

The New Heart

A Sermon by Charles Spurgeon

"A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh." Ezekiel 36:26

Behold a wonder of divine love. When God makes his creatures, he regards one creation as sufficient, and should they lapse from the condition in which he has created them, he allows them, as a rule, to endure the penalty of their transgression and to abide in the place into which they are fallen. But here he makes an exception; man, fallen man, created by his Maker, pure and holy, has willfully and wickedly rebelled against the Most High and lost his first estate. But behold, he is to be the subject of a new creation through the power of God's Holy Spirit. Behold this and wonder! What is man compared with an angel? Is he not little and insignificant? "And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day." God has no mercy upon them; he made them pure and holy, and they ought to have remained so, but inasmuch as they willfully rebelled, he cast them down from their shining seats forever; and without a single promise of mercy, he has bound them fast in the fetters of destiny to abide in eternal torment.

But wonder, ye heavens, the God who destroyed the angels stoops from his highest throne in glory and speaks to his creature man, and says unto him,

Now, you have fallen from me even as the angels did; you have grossly erred and gone astray from my ways. Not for your sake do I this, but for my own name's sake: behold, I will undo the mischief which your own hand has done; I will take away that heart which has rebelled against me. Having made you once, you have unmade yourself. I will make you over again. I will put my hand a second time to the work; once more shall you revolve upon the potter's wheel, and ***I will make you*** a vessel of honor, fit for my gracious use. I will take away your stony heart and give you a heart of flesh; a new heart will I give you; a new spirit will I put within you.

Is this not a wonder of divine sovereignty and of infinite grace, that mighty angels should be cast into the fire forever, and yet God has made a covenant with man that he will renew and restore him?

And now, my dear friends, I shall attempt this morning:

- First of all, to show ***the necessity for the great promise contained in my text***, that God will give us a new heart and a new spirit
- After that, I shall endeavor to show ***the nature of the great work which God works in the soul, when he accomplishes this*** promise
- Afterwards, [I offer] ***a few personal remarks to all my hearers.***

I. In the first place, it is my business to endeavor to show THE NECESSITY FOR THIS GREAT PROMISE.

Not that it needs any showing to the quickened and enlightened Christian. But this is for the conviction of the ungodly and for the humbling of our carnal pride. Oh, that this morning the gracious Spirit may teach us our depravity that we may thereby be driven to seek the fulfillment of this mercy, which is most assuredly and abundantly necessary, if we would be saved.

You will notice that in my text, God does not promise us that he will improve our nature or that he will mend our broken hearts. No, the promise is that he will give us new hearts and right spirits. Human nature is too far gone ever to be mended. It is not a house that is a little out of repair, with here and there a slate blown from the roof, and here and there a piece of plaster broken down from the ceiling. No, it is rotten throughout, and the very foundations have been sapped. There is not a single timber in it which has not been eaten by the worm, from its uppermost roof to its lower foundation. There is no soundness in it; it is all rottenness and ready to fall. God does not attempt to mend, but he determines that the old house shall be entirely swept away and that he will build a new one. If only a wheel or two of that great thing called "manhood" were out of repair, then he who made man might put the whole to rights. But no, the whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint. From the sole of the foot to the crown of the head, it is all wounds and bruises and putrifying sores. The Lord, therefore, does not attempt the repairing of this thing but says, "I will give you a new heart, and a right spirit will I put within you."

Now I shall endeavor to show that God is justified in this and that there was an abundant necessity for his resolution to do so. For in the first place, if you consider what human nature has been, and what it is, it will not be very long before you will say of it, "Ah, it is a hopeless case indeed."

Consider, then, for a moment, how bad human nature must be if we think how ill it has treated its God. There are many men that are forgotten, that are despised, and that are trampled on by their fellows. But there never was a man who was so despised as the everlasting God has been. Many a man has been slandered and abused, but never was man abused as God has been. Let us look back upon our past lives and see how ungrateful we have been to him. It was he who gave us being, and the first utterance of our lips should have been in his praise. And so long as we were here, it was our duty to have perpetually sung his glory. But instead of that, from our birth, we spoke that which was false and untrue and unholy, and since then we have continued to do the same. We have never returned his mercies with gratitude and thankfulness, but we have let them lie forgotten.

