

SERMON XXXI.

Of the State of Spiritual Death, and the Misery thereof.

EPH. v. 14.

Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.

THIS scripture represents unto us the miserable and lamentable state of the unregenerate, as being under the power of spiritual death, which is the cause and inlet of all other miseries. From hence, therefore, I shall make the first discovery of the woful and wretched state of them that apply not Jesus Christ to their own souls.

The scope of the apostle in this *context*, is to press believers to a circumspect and holy life; to “walk as children of light.” This exhortation is laid down in ver. 8. and pressed by divers arguments in the following verses.

First, From the tendency of holy principles, unto holy fruits and practice, ver. 9, 10.

Secondly, From the convincing efficacy of practical godliness, upon the consciences of the wicked, ver. 11, 12, 13. It awes and convinces their consciences.

Thirdly, From the co-incidence of such a conversation with the great design and drift of the scriptures, which is to awaken men by regeneration, out of that spiritual sleep, or rather death, which sin hath cast them into; and this is the argument of the text, *Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, &c.* There is some difficulty in the reference of these words. Some think it is to Isa. xxvi. 19. “Awake and sing ye that dwell in the dust.” Others to Isa. lx. i. “Arise, shine, for thy light is come,” &c. But most probably, the words neither refer to this or that particularly, but to the drift and scope of the whole scriptures, which were inspired and written upon this great design, to awaken and quicken souls out of the state of spiritual death. And in them we are to consider these three things more distinctly and particularly.

1. The miserable state of the unregenerate; they are *asleep and dead*.

2. Their duty; which is to “awake, and stand up from the “dead.”

3. The power enabling them thereunto; “Christ shall give “thee light.”

First, The miserable state of the unregenerate, represented under the motions of *sleep* and *death*: both expressions intending one

and the same thing, though with some variety of notion. The Christless and unregenerate world is in a deep sleep; a spirit of slumber, senselessness and security is fallen upon them, though they lie exposed immediately to eternal wrath and misery, ready to drop into hell every moment. Just as a man that is fast asleep in a house on fire, and whilst the consuming flames are round about him, his fancy is sporting itself in some pleasant dream; this is a very lively resemblance of the unregenerate soul. But yet he that sleeps hath the principle of life entire in him, though his senses be bound, and the actions of life suspended by sleep. Lest therefore we should think it is only so with the unregenerate, the expression is designedly varied, and those that were said to be *asleep*, are positively affirmed to be *dead*; on purpose to inform us that it is not a simple *suspension* of the acts and exercise, but a total *privation* of the principle of spiritual life, which is the misery of the unregenerate.

Secondly, We have here the duty of the unregenerate, which is to "awake out of sleep, and arise from the dead." This is their great concernment; no duty in the world is of greater necessity and importance to them. "Strive (saith Christ) to enter in at the "strait gate," Luke xiii. 24. And the order of these duties is very natural. First awake, then arise. Startling and rousing convictions make way for spiritual life; till God awake us by convictions of our misery, we will never be persuaded to arise and move towards Christ for remedy and safety.

Thirdly, But you will say, if unregenerate men be dead men, to what purpose is it to persuade them to arise and stand up: The very exhortation supposes some powers or ability in the unregenerate; else in vain are they commanded to arise*. This difficulty is solved in this very text, though the duty is ours, yet the power is God's. God commands that in his word, which only his grace can perform. "Christ shall give thee light." Popish commentators would build the tower of free-will upon this scripture, by a very weak argument, drawn from the order wherein these things are here expressed; which is but a very weak foundation to build upon, for it is very usual in scripture to put the effect before, and the cause after, as it is here, so in Isa. xxvi. 19. "Awake and sing, "ye that dwell in the dust." But I will not here intangle my discourse with that controversy; that which I aim at is plain in the words, viz.

* Though the words seem to import a willingness first to awake and rise, and then to be enlightened, yet we are to understand, that it is by the efficacy of Christ's light that the sinner is made to awake and rise. *Roll. on the place.*

Doct. *That all Christless souls are under the power of spiritual death; they are in the state of the dead.*

Multitudes of testimonies are given in scripture to this truth; Eph. ii. 1, 5. "You hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins." Col. ii. 13. "And you being dead in your sins, and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him;" with many other places of the same importance. But the method in which I shall discourse this point will be this;

First, I will shew you in what sense Christless and unregenerated men are said to be dead.

