

A person wearing a dark hoodie is kneeling on a wet, reflective surface. They are positioned in front of a large, intense fire that fills the background with bright orange and yellow flames. The person's head is bowed, and their hands are clasped in front of them. The wet ground reflects the fire, creating a shimmering effect. The overall mood is one of solemnity and reflection.

REPENTANCE

A.W. PINK



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by A. W. Pink

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The Necessity of Repentance

This is discovered by a contemplation of the law, for “by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:20). Where there is no enforcing and expounding of the holy law of God there can be no true, deep, saving knowledge of sin; as the apostle Paul so plainly affirms, “I had not *known* sin, but by the law” (Rom. 7:7). The exceeding sinfulness of sin (Rom. 7:13) is only exposed when the Spirit turns the light of God's law upon our conscience and heart. But this is preeminently an age of lawlessness, and that in every respect. And it cannot be otherwise: where the law of God is flouted, where thousands of preachers are declaring that the law has no place in this dispensation

of grace, we cannot expect people to have much respect for human law. God has caused the people to reap that which they have sown: having sown the wind, they are now reaping the whirlwind. Bolshevism and anarchy are the inevitable rebound from having slighted and rejected the Ten Commandments!

Practical godliness consists in a conformity of heart and life to the *law* of God, and in a sincere compliance with the *gospel* of Christ. But it is only as we rightly understand both the law and the gospel that we can discern wherein a conformity to the one and a compliance with the other really consists. Now the requirements of the law are summed up in that word, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might" (Deut. 6:5; cf. Matt. 22:37). Observe carefully the three things here specified: first, the duty required, namely, love to God. Second, the ground or reason for this, namely, because He is the Lord our God. Third, the measure or extent of this duty, namely, to love Him with all the heart. Nothing other than this, nothing less than this, will ever meet the righteous claims of God upon us.

Now that which is implied in and required unto a real love to God is, first, a true *knowledge* of Him. If our apprehensions of God are wrong, if they are not formed by Scripture, then it is obvious we have but a false image of Him, framed by our own fancy. By a true knowledge of God (John 17:3; I John 5:20) we mean far more than a correct theoretical notion of His perfections: there must be a heartfelt realization of His personal loveliness, His ineffable glory. And where *that* truly exists, there will be a *delighting* of ourselves in Him (Ps. 37:4) and a desire and a determination to *please* Him. And self-love naturally causes us to magnify self and seek to promote our own interests, so a true love to God causes us to put Him first and seek His interests.

In repentance *sin* is the thing to be repented *of*, and sin is a transgression of the law (I John 3:4). And the first and chief thing required by the law is *supreme love to God*. Therefore, the lack of

supreme love to God, the heart's disaffection for His character and rebellion against Him (Rom. 8:7) is our great wickedness, of which we have to repent. But it will never be in our hearts to repent unless we truly see our blame. And we can never truly see our blame until we perceive that which chiefly renders us *to* blame. It is the excellency of God, the infinite perfections of His glorious being, which renders Him worthy of and entitled to our supreme love and fullest obedience; and this it is which chiefly renders us to blame, for *not* having loved and served Him. Not to love so lovable an Object as the God of love is the crime of crimes.

What is *sin*? Sin is saying, I renounce the God who made me; I disallow His right to govern me. I care not what He says to me, what commandments He has given, nor how He expostulates: I prefer self-indulgence to His approval. I am indifferent unto all He has done to and for me; His blessings and gifts move me not: I am going to be lord of myself. Sin is rebellion against the majesty of heaven. It is to treat the Almighty with contempt. Oh, how vastly different a thing is *sin* from what the world supposes! How insensible are the unregenerate to the glory of God and that, which is due unto Him from us!

The natural man supposes that the great evil of sin consists in its being so injurious *to us*. For a creature, which is absolutely dependent, to assume an attitude of haughty independence is the sin of sins. To despise One, who is infinitely glorious and infinitely worthy of honor, love, and obedience, is an awful abomination. To be more concerned about pleasing fellow rebels than to seek the favor of God is turpitude of the blackest dye. O reader, if you have never seen the *great evil* of sin, then are you a stranger to God and blind to His surpassing loveliness; you are under the *blinding* power of sin.

Weigh well what is now being presented if you value your soul, dear friend. The “*deceitfulness* of sin” (Heb. 3:13) may hitherto have closed your eyes to the terrible condition you are in. If so, are you now willing to be undeceived? Are you willing to really see *yourself*?

Then make no mistake upon this point: never was any sinner pardoned while he was impenitent; and never was a soul truly penitent while insensible of the great evil of sin; and never did a sinner perceive the great evil of sin till he became acquainted with the infinitely great and glorious God against whom he has sinned. You may indeed have been sorry for sin on *other* accounts—as exposing you to shame before men, as having injured your reputation, or because it has brought down God's chastening hand upon your body or temporal affairs. But if you have never seen the great evil of sin, as it is against that God who is infinitely glorious in Himself, then your repentance was not genuine, and *God* has not pardoned you.

“Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight” (Ps. 51:4). A sense of the great evil of sin is essential to true repentance. We cannot be suitably affected toward things unless we see them as they are. No matter how lovely a thing or person may be, if their excellency be not perceived the heart is untouched. Even the infinite glory of God will not excite our esteem and love, if we have no sense of it. So, on the other hand, let sin be never so evil, yet if this be not *realized* we are not suitably affected toward it. Though it deserves to be hated with perfect hatred, and though there be every reason why we should be horrified on account of it and abase ourselves before God, mourning it in bitterness of heart, fearing it, watching against it as the greatest of all evils, yet we shall never do so until we see sin in its real hideousness. Thus a deep sense of the infinite evil of sin is plainly essential to repentance, yea, it is from this that repentance immediately springs.

The evil of sin arises from our obligations to do otherwise, namely, our being under obligation to love and serve Him who is infinitely glorious. But unless I clearly see this, there will not be, there cannot be any deep repentance. The language of every sinner's heart is, I care not *what* God requires, and I am going to have *my own* way. I care not what be God's claims upon me; I refuse to submit unto His authority. I care not what He has threatened to do unto those that

defy Him, I will not be intimidated. His eyes may be upon me, but I am not going to be restrained thereby; I care not what *He* loves and what He hates, I shall please myself. But when the Holy Spirit enlightens and convicts a soul, his language is—"Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight."

Thus, true repentance issues from a realization in the heart, wrought therein by the Holy Spirit, of the sinfulness of sin, of the awfulness of ignoring the claims of God and defying His authority. It is therefore a holy horror and hatred of sin, a deep sorrow for it, an acknowledgment of it before God, and a complete heart forsaking of it. Not until this is done will God pardon us. Whoever will take the trouble to search through the Scriptures on this point, will find that it is plainly and uniformly taught by Moses and the prophets, by Christ and His apostles. Begin with what God demanded on the Day of Atonement: "whatsoever soul it be that shall not be *afflicted* in that same day," so far from the sacrifice removing *his* sins, "he shall be cut off from among his people" (Lev. 23:29).

Weigh well the teaching of these verses: "If they shall bethink themselves in the land whither they were carried captives, and *repent*, and make supplication unto thee in the land of them that carried them captives, saying, We have sinned, and have done perversely, we have committed wickedness; and *return* unto thee with *all* their heart, and with all their soul, in the land of their enemies, which led them away captive, and *pray* unto thee . . . *then* hear thou their prayer and their supplication . . . and *forgive* thy people that have sinned against thee" (I Kings 8:47-50). No change of dispensation has wrought any change in the character of the thrice-holy God. His claims are ever the same.

For the teachings of the prophets see Psalm 32:3-5; Proverbs 28:13; Jeremiah 4:4, Ezekiel 18:30-32, Hosea 5:15, Joel 2:12-13. John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ, preached saying, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2). This was as though he said, "Such is the nature of the Messiah's kingdom, so holy is it, that

no impenitent inner, while such, can be a member of it and share its blessings. The promised One is on the eve of making His appearance: therefore repent ye, and thus be prepared to receive Him.” Thus did John preach, and many did he turn unto the Lord their God (Luke 1:16-17).

The Lord Jesus taught and constantly pressed the *same* truth. His call was, “Repent ye, and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15): the gospel cannot be savingly believed until there is genuine repentance—as the ground must be ploughed before it is capable of receiving the seed, so the heart must be melted ere it will welcome the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Therefore did He declare, “Blessed are they that *mourn*, for they shall be comforted” (Matt. 5:4), and announce that He had been sent “to heal the *broken-hearted*” (Luke 4:18). He came here to “call sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:32), and insisted that “except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3, 5). He illustrated this truth at length in the parable of the prodigal son, who “came to himself,” repented, *left* the “far country,” returned to the Father, and so obtained His forgiveness (Luke 15:17-20).

When risen from the dead, Christ commissioned His servants “that repentance *and* remission of sins should be preached in His name among *all* nations” (Luke 24:47), and Acts 5:31 tells us that He has been exalted on high to communicate these blessings in the *same order*, namely, “to give repentance to [the *spiritual*] Israel *and* forgiveness of sins.” Accordingly we find the apostles, who were filled with the Holy Spirit, thus carrying out His command. On the day of Pentecost when many were “pricked in their hearts” and asked, “What shall we do?” Peter did not say, Do nothing, but rest upon the finished work of Christ. Instead, he said, “*Repent*, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). Again, in Acts 3:19 we find him saying, “Repent ye therefore and be converted *that* your sins *may* be blotted out”!

When Paul was converted and sent to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, it was to “open their eyes and to *turn them from* darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God, *that* they might receive forgiveness of sins” (Acts 26:18); hence we find he went everywhere and preached to men that “they should repent and turn to God and do works meet for repentance” (Acts 26:20), “testifying to both Jews *and also* to the Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21). As to those who shut their eyes, stopped their ears, hardened their hearts, and were given up to destruction in the days of the prophets (Isa. 6:10), of Christ (Matt. 13:15), and of the apostles (Acts 28:27), their sentence ran thus: “. . . lest