. If it is good, you may rejoice in it, and go on; and, if it is bad, you may immediately look for recovery, as those who believe they must turn or die. What will you say? Will you resolve, and promise to expend much labor for your own souls? Will you fall upon this self-examination when you get home? Is my request unreasonable? Your consciences know that it is not. I beg you, for the sake of that God who commands you, and at whose bar you will shortly all appear, that you do not deny me this reasonable request: for the sake of souls that must turn or die, I ask that you do not refuse my request, but make it your business to understand your own condition, and build upon sure ground, and know, whether you are converted or not, and do not risk your souls by failing to take secure precautions.

Source: Richard Baxter, *A Call to the Unconverted to Turn and Live* (1658), Sermon I. Text lightly modernized in spelling/punctuation; collated against the original-spelling Wikisource edition.

Previously prepared for an earlier version of *The Stromata*. Accessed July 2026.

Translation: Author died 1691. Original English composition, no translation involved. Confirmed as Richard Baxter after verbatim comparison against the well-documented original.

<https://www.thestromata.com/texts/call-to-unconverted-sermon-1-baxter>