

"All we, like sheep, have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all". But Christ does more than this, and here the analogy again holds good,—he lays hold on the sinner: by his word and spirit he converts him: he works in him faith—he produces in him all the dispositions which qualify for new obedience; he thus leads the sinner, or brings him, back to God. And in every instance of a converted soul, Christ is like the Shepherd—coming, and seeking, and delivering that soul—laying hold of it, turning it to righteousness; preventing it from wandering farther; saving it from the yawning pit, and the roaring lion; saving it from sin—from destruction—from death—from Satan and from hell. Christ's spirit arrests that soul, and convicts it of sin, brings it to faith, awakens it to repentance, and leads it to new obedience. When this is the case, it is brought back to the fold: it is returned to the shepherd and bishop of the soul. It is safe, and Christ rejoices over it—and angels rejoice over it: Heaven is glad, and the anthems of Heaven re-awakened to a new, a more joyful song.

The same truth, you will perceive, is taught us in the figure of the lost piece of money. The woman lighteth a candle, and sweeps the house, and seeks diligently till she find it. So, it is by Christ coming and seeking the soul that it is recovered. It would have been lost for ever otherwise. Christ comes by his word and spirit and restores the useless energies, the useless faculties, of the soul—restores them to their proper object, to their proper use. He awakens repentance, and begets faith, and revives love, and produces new obedience. The soul is again useful to its Creator, its rightful owner. It becomes available for his purposes. Its reason, or understanding, is again employed in contemplating God—its faith in trusting in him—its affections in loving him—all its powers in serving him.

In the parable of the prodigal son, the exercise of the soul itself in returning to God is brought out; the repentance and faith of the sinner are admirably illustrated. It is Christ that apprehends a soul, and works both repentance and faith in it: but the process of repentance and faith, the manner of them, is here illustrated. In what state is the sinner?—He is abject, vile, miserable. He has departed from God: he has followed his own

desires; he has set up his own will: he has been serving diverse lusts and pleasures. He is in consequence plunged in misery. He is in spiritual want, spiritual starvation. He is occupied in the meanest drudgery, the bondsman of Satan. In this state he is made to feel his want.—He comes to see his wretched and destitute condition. He comes to himself, as the parable has it. He thinks of his degraded and miserable condition. He thinks how far otherwise it might be with him—how different it is with others of God's children, who have never departed from God, who are still his servants. "How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!" "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am now no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants."—Not that there are any in God's house that are regarded in any other light than as children. But Christ would here teach the low estimate that a sinner has of himself, his willingness to be nothing in God's sight—to occupy the humblest place in his household—to be admitted on any terms into his house. When once the resolution is finally made, he puts it in execution. He arises and goes to his father. The sinner thus exercised—come to himself;—for sin is regarded as a species of madness—the sinner is alienated even from himself; he is not in his right mind: "madness," it is said, "is in his heart":—when the sinner has come to himself—to his right mind—he goes to God in prayer, confesses his sins to God, and implores pardon through Jesus Christ. He goes to God as his father in heaven, and humbles himself before him—just as a penitent child will go to his father, and humble himself in his sight, if haply he may obtain reconciliation and forgiveness. The son of an earthly father who has acted the part of the prodigal, will naturally, on seeing his folly, return to his father's house to ask that forgiveness which he is well assured will not be withheld.—He counts upon his father's forgiveness, his affection even for an erring child.—He feels a conviction that he will be received, that he will obtain pardon, that he will not be cast off. And so, the sinner who has come to himself, who has seen his folly, who repents of his sins, goes to God, with the same, or a similar, confidence, having God revealed to him in all the grace and mercy of the gospel.