
OR,
The way of directing Souls that are under the Work of Conversion.

Compiled for the help of Young Ministers:

And may be Serviceable to Private Christians, who are Enquiring the Way to Zion.

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With an Epistle Prefixed, by the Reverend Dr. Increase Mather.

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THE Work of Regeneration being of absolute necessity unto Salvation, it greatly concerns Ministers especially, in all ways possible to promote the same; and in particular, that they guide Souls right who are under a work of Preparation: some there be that do deny any necessity of the Preparatory work of the Spirit of God, in order to a closing with Christ, this is a very dark Cloud, both as it is an evidence that such men have not the experience of that work in their own Souls; and as it is a sign that such men are utterly unskilful in guiding others that are under this work: if this Opinion should prevail in the Land, it would give a deadly wound to Religion, it would expose men to think themselves Converted when they are not: if men do understand that there is a work of Humiliation before Faith, then if they get some common affections, love, sorrow, delight, yea, and a common faith too, they will say these are not of the right kind; for men must see the plague of their own hearts, their hepless-
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ness, and that they are like Clay in the hand of the Potter, before they come to Christ, and to will be afraid, and be searching of themselves; but if they do not know any necessity of preparation, they will take the first appearances of Holiness for Holiness; and if they find religious affections in themselves, they will grow confident that God has wrought a good work in them. It would likewise expose them to boulster up others in a false confidence: a man that knows there must be a work of preparation, will be careful how he encourages others that they are in Christ, he will enquire how God has made way for their receiving of Christ; but another that is a stranger to it, will be ready to take all for gold that glisters, and if he sees men religiously disposed, will be speaking peace to them; he will be like the false Prophets, saying, peace, peace, when there is no peace. So men will be hardened, it is a dismal thing to give men sleepy notions; and make them sleep the sleep of death.

The truth of this Opinion is much to be suspected from what has been left on Record to the contrary, by Hildersham, Perkins, Dod, Sibbs, Bains, Dike, Ball, Preston, Hooker, Shepard, Norton, & others of the like Stamp, whose judgment in matters of this nature does outweigh the judgment of thousand of others, though otherwise Learned men: but besides this, there is a great deal of light held forth in the Word of God in this matter. I will not argue from Is-
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Israel being led by Moses the Law-giver out of Egypt through a land of pits and drought, and fiery flying Serpents, before they were brought into Canaan by Joshua: Nor from the Legal Dispensation of the Covenant of Grace foregoing the Evangelical: Nor from John Baptist being sent as a Forerunner of Christ to prepare the way of the Lord: Nor from the Parable of the Prodigal being in want, and becoming a Servant of a Citizen of the Country before he returned to his Father: Nor from the Dry Bones being in a disconsolatae condition, before God put life into them: these things may better be made use of for Illustrations than Proofs.

But there are other Scriptures which hold forth, that there must be PREPARATION for Christ before our Closing with him: it does appear by INSTANCES recorded in the Scripture: One is of Paul, Acts 9. 4, 5. he was terrifyed, in way of preparation to his receiving of Christ, and about the same time was led into the understanding of his own helplessness, Rom. 7. 9. Another is of the Taylor, Acts 16. 29. 30,31. he was greatly scared, least he should fall short of Salvation; and since we have such instances, and none to the contrary, we may well judge that this is Gods method in Converting Sinners.

It also appears from such DOCTRINES as are held forth in the Scripture: As that some Sinners are near the Kingdom of God, and others are far from it: Mark 12. 34. this shews that
some men are in a more prepared way, and more hopeful to receive it than others: So the doctrine that some are not in a present incapacity to come to Christ, because under the power of a carnal design: Joh. 5. 44. this shews that men must be broken off from their carnal design before they come to Christ: So the doctrine of the difficulty of getting into a state of Salvation.

Matt. 7. 13. Luke 13. 24. this shews that there be many difficulties in the way of Conversion; and that by striving, they may get into a nearer preparedness for faith.

It also appears by that PROPHESY of our Saviour, where it is foretold that God will first prepare men, and then bring them to Christ, Joh. 16. 8. here it is foretold what method the Spirit will take with men; he will not reveal the Righteousness of Christ to men in the first place; but in order to this, he convinces them of sin, makes them see their danger and miserable condition: first he searches their wound, and then applies the remedy: It appears also, by the particular application of the Call of the Gospel to those that are prepared: Sometimes the Call is propounded generally to all, but at other times it is propounded particularly to such as are in distress by reason of their sins; that see themselves miserable and undone. Mat. 11. 28. Isa. 55. 1. Rev. 22. 17. the Call is applied particularly to these, as being in the next capacity to give entertainment unto it: intimating the condition that men must be in before they do receive it.