Secondly, What the state of spiritual death is.

Thirdly, How it appears that all unregenerate men are in this sad state. And then apply it.

First, In what sense are Christless and unregenerate men said to be dead men.

To open this, we must know there is a three-fold death, viz.

1. Natural.
2. Spiritual.
3. Eternal.

Natural death is nothing else but the privation of the principle of natural life, or the separation of the soul from the body, James ii. 26. "The body without the spirit is dead." Spiritual death is the privation of the principle of spiritual life, or the want and absence of the quickening Spirit of God in the soul; the soul is the life of the body, and Christ is the life of the soul; the absence of the soul is death to the body, and the absence or want of Christ is death to the soul. Eternal death is the separation both of body and soul from God, which is the misery of the damned. Now christless and unregenerate men are not dead in the first sense; they are naturally alive though they are dead while they live; nor are they yet dead in the last sense, eternally separated from God by an irrevocable sentence as the damned are; but they are dead in the second sense; they are spiritually dead, whilst they are naturally alive; and this spiritual death is the fore-runner of eternal death. Now spiritual death is put in scripture in opposition to a two-fold spiritual life, viz.

1. The life of justification.
2. The life of sanctification.

Spiritual death in opposition to the life of justification, is nothing else but the guilt of sin bringing us under the sentence of death. Spiritual death, in opposition to the life of sanctification, is the pollution or dominion of sin. In both these senses, unrege-

nerate men are dead men ; but it is the last which I am properly concerned to speak to in this place, and therefore,

Secondly, Let us briefly consider what this spiritual death is, which, as before was hinted, is the absence of the quickening Spirit of Christ from the soul of any man. That soul is a dead soul, into which the Spirit of Christ is not infused in the work of regeneration ; and all its works are dead works, as they are called, Heb. ix. 14. For, look how it is with the damned, they live, they have sense and motion, and an immortality in all these ; yet because they are eternally separated from God, the life which they live, deserves not the name of life, but it is every where in scripture stiled death : so the unregenerate, they are naturally alive ; they eat and drink, they buy and sell, they talk and laugh, they rejoice in the creatures ; and many of them spend their days in pleasures, and then go down to the grave. This is the life they live, but yet the scripture rather calls it death than life ; because though they live, yet it is without God in the world, Eph. ii. 12. though they live, yet it is a life alienated from the life of God, Eph. iv. 18. And therefore while they remain naturally alive, they are in scripture said “to remain in death,” 1 John iii. 14. and to be “dead while they live,” 1 Tim. v. 6. And there is great reason why a christless, an unregenerate state, should be represented in scripture, under the notion of death ; for there is nothing in nature which more aptly represents that miserable state of the soul, than natural death doth. The dead see and discern nothing, and the natural man perceiveth not the things that are of God. The dead have no beauty or desirableness in them ; “Bury my dead (saith Abraham) out of my sight ;” neither is there any spiritual loveliness in the unregenerate. True it is, some of them have sweet natural qualities and moral excellencies, which are engaging things, but these are so many flowers, decking and adorning a dead corpse. The dead are objects of pity and great lamentation : men used to mourn for the dead, Eccl. xii. 5. “Man goeth to his “long home, and the mourners go about the streets.” But unregenerate, and christless souls, are much more the objects of pity and lamentation. How are all the people of God (especially those that are naturally related to them) concerned to mourn over them and for them, as Abraham did for Ishmael, Gen. xvii. 18. “O that “Ishmael might live before thee.” Upon these, and many other accounts, the state of unregeneracy is represented to us in the notion of death.

Thirdly, And that this is the state of all Christless and unsanctified persons, will, undeniably, appear two ways.

1. The causes of spiritual life have not wrought upon them.
2. The effects and signs of spiritual life do not appear in them,

and therefore they are in the state, and under the power of spiritual death.