I think that if we should look back with the eye of penitence, we should be lost in wonder, shame, and grief, for our cry will be, "What! Could I treat so good a friend so ill? Have I had so gracious a benefactor and yet have been so unmindful of him; so devoted a father yet have never embraced him?"

But worse than this, we have not only been forgetful of him, but we have rebelled against

him. We have despised his day; the day set apart on purpose for our good. We pursue our own pleasure and labor instead of consecrating it to him. He gave us his Scriptures and desired that we should read them, for they were full of love to us. But we have kept it closed until the very spiders have spun their webs over the leaves.

Ah, my friends, I say again that there never was a man treated by his fellow-creatures, even the worst of men, so badly as God has been. And yet while men have been ill treating him, he has still continued to bless them. He has put breath into the nostrils of man even while he has been cursing him. He has given him food to eat even while man has been spending his strength in warfare against the Most High. It is a mercy that he is God, or else we sons of Jacob would long ago have been consumed, and justly too.

There is another aspect in which we may regard the sinfulness of human nature: that is its *pride*. It is the very worst part of man that he is so proud. Beloved, pride is woven into the very warp and woof of our nature, and we shall never get rid of it until we are laid in our casket. What a strange thing it is to see a sinful, guilty wretch proud of his morality, and yet it is a thing we may see every day. A man who is an enemy of God, proud of his honesty and yet he is robbing God; a man proud of his chastity and yet, if he knew his own thoughts, they are full of lasciviousness and uncleanness; a man proud of the praise of his fellows, while he knows himself that he has the blame of his own conscience and the blame of God Almighty.

It is a strange thing to think that man should be proud when he has nothing to be proud of. A living, animated lump of clay, defiled and filthy, a living hell, and yet proud. I, who am living on God's daily charity to be proud of my wealth when I have not a single farthing with which to bless myself unless God chooses to give it to me; a fool who knows nothing yet proud of my learning. And strangest of all, that man who has a deceitful heart, full of all manner of evil concupiscence, adultery, idolatry, and lust should pride himself upon having some good points about him which deserve the veneration of his fellows, if not some consideration from the Most High. Ah, human nature, this is, then, your own condemnation, that you are insanely proud while you have nothing to be proud of. Write "Ichabod" upon it. The glory has departed for ever from human nature. Let it be put away and let God give us something new, for the old can never be made better. It is helplessly insane, decrepit, and defiled.

Human nature cannot be made better, for many have tried it but they have always failed. I tried a long time to improve myself, but I never did make much of it. Instead of becoming better, I became worse. I had now got the devil of self-righteousness, self-trust, and self conceit. You may try to reform, dear friends, but you will find you cannot do it. And remember, even if you could, still it would not be the work which God requires. He will not have reformation; he will have renovation. He will have a new heart and not a heart changed a little for the better.

You will perceive that we must have a new heart when you consider what are the employments and the enjoyments of the Christian religion. The nature that can feed on the garbage of sin, and devour the carrion of iniquity, is not the nature that can ever sing the praises of God and rejoice in his holy name. The raven yonder has been feeding on the most loathsome food; do you expect that she shall have all the kindness of the dove? Not unless you could change the raven into a dove. For as long as it is a raven, its old propensities will cling to it, and

it will be incapable of anything above the raven's nature. You have seen the vulture gorge to his very full with the very filthiest of flesh, and do you expect to see that vulture sitting on the branch singing God's praises with its hoarse screaming and croaking throat? And do you imagine that you will see it feeding like the barnyard fowl on the clean grain unless its character and disposition be entirely changed? Can it be possible for a man that has sung the lascivious song of the drunkard, and has defiled his body with uncleanness, and has cursed God, to sing the high praises of God in heaven as well as he who has long loved the ways of purity and communion with Christ? I answer, no, never, unless his nature be entirely changed. For if his nature remain what it is, improve it as you may, you cannot make anything better of it. So long as his heart is what it is, you can never bring it to be capable of the high delights of the spiritual nature of the child of God. Therefore, beloved, there must assuredly be a new nature put into us.