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EXPERIENCE also gives considerable light in this matter: we learn by experience, that men's hearts are generally set for carnal things before they are terrified, and for their own Righteousness before they see their own hearts. Generally such men as have not had the terrors of God in them, don't much mind Eternal Things; if they be not rude and vicious, yet they are worldly, vain and proud. Eph. 2. 3. And such convinced sinners as have not been led into the understanding of their hearts, are set to build up a righteousness of their own, they are taking incouragement from their frames, with a neglect of Christ. Experience also shews that many men highly reputed of for Religion, have had a work of preparation. Many men that have a special interest in the hearts of others, can give a fair account how they have been prepared for Christ; and many Professors that have not had such experience have not proved well. Several that have had some lighter touches of Conviction, though they have made a blaze a while, yet have proved themselves carnal Men at last; or at least have rendred themselves much suspected. Many that have been strangers to the work of preparation, have crackt their credit at last. Mat. 13. 20, 21. Yea, many Godly People do know that they were Hypocrites, and never saw Christ, till after they had a work of Humiliation: they know they were not godly, though they have affections,
affections, enlargements and encouragements: it was all common work, and they had no spark of grace in them; their Religion was but the fruit of nature improved. Rom. 7. 9. Yea, this is exceeding agreeable to REASON; the light of Nature cannot give a demonstration of it: for it is a voluntary dispensation; there is no necessity in nature of any preparation before the infusion of GRACE. Christ changed the Water into Wine, and raised the Dead to Life, without any previous preparation; so he can do in this case. The work of preparation does not make the work of the new Creation the easier; for after men have a work of preparation, sin reigns in them as much as before; preparation does not at all destroy the principle; & men when prepared, can do nothing to help God in planting Grace in them: and men that are not prepared, can do nothing to hinder God in implanting Grace: but yet it is very agreeable to reason, that the Spirit do work a work of preparation, before it does infuse Grace: for it is the duty of Ministers to preach such things to Sinners, as are proper to work this preparation; they are bound to preach the threatenings of the Law, mans Insufficiency, and God's Soveraignty: Yea, the manner of God is to deal with men, after the manner of men. Man is a rational Creature, and therefore God deals with him in a moral way, let's Convictions before him. Men would make Enemies submit, before they pardon them; so does God. Besides, it is the du-
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try of the Sinner to do those things wherein preparation does consist; it is their duty to seek to God, to reform, and to make an absolute resignation of themselves to God. No wonder then if God holds them to it; Yea further, there is an absolute necessity in nature, that men be prepared before the Exercise of Faith; men cannot exercise Faith, till the heart be prepared by a sense of danger, and the insufficiency of other things. if they don't see their danger, they can see no occasion that they have to come to Christ: if they don't see themselves liable to Wrath, how can they come to Christ to save them from Wrath; as long as they imagine that they can help themselves, they will not come to Christ for help: men can't trust in Christ alone, till driven out of themselves; they cannot come as helpless and undone, until they see themselves so. Phil. 3. 3.

And seeing there is such a work of preparation foregoing mens Closing with Christ, it must needs be of great consequence for awakened Sinners to be guided aright under this work. If men have the best Guides, yet they may miscarry, but undoubtedly many do perish for want of suitable help; some after they have been in trouble a while, do grow discouraged, under apprehensions that their seeking will be in vain, and so leave off endeavouring after a Converted Estate. Some wander up and down under fears and hopes as the Children of Israel in the Wilderness, until they dye: they can-
cannot be quiet in a way of sin, neither can they find the way of deliverance; and many others, after a little trouble are comforted under a notion of being at peace with God. Unskilful Chyrurgeons make a palliate cure, and periwade them that the bitterness of Death is past: multitudes of Souls perish through the ignorance of those that should guide them in the way to Heaven: men are nourished up with vain hopes of being in a state of Salvation, before they are got half the way to Christ.

Those therefore whose business it is to lead Souls to Christ, had need furnish themselves with skill and understanding to handle wounded Consciences in a right manner, that they may be serviceable to them in their distresses; who would venture his Ship with an unskilful Pilot? Who would venture his wounded Body with an Unskilful Chyrurgeon? Who would willingly put his distressed Soul into the hands of an Unskilful Minister? Men should not satisfy themselves with other points of learning, but labour after that they may speak words in Season to every one that is weary; that as Moses said to his Father-in-law, they may be instead of eyes to them that are in the Wilderness.

There are two things especially serviceable to this end.

One is, that they get experience of this work in their own hearts: If they have not experience, they
they will be but blind guides; they will be in great danger to entertain false notions concerning a Work of Conversion: they will be inclined to think, that there is not so much necessary as is in order to Conversion; they are in danger to be deceived with pretences of men being delivered from their own righteousness, with shews of humiliation, faith and love. Whatever Books men have read, there is great need of experimental knowledge in a Minister; many particular things will occur that he will not meet withal in Books: it is a great calamity to wounded Consciences, to be under the direction of an unexperienced Minister.

The other is, to be acquainted with the observation of those who have travelled much in this work: if a man have experience in his own Soul, that will not reach all cases that may come before him; there is great variety in the workings of the Spirit, and in the workings of men's hearts under the convictions of the Spirit; and men that have had to do with many Souls in their distresses, may afterward meet with such difficulties as may puzzle them very much; therefore it is of great use to get the knowledge of the observations of those who have had to do with great variety of cases, whereby they may get a larger Understanding how to manage themselves, when things are difficultly circumstanced.
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This small Treatise, composed upon the desire of some Younger Ministers, is offered to the consideration of such as do desire to be further instructed in the right way of dealing with distressed Souls: and if the Author shall be hereby the instrument of the Salvation of any perishing Souls, he shall count his Labour well bestowed.

Directions
This is the Book which was the Means of the Conversion of Mr. David Brainerd, who was very successful in his endeavors for the Conversion of the Indians. See his Journals of Life by John Edwards.