

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Joseph Alleine (1634-1668)**, English Nonconformist preacher, who in his youth was a brilliant student who turned down promising careers in politics, science and academia for the work of the ministry, for his true interests were only spiritual: "I have had," he wrote to his parents, "to accept very honorable preferment in several kinds ... but I have not found the invitations to suit with the inclinations of my own heart." He was especially burdened for unbelievers, and it was said of his preaching that "he never preached without a long expostulation with the impenitent, vehemently urging them to come some good resolve before he and they parted, and to make their choice for life or death." Those who knew him best believed him to be a man of great piety, prayer, and service both to fellow ministers and those under his own ministry. When persecution in England came in 1662, Alleine was one of many non-conformist ministers (including Richard Baxter, Thomas Manton, John Howe, Philip Henry, and John Flavel) forced to leave their churches and even spend time behind prison bars, where he and others would preach to their flocks who came to hear them. His confinement was eventually to rob him of his health, but like John Bunyan, it was there that he would write his most famous work *An Alarm to the Unconverted* (also entitled *A Sure Guide to Heaven*) a classic work which had a profound influence on George Whitefield, C.H. Spurgeon, and many others.

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### Excerpt from AN ALARM TO THE UNCONVERTED

BY JOSEPH ALLEINE

*"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord." (Acts 3:19)*

*The following excerpt is from the opening pages of the book. It has been abridged, and subheadings have been added for clarity. A few words have been changed to reflect modern usage.*

#### ALLEINE'S OPENING LETTER TO HIS READERS

Dearly Beloved,

Unconverted souls call for earnest compassion and prompt diligence to pluck them as brands from the burning (Jude 23). Therefore it is to them I shall first apply myself in these pages. But from where shall I fetch my argument? With what shall I win them? O that I could tell! I would write to them in tears, I would weep out every argument, I would empty my veins for ink, I would petition them on my knees. This is what I have prayed for and studied for these many years: that I might bring you to God. O that I might now do it! Will you yet be entreated?

'But, O Lord, how insufficient I am for this work. Shall I go and speak to the grave, and expect the dead will obey me and come forth? Shall I make an oration to the rocks, or declaim to the mountains, and think to move them with arguments? Shall I make the blind to see? From the beginning of the world was it not heard that a man opened the eyes of the blind (John 9:32). But, O Lord, You can pierce the heart of the sinner. I can only draw the bow at a venture—but may You direct the arrow between the joints of the harness. Slay the sin, and save the soul of the sinner who casts his eyes on these pages.

There is no entering into heaven but by the strait passage of the second birth; without holiness you shall never see God (Heb 12:14). Therefore give yourselves unto the Lord now. Set yourselves to seek Him now. Set up the Lord Jesus in your hearts, and set Him up in your houses. Kiss the Son (Psalm 2:12) and embrace the offers of mercy; touch His scepter and live; for why will you die? I do not beg for myself—but would have you happy: this is the prize I run for. My soul's desire and prayer for you is, that you may be saved (Rom 10:1).

My work is not to please you—but to save you; nor is my business with your fancies—but with your hearts. If I have not your hearts, I have nothing. If I were to please your ears, I would sing another song. I could then tell you a smoother tale; I would make pillows for you and speak peace. But how much better are the wounds of a friend! I know, if we succeed not with you, you are lost; if we cannot get your consent to arise and come away, you will

perish forever. No conversion—no salvation! I must get your goodwill, or leave you miserable.

### THE NATURE OF CONVERSION

But some of you do not know what I mean by conversion, and in vain shall I attempt to persuade you to that which you do not understand. Therefore for your sakes I will show what conversion is. I dare not leave you with your eyes half open, like him who saw '*men as trees walking*' [Mark 8:24]. The Word is profitable for doctrine as well as reproof. And therefore, having thus far conducted you by the shelves and rocks of so many dangerous mistakes, I would guide you at length into the haven of truth.