First, The causes of spiritual life have not wrought upon them. There are two causes of spiritual life,

1. Principal, and internal.
2. Subordinate and external.

The principal internal cause of spiritual life is the regenerating Spirit of Christ, Rom. viii. 2. "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." It is the Spirit, as a regenerating Spirit, that unites us with Christ, in whom all spiritual life originally is, John v. 25, 26. "Verily I say unto you, that the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live: For as the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself." As all the members of the natural body receive animation, sense, and motion, by their union with their natural head; so all believers, the members of Christ, receive spiritual life and animation by their union with their natural head; so all believers, the members of Christ, receive spiritual life and animation by their union with Christ their mystical head, Eph. iv. 15, 16. Except we come to him, and be united with him in the way of faith, we can have no life in us, John v. 40. "Ye will not come unto me that ye may have life." Now the Spirit of God hath yet exerted no regenerating, quickening influences, nor begotten any special saving faith in natural, unsanctified men; whatever he hath done for them in the way of natural, or spiritual common gifts, yet he hath not quickened them with the life of Christ. And as for the subordinate external means of life, viz. the preaching of the gospel, which is the instrument of the Spirit in this glorious work, and is therefore called, *The word of life*, Phil. ii. 16. This word hath not yet been made a regenerating, quickening word to their souls. Possibly it hath enlightened them, and convinced them: it hath wrought upon their minds in the way of common illumination, and upon their consciences in the way of conviction, but not upon their hearts and wills, by way of effectual conversion. To this day the Lord hath not given them an heart opening itself, in the way of faith, to receive Jesus Christ.

Secondly, The effects and signs of spiritual life do not appear in them: For,

First, They have no feeling, or sense of misery and danger. I mean no such sense as thoroughly awakens them to apply Christ their remedy. That spiritual judgment lies upon them, Isa. vi. 9, 10. "And he said, Go and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not; make the

“heart of this people fat, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes.”

Secondly, They have no spiritual motions towards Christ, or after things that are spiritual; all the arguments in the world cannot persuade their wills to move one step towards Christ in the way of faith, John v. 30. *Ye will not come unto me*: Were there a principle of spiritual life in their souls, they would move Christ-ward and heaven-ward, John iv. 14. It would be in them a well of water springing up into eternal life. The natural tendency of the spiritual life is upward.

Thirdly, The unregenerate have no appetite unto spiritual food; they savour not things that are spiritual; they can go from week to week, and from year to year, all their life-time, without any communion betwixt God and their souls, and feel no need of it, nor any hungerings or thirstings after it; which could never be, if a principle of spiritual life were in them; for then they would “esteem the words of God’s mouth more than their necessary food,” Job xxx. 12.

Fourthly, They have no heat or spiritual warmth in their affections to God, and things above; their hearts are as cold as a stone to spiritual objects. They are heated, indeed, by their lusts and affections to the world, and the things of the world: but O how cold and dead are they towards Jesus Christ, and spiritual excellencies.

Fifthly, They breathe not spiritually, therefore they live not spiritually: were there a spiritual principle of life in them, their souls would breathe after God in spiritual prayer, Acts ix. 11. “Behold he prayeth.” The lips of the unregenerate may move in prayer, but their hearts and desires do not breathe and pant after God.

Sixthly, They have no cares or fears for self-preservation, which is always the effect of life; the poorest fly, or silliest worm will shun danger. The wrath of God hangs over them in the threatenings, but they tremble not at it: hell is but a little before them; they are upon the very precipice of eternal ruin, yet will use no means to avoid it. How plain, therefore, is this sad case which I have undertaken here to demonstrate, viz. that christless and unregenerate souls are dead souls? The uses follow.

Inf. 1. If all Christless and unregenerate souls be dead souls, then how little pleasure can Christians take in the society of the unregenerate?