God hates a depraved nature, and therefore it must be taken away before we can be accepted in him. God does not hate our sin so much as he does our sinfulness. It is not the overflowing of the spring, it is the well itself. The Lord is angry not only against our overt acts, but against the nature which dictates the acts. God is not so shortsighted as merely to look at the surface, he looks at the source and fountain. He says, "In vain shall it be, though you should make the fruit good, if the tree remain corrupt. In vain shall you attempt to sweeten the waters so long as the fountain itself is defiled." God is angry with man's heart. He has a hatred against man's depraved nature, and he will have it taken away. He will have it totally cleansed before he will admit that man into any communion with himself, and above all, into the sweet communion of Paradise.

II. And now it shall be my joyful business to endeavor, in the second place, to set before you very briefly ***THE NATURE OF THIS GREAT CHANGE WHICH THE HOLY SPIRIT WORKS IN US.***

A Divine Work

I begin by observing that it is a *divine* work from first to last. To give a man a new heart and a new spirit is God's work, and the work of God alone. Arminianism falls to the ground when we come to this point. Nothing will do here but that old-fashioned truth men call Calvinism. "Salvation is of the Lord alone!" This truth will stand the test of ages and can never be moved, because it is the immutable truth of the living God.

Man may reform himself, but how can man give himself a new heart? I need not enlarge upon the thought, it will strike you in a moment, that the very nature of the change, and the terms in which it is mentioned here, put it beyond all power of man. How can man put into himself a new heart, for the heart being the motive power of all life must exert itself before anything can be done? But how could the exertions of an old heart bring forth a new heart? Can you imagine for a moment a tree with a rotten heart by its own vital energy giving to itself a new young heart? You cannot suppose such a thing. Oh, beloved, there never was a man yet that did so much as the turn of a hair towards making himself a new heart. He must lie passive there; he shall become active afterwards. But in the moment when God puts a new life into the soul, the man is passive: and if there be anything of activity, it is an active resistance against it, until God, by overcoming victorious grace, gets the mastery over man's will.

A Gracious Change

This is a *gracious* change. When God puts a new heart into man, it is not because man deserves a new heart, not because there was anything good in his nature that could have prompted God to give him a new spirit. The Lord simply gives a man a new heart because he wishes to do it; that is his only reason. "But," you say, "suppose a man cries for a new heart?" I answer, no man ever did cry for a new heart until he had got one, for the cry for a new heart proves that there is a new heart there already. "But," says one, "are we not to seek for a right spirit?" Yes, I know it is your duty. But I equally know it is a duty you will never fulfill. You are commanded to make to yourselves new hearts, but I know you will never attempt to do it until God first of all moves you thereunto. As soon as you begin to seek a new heart, it is presumptive evidence that the new heart is there already, in its germ, for there would not be this germinating in prayer unless the seeds were there before it.

"But," says one, "suppose the man has not a new heart, and were earnestly to seek one, would he have it?" You must not make impossible suppositions; so long as the man's heart is depraved and vile, he never will do such a thing. I cannot, therefore, tell you what might happen if he did what he never will do. The fact is that no man ever did, or ever will, seek a new heart or a right spirit, until, first of all, the grace of God beings with him. It is a gracious change, freely given without any merit of the creature, without any desire or goodwill coming before hand. God does it of his own pleasure, not according to man's will.

A Victorious Effort

It is a *victorious* effort of divine grace. When God first begins the work of changing the heart, he finds man totally averse to any such thing. Man by nature kicks and struggles against God; he will not be saved. I must confess that I never would have been saved if I could have helped it. As long as ever I could, I rebelled and revolted and struggled against God. When he would have me pray, I would not pray. When he would have me listen to the sound of the ministry, I would not. And when I heard, and the tear rolled down my cheek, I wiped it away and defied him to melt my heart. When my heart was a little touched, I tried to divert it with sinful pleasures. And when that would not do, I tried self-righteousness, and would not then have been saved until I was hemmed in, and he gave me the effectual blow of grace, and there was no resisting that irresistible effort of his grace. It conquered my depraved will and made me bow myself before the scepter of his grace. And so it is in every case. Man revolts against his Maker and his Saviour, but where God determines to save, save he will. God will have the sinner if he designs to have him. God never was thwarted yet in any one of his purposes. Man does resist with all his might, but all the might of man, tremendous though it be for sin, is not equal to the majestic might of the Most High when he rides forth in the chariot of salvation. He does irresistibly save and victoriously conquer man's heart.