**Conversion then, in short, lies in the thorough change both of the heart and life, in which:**

1. *The AUTHOR of conversion* is the Spirit of God. Conversion is a work above man's power. We are 'born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man—but of God' (John 1:13). Never think you can convert yourself. If ever you would be savingly converted, you must despair of doing it in your own strength. It is a resurrection from the dead (Eph 2:1), a new creation (Gal 6:15; Eph 2:10), a work of absolute omnipotence (Eph 1:19).
2. *The efficient CAUSE of conversion* is both free grace, which is internal, and the merit and intercession of the blessed Jesus, which is external.
3. *The INSTRUMENT of conversion* is the Word and those who minister it.
4. *The final END of conversion* is man's salvation, and God's glory.
5. *The SUBJECT of conversion* is the elect sinner, in all his parts and powers, members and mind. Whom God predestinates, them only He calls (Rom 8:30). None are drawn to Christ by their calling, nor come to Him by believing—but His sheep, those whom the Father has given Him (John 6:37, 44). Effectual calling runs parallel with eternal election (2 Pet 1:10). Do not stand still disputing about your election—but set to repenting and believing. Cry to God for converting grace. Revealed things belong to you; busy yourself in these, and not in unrevealed mysteries. Whatever the decrees of heaven may be, *I am sure that if I repent and believe, I shall be saved; and that if I do not repent, I shall be damned.* Is not this plain ground for you; and will you yet run upon the rocks?

More particularly, this change of conversion extends to the whole man. A carnal person may have some shreds of good morality—but he is never good throughout the whole cloth. Conversion is not a repairing of the old building; but it takes all down, and erects a new structure. It is not the sewing on a patch of holiness; but with the true convert, holiness is woven into all his powers, principles and practice. The sincere Christian is quite a new fabric, from the foundation to the top-stone. He is a new man, a new creature; *all things are become new* (2 Cor 5:17).

Conversion is a deep work, a heart work. It makes a new man in a new world. It extends to the whole man: to the *mind*, to the *members*, and to the *motions*, or practice of the whole life.

**I. The MIND, with all of its CHOICES, AFFECTIONS, JOYS, FEARS, LOVES and SORROWS is changed.** Conversion turns the balance of the judgment, so that God and His glory outweigh all carnal and worldly interests. It opens the eye of the mind, and makes the scales of its native ignorance fall off, and turns men from darkness to light. The man who before saw no danger in his condition, now concludes himself lost and forever undone (Acts 2:37) unless he is renewed by the power of grace. Now, according to this new light, the man is of another mind, another judgment, than he was before. Now God is all with him, he has none in heaven nor in earth like Him; he truly prefers Him before all the world. His favor is his life, the light of His countenance is more than corn and wine and oil – the good that he formerly enquired after, and set his heart upon (Psalm 4:6-7). A hypocrite may come to yield a general assent that God is the chief good; indeed, the wiser heathens, some few of them, have at least stumbled upon this. But no hypocrite comes so far as to look upon God as the most desirable and suitable good to him, and thereupon to acquiesce in Him. This is the convert's voice: '*The Lord is my portion, says my soul. Whom have I in heaven but you? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside you. God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever*' (Lam. 3:24; Psalm 73:25-26). The mind is affected by conversion in all of the following ways:

*The CHOICE is changed.* He pitches upon God as his blessedness, and upon Christ and holiness as means to bring him to God. He chooses Jesus for his Lord. He is not merely forced to Christ by the storm, nor does he take Christ for bare necessity—but he comes freely. His choice is not made in a fright, as with

the terrified conscience, or the dying sinner—who will seemingly do anything for Christ—but only takes Christ rather than hell. He deliberately resolves that Christ is his best choice, and would rather have Him than all the good of this world, might he enjoy it while he would (Phil 1:23). Again, he takes holiness for his path; he does not out of mere necessity submit to it—but he likes it and loves it. 'I have chosen the way of your precepts' (Psalm 119:173). He takes God's testimonies not as his bondage—but his heritage; yes, heritage forever. He counts them not his burden—but his bliss; not his cords—but his cordials (1 John 5:3; Psalm 119:14,16,47)

Put it to your conscience whether you are the man. O happy man, if this be your case! But see that you are thorough and impartial in the search.