Certainly, it is no pleasure for the living to converse among the dead. It was a cruel torment invented by Mezentius the tyrant, to tie a dead and living man together. The pleasure of society arises from the harmony of spirits, and the hopes of mutual en-

joyment in the world to come; neither of which can sweeten the society of the godly with the wicked in this world*. It is true, there is a necessary civil converse which we must have with the ungodly here; or else, (as the apostle speaks) we must go out of the world. There are also duties of relation which must be faithfully and tenderly paid, even to the unregenerate: but certainly, where we have our free election, we shall be much wanting both to our duty and comfort, if we make not the people of God our chosen companions. Excellently to this purpose speaks a modern author†, “Art thou a godly master? when thou takest a servant into thine house, chuse for God as well as thyself.—A godly servant is a greater blessing than we think on: he can work, and set God on work also for his master’s good, Gen. xxiv. 12. O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray thee send me good speed this day, and shew kindness unto my master.” And surely he did his master as much service by his prayer, as by his prudence in that journey.—Holy David observed, while he was at Saul’s court, the mischief of having wicked and ungodly servants, (for with such was that unhappy king so compassed, that David compares his court to the profane and barbarous Heathens, among whom there was scarce more wickedness to be found, Psal. cxx. 6. “Wo is me, that I sojourn in Meshech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar;” i. e. among those who were as prodigiously wicked as any there); and no doubt, but this made this gracious man, in his banishment, before he came to the crown, (having seen the evil of a disordered house) to resolve what he would do when God should make him the head of such a royal family, Psal. ci. 7. “He that worketh deceit, shall not dwell within my house; he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight.”

“Art thou godly? shew thyself so in the choice of husband or wife. I am sure, if some, (and those godly ones) could bring no other testimonials for their godliness than the care they have taken in this particular, it might justly be called into question both by themselves and others. There is no one thing that gracious persons, (even those recorded in scripture as well as others, have shewn their weakness, yea, given offence and scandal more in, than in this particular, “The sons of God saw that the daughters of men were fair,” Gen. vi. 2. One would have thought that the sons of God should have looked for grace in the heart, rather than beauty in the face; but we see, even

* As diseases bred in one part of the body use to spread their pernicious influence to the other members which are near to that part; so the vices of the wicked use to infect those that have intercourse with them. *Tertullian against Valentine.*

† Gurnal’s *Christian Armour*, part 2. p. 256, 257.

“they sometimes turn in at the fairest sign, without much enquiring what grace is to be found dwelling within.” Look to the rule, O Christian, if thou wilt keep the power of holiness, that is clear as the sun-beam written in the scripture, “Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers,” 2 Cor. vi. 14.

Inf. 2. How great and wholly supernatural, marvellous, and wonderful is that change which regeneration makes upon the soul of men! It is a change from death to life, Luke xv. 24. “This my son was dead and is alive again.” Regeneration is life from the dead; the most excellent life from the most terrible death: it is the life of God re-inspired into a soul alienated from it by the power of sin, Eph. iv. 11. There are two stupendous changes made upon the souls of men, which justly challenge the highest admiration, viz.

1. That from sin to grace.

2. From grace to glory.

The change from grace to glory is acknowledged by all, and that justly, to be a wonderful change for God to take a poor creature out of the society of sinful men; yea, from under the burden of many sinful infirmities, which made him groan from day to day in this world; and in a moment to make him a complete and perfect soul, shining in the beauties of holiness, and filling him as a vessel of glory, with the unspeakable and inconceivable joys of his presence; to turn his groanings into triumphs, his fightings into songs of praise; this, I say, is marvellous, and yet the former change from sin to grace is no way inferior to it, nay, in some respect, beyond it; for the change which glory makes upon the regenerate is but a gradual change, but the change which regeneration makes upon the ungodly is a specific change. Great and admirable is this work of God; and let it for ever be marvellous in our eyes.

Inf. 3. If unregenerate souls be dead souls, what a fatal stroke doth death give to the bodies of all unregenerate men? A soul dead in sin, and a body dead by virtue of the curse for sin, and both soul and body remaining for ever under the power of eternal death, is so full and perfect a misery, as that nothing can be added to make it more miserable: It is the comfort of a Christian that he can say when death comes, *Non omnis moriar*, I shall not wholly die; there is a life I live which death cannot touch, Rom. viii. 13. “The body is dead, because of sin; but the spirit is life because of righteousness.” Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power. As death takes the believer from amidst many sorrows and troubles, and brings him to the vision of God, to the general assembly of all the perfected saints, to a state of complete freedom and full satisfaction; so it drags the unregenerate from all his sensitive delights.

and comforts, to the place of torment: it buries the dead soul out of the presence of God for ever: it is the king of terrors, a serpent with a deadly sting to every man that is out of Christ.