An Instantaneous Change

And furthermore, this change is *instantaneous*. To sanctify a man is the work of the whole life, but to give a man a new heart is the work of an instant. In one solitary second,

swifter than the lightning flash, God can put a new heart into a man and make him a new creature in Christ Jesus. You may be sitting where you are today, an enemy of God, with a wicked heart within, hard as a stone and dead and cold. But if the Lord wills it, the living spark shall drop into your soul, and in that moment you will confess your sin and fly to Christ for mercy.

III. Now we have in this subject a ***GRAND FIELD OF HOPE AND ENCOURAGEMENT TO THE VERY VILEST OF SINNERS.***

There are some of you present who are seeking after mercy. Your cry to God has been, "Create in me a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me." Let me comfort you by this reflection, that your prayer is already heard. You have a new heart and a right spirit. Perhaps you will not be able to perceive the truth of this utterance for months to come; therefore continue in prayer till God shall open your eyes so that you may see that your prayer is answered. But rest assured, it is answered already. If you hate sin, that is not human nature. If you long to be a friend of God, that is not human nature. If you desire to be saved by Christ without any stipulations of your own, that is not human nature. If you are this day willing that Christ should take you to be his own, to have and to hold through life and through death, to live in his service, and if need be, to die for his honor, that is not human nature. That is the work of divine grace. There is something good in you already. The Lord has begun a good work in your heart, and he will carry it on even unto the end.

There are others of you here, however, who have not proceeded so far, but you are driven to despair. The devil has told you that you cannot be saved; you have been too guilty, too vile. Any other person in the world might find mercy, but not you, for you do not deserve to be saved. Hear me then, dear friend. Have I not tried to make it as plain as the sunbeam all through this service that God never saves a man for the sake of what he is and that he does not either begin or carry on the work in us because there is anything good in us? The greatest sinner is just as eligible for divine mercy as the very least of sinners. He who has been a ringleader in crime, I repeat, is just as eligible for God's sovereign grace, as he that has been a very paragon of morality. For God wants nothing of us. It is not as the farmer who wants a fertile soil to begin with. God will begin with the rocky soil, and he will pound that rocky heart of yours until it turns into the rich black loam of penitential grief. And then he will scatter the living seed in that soil until it brings forth a hundred fold. But he wants nothing of you to begin with. He can take you, a thief, a drunkard, a harlot, or whoever you may be. He then can bring you on your knees, make you cry for mercy, make you lead a holy life, and keep you unto the end. "Oh!" says one, "I wish he would do that to me." Well, if that be a true wish, ***he will***. If you desire this day that you should be saved, there never was an unwilling God where there was a willing sinner. Sinner, if you will to be saved, God wills not the death of any, but rather that they should come to repentance. You are freely invited now to turn your eye to the cross of Christ. Jesus Christ has borne the sins of men and carried their sorrows. You are bidden to look there, and trust there, simply and implicitly. Then you are saved. That very wish, if it be a sincere one, shows that God has just now been begetting you again to a lively hope. If that sincere wish shall endure, it will be abundant evidence that the Lord has brought you to himself and that you are and shall be his.

And now reflect every one of you that is not converted. We are all this morning in the

hands of God. We deserve to be damned. If God damns us, there is not a single word that will be heard against his doing it. We cannot save ourselves; we lie entirely in his hands; like a moth that lies under the finger, he can crush us now, if he pleases, or he can let us go and save us. What reflections ought to cross our mind if we believe that? Why, we ought to cast ourselves on our faces as soon as we reach our homes and cry, "Great God, save me, a sinner! Save me! I renounce all merit for I have none. I deserve to be lost. Lord, save me, for Christ's sake." As the Lord my God lives, before whom I stand, there is not one of you that shall do this who shall find my God shut the gates of mercy against you. Go and try him. Fall upon your knees in your room this day and try my Master. See if he will not forgive you. You think too harshly of him. He is a great deal kinder than you think he is. You think he is a hard Master, but he is not. I thought he was severe and angry, and when I sought him, "Surely," I said, "if he accepts all the world, he will reject me." But I know he took me to him, and when I thought he would spurn me forever, he said, "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins." It shall be so in your case. Only try him, I beseech you. The Lord help you to try him, and to him shall be the glory, and to you shall be happiness and bliss, forever and ever.