*Conversion turns the bent of the AFFECTIONS.* These all run in a new channel. The Jordan is now driven back, and the water runs upwards against its natural course. Christ is his hope. This is his prize. Here his eye is: here his heart. He is content to cast all overboard, as the merchant in the storm about to perish—so he may but keep this jewel.

While carnal, he said, 'O if I were but in great esteem, rolling in wealth, and swimming in pleasure; if my debts were paid, and I and mine provided for, then I would be a happy man.' But now the tune is changed. 'Oh!' says the convert, 'if I had but my corruptions subdued, if I had such a measure of grace, and fellowship with God, though I were poor and despised—I would not care, I would account myself a blessed man.' Reader, is this the language of your soul?

*His JOYS are changed.* He rejoices in the way of God's testimonies as much as in all riches. He delights in the law of the Lord, in which he once had little savor. He has no such joy as in the thoughts of Christ, the enjoyment of His company, the prosperity of His people.

*His FEARS are not so much of suffering—as of sinning.* Once he was afraid of nothing so much as the loss of his estate or reputation; nothing sounded so terrible to him as pain, or poverty, or disgrace. Now these are little to him, in comparison with God's dishonor or displeasure. How warily does he walk, lest he should tread upon a snare! He looks in front, and behind: he has his eye upon his heart, and is often casting it over his shoulder, lest he should be overtaken with sin. It kills his heart to think of losing God's favor; this he dreads as his only undoing. No thought pains him so much as to think of parting with Christ.

*His LOVE runs in a new course.* 'My Love was crucified', says Ignatius, that is, my Christ. 'This is my beloved', says the spouse (Song 5:16). How often does Augustine pour his love upon Christ! He can find no words sweet enough. 'Let me see You, O Light of my eyes. Come, O Joy of my spirit; Let me behold You, O Gladness of my heart. Let me love You, O Life of my soul. Appear unto me, O my great delight, my sweet comfort, O my God, my life, and the whole glory of my soul. Let me find You, O Desire of my heart; let me hold You, O Love of my soul. Let me embrace You, O Heavenly Bridegroom. Let me possess You.'

*His SORROWS have now a new vent* (2 Cor 7:9-10). The view of his sins, the sight of Christ crucified—which could scarcely stir him before, now how much do they affect his heart! His hatred boils, his anger burns against sin. He has no patience with himself; he calls himself fool, and beast; and thinks any name too good for himself, when his indignation is stirred up against sin (Psalm 73:22; Prov 30:2). He could once wallow in it with much pleasure; now he loathes the thought of returning to it as much as of licking up the filthiest vomit!

**II. The MEMBERS are affected in conversion.** These members which before were the instruments of sin—are now become the holy utensils of Christ's living temple. He who before dishonored his body, now possesses his vessel in sanctification and honor, in temperance, chastity, and sobriety, and dedicates it to the Lord.

*The EYE, which was once a wandering eye,* a wanton eye, a haughty, a covetous eye—is now employed, as Mary's, in weeping over its sins, in beholding God in His works, in reading His Word, or in looking for objects of mercy and opportunities for His service.

*The EAR, which was once open to Satan's call,* and which did relish nothing so much as filthy, or at least frothy talk, and the laughter of fools—is now bored to the door of Christ's house, and open to His disciples. It says, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant hears.' [1 Sam. 3:10] It waits for His words as the rain, and relishes *them more than the appointed food* (Job 23:12), *more than the honey*

*and the honeycomb* (Psalm 19:10).