Inf. 4. If every unregenerate soul be a dead soul, how sad is the case of hypocrites and temporary believers, who are twice dead? These are those cursed trees, of which the apostle Jude speaks, Jude ver. 12. "Trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots." The apostle alludes unto dying trees, trees that are dying the first time in the spring, then they fade, decay, and cast off their leaves, when other trees are fragrant and flourishing: but from this first death they are sometimes recovered, by pruning, dressing, or watering the roots; but if in autumn, they decay again, which is the critical and *climacterical* times of trees, to discover whether their disease be mortal or not; if then they wither and decay the second time, the fault is *ab intra*, the root is rotten, there is no hope of it; the husbandmen bestows no more labour about it, except it be to root it up for fuel to the fire. Just thus stands the case with false and hypocritical professors, who though they were still under the power of spiritual death, yet in the beginning of their profession, they seemed to be alive; they shewed the world the fragrant leaves of a fair profession, many hopeful buddings of affection towards spiritual things were seen in them, but wanting a root of regeneration, they quickly began to wither and cast their untimely fruit. However, by the help of ordinances, or some rousing and awakening providences, they seem to recover themselves again; but all will not do, the fault is *ab intra*, from the want of a good root, and therefore, at last, they who were always *once dead*, for want of a principle of regeneration, are now become *twice dead*, by the withering and decay of their vain profession. Such trees are prepared for the severest flames in hell, Matth. xxiv. 51. their portion is the saddest portion allotted for any of the sons of death. Therefore the apostle Peter tells us, 2 Pet. ii. 20, 21. "For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome; the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them." Double measures of wrath seem to be prepared for them that die this double death.

Inf. 5. If this be so, then unregenerate persons deserve the greatest lamentations. And were this truth heartily believed, we could not but mourn over them, with the most tender compassion and hearty sorrow. If our husbands, wives, or children are dying a natural

death, how are our hearts rent in pieces with pity and sorrow for them? What cries, tears, and wringing of hands, discover the deep sense we have of their misery! O Christians, is all the love you have for your relations spent upon their bodies? Are their souls of no value in your eyes? Is spiritual death no misery? Doth it not deserve a tear? The Lord open your eyes, and duly affect your hearts with spiritual death and soul miseries.

Consider, my friends, and let it move your bowels, (if there be bowels of affection in you,) whilst they remain spiritually dead, they are useless and wholly unserviceable unto God in the world, as to any special and acceptable service unto him, 2 Tim. ii. 21. they are incapable of all spiritual comforts from God; they cannot taste the least sweetness in Christ, in duties, or in promises, Rom. viii. 6. they have no beauty in their souls, how comely soever their bodies are; it is grace, and nothing but grace that beautifies the inner man, Ezek. xvi. 6, 7. The dead have neither comfort nor beauty in them: they have no hope to be with God in glory; for the life of glory is begun in grace, Phil. i. 6. their graves must be shortly made, to be buried out of the sight of God for ever in the lowest hell, the pit digged by justice for all that are spiritually dead: the dead must be buried. Can such considerations as these draw no pity from your souls, nor excite your endeavours for their regeneration? then it is to be feared your souls are dead as well as theirs. O pity them, pity them, and pray for them; in this case only, prayers for the dead are our duty: who knows but at the last, God may hear your cries, and you may say with comfort, as he did, "This my son was dead, but is alive; was lost, but is found; and they began to be merry," Luke xv. 24.

SERMON XXXII.

The Condemnation of Unbelievers, illustrated and applied.

JOHN iii. 18.

—*But he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.*

CHRI^ST having discoursed with Nicodemus in the beginning of this chapter, about the necessity of regeneration, proceeds to shew in this following discourse, the reason and ground why regeneration and faith are so indispensably necessary, viz. because