*The HEAD, which was full of worldly designs*—is now filled with other matters, and set on the study of God's will, and the man employs his head, not so much about his gain—as about his duty. The thoughts and cares that fill his head are, principally, how he may please God and flee sin.

*His HEART, which was a sty of filthy lusts*—is now become an altar of incense, where the fire of divine love is ever kept burning, and from which the daily sacrifice of prayer and praise, and the sweet incense of holy desires, ejaculations and prayers, are continually ascending.

*The MOUTH is become a well of life*; his tongue as choice silver, and his lips feed many. Now the salt of grace has seasoned his speech, has eaten out the corruption (Col 4:6), and cleansed the man from his filthy conversation, flattery, boasting, railing, lying, swearing, backbiting—which once came like flashes proceeding from the hell which was in the heart (James 3:6). The throat, that once was an open sepulcher, now sends forth the sweet breath of prayer and holy discourse, and the man speaks in another tongue, in the language of Canaan, and is never so well as when talking of God and Christ, and the matters of another world. His mouth brings forth wisdom; his tongue is become the silver trumpet of his Maker's praise, his glory and the best member that he has.

Now here you will find the hypocrite sadly deficient. He speaks, it may be, like an angel—but he has a covetous eye, or the gain of unrighteousness is in his hand. His hand is white—but his heart is full of rottenness (Matt 23:27), full of unmortified cares, a very oven of lust, a shop of pride, the seat of malice. It may be, with Nebuchadnezzar's image, he has a golden head—a great deal of knowledge; but he has feet of clay—his affections are worldly, he minds earthly things, and his way and walk are sensual and carnal. The work is not thorough with him.

### **III. Lastly, the MOTIONS of one's LIFE and PRACTICE are also affected.**

The new man takes a new course (Eph 2:2-3). His conversation is in heaven (Phil 3:20). No sooner does Christ call by effectual grace but he straightway becomes a follower of Him. When God has given the new heart, and written His law in his mind—he henceforth walks in His statutes and keeps His judgments.

Though sin may dwell in him—truly a wearisome and unwelcome guest—yet it has no more dominion over him. He has his fruit unto holiness, and though he makes many a blot—yet the law and life of Jesus is what he looks at as his pattern, and he has an unfeigned respect to all God's commandments. He makes conscience even of little sins and little duties. His very infirmities which he cannot help, though he would, are his soul's burden, and are like dust in a man's eye, which though but little—is not a little troublesome. (O man, do you read this, and never stop to examine yourself?)

## **THE DANGER OF HYPOCRISY**

The sincere convert is not one man at church—and another at home. He is not a saint on his knees—and a cheat in his shop. He will not tithe mint and cummin, and neglect mercy and judgment, and the weightier matters of the law. He does not pretend piety—and neglect morality. But he turns from all his sins and keeps all God's statutes, though not perfectly, except in desire and endeavor—yet sincerely, not allowing himself in the breach of any. Now he delights in the Word, and sets himself to prayer, and opens his hand and draws out his soul to the hungry. He breaks off his sins by righteousness, and his iniquities by showing mercy to the poor (Dan 4:27). He has a good conscience willing in all things to live honestly (Heb 13:18), and to keep without offence towards God and men.

Here again you find the unsoundness of many who take themselves for good Christians. They are partial in the law (Mal 2:9), and take up the cheap and easy duties of religion—but they do not go through with the whole work. They are as a cake half-baked and half-raw. It may be, you find them exact in their words, punctual in their dealings—but then they do not exercise themselves unto godliness; and as for examining themselves and governing their hearts, to this they are strangers. You may see them duly at church; but follow them to their families, and there you shall see little but the world minded. Or if they have family duties, follow them to their closets, and there you shall find their souls are little looked after. It may be that they seem religious—but they do not bridle their tongues, and so all their religion is vain (James 1:26). It may be they come to closet and family prayer; but follow them to their shops, and there you find them in the habit of lying, or some fashionable way of deceit. Thus the hypocrite is not thorough in his obedience.

ALL of Christ is accepted by the sincere convert. He loves not only the wages—but the work of Christ; not only the benefits—but the burden of Christ. He is willing not only to tread out

the corn—but to draw under the yoke. He takes up the commands of Christ, yes, the cross of Christ.

The unsound convert takes Christ by halves. He is all for the salvation of Christ—but he is not for sanctification. He is for the privileges—but does not appropriate the person of Christ. He divides the offices and benefits of Christ. This is an error in the foundation. Whoever loves life, let him beware here. It is an undoing mistake, of which you have been often warned, and yet none is more common. Jesus is a sweet Name—but men do not love the Lord Jesus in sincerity. They will not have Him as God offers, 'to be a Prince and a Savior' (Acts 5:31). They divide what God has joined, the King who rules—and the Priest who saves. They will not accept the salvation of Christ as He intends it; they divide it here. Every man's vote is for salvation from suffering—but they do not desire to be saved from sinning. They would have their lives saved—but still would have their lusts. Indeed, many divide here again; they would be content to have some of their sins destroyed—but they cannot leave the lap of Delilah, or divorce the beloved Herodias. They cannot be cruel to the right eye or right hand.

O be infinitely careful here; your soul depends upon it. The sound convert takes a whole Christ, and takes Him for all intents and purposes, without exceptions, without limitations, without reserve. He is willing to have Christ upon any terms; he is willing to have the dominion of Christ as well as deliverance by Christ. He says with Paul, 'Lord, what will you have me to do?' [Acts 9:6] Anything, Lord! He gives Christ the blank page—to write down His own conditions.

Here the hypocrite's rottenness may be discovered. He desires holiness, as one well said, only as a bridge to heaven, and inquires earnestly what is the least that will serve his turn; and if he can get but so much as may bring him to heaven, this is all he cares for. But the sound convert desires holiness for holiness' sake, and not merely for heaven's sake. He would not be satisfied with so much holiness as might save him from hell—but desires the highest degree. Yet desires are not enough. What is your way and your course? Are the drift and scope of your life altered? Is holiness your pursuit, and piety your business? If not, you fall short of sound conversion.

#### THE NEED FOR SELF-EXAMINATION

And is this which we have described, the conversion which is of absolute necessity to salvation? Then be informed—that *strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leads unto life—that there are few that find it*—that there is need of divine power savingly to convert a sinner to Jesus Christ.

Again, be exhorted, O man, to examine yourself. What does conscience say? Does it begin to accuse? Does it not pierce you as you go? Is this your judgment, and this your choice, and this your way, that we have described? If so, then it is well. But does your heart condemn you, and tell you of a certain sin you are living in against your conscience? Does it not tell you there is such and such a secret way of wickedness that you wish to pursue; such and such a duty that you make no conscience of?

Does not conscience carry you to your closet, and tell you how seldom prayer and Scripture reading are performed there? Does it not carry you to your family, and show you the charge of God, and the souls of your children who are neglected there? Does not conscience lead you to your shop, your trade, and tell you of some iniquity there? Does it not carry you to the public-house, or the private club, and blame you for the loose company you keep there, the precious time which you misspend there, the talents which you waste there? Does it not carry you into your secret chamber, and read there your condemnation?

O conscience! do your duty. In the name of the living God, I command you—discharge your office. Lay hold upon this sinner, fall upon him, arrest him, apprehend him, undeceive him. What! will you flatter and soothe him while he lives in his sins? Awake, O conscience! What do you mean, O sleeper? What! have you no reproof in your mouth? What! shall this soul die in his careless neglect of God and of eternity, and you altogether remain silent? What! shall he go on still in his trespasses, and yet have peace? Oh, rouse yourself, and do your work. Now let the preacher in your bosom speak. Cry aloud, and spare not; lift up your voice like a trumpet. Let not the blood of his soul be required at your hands.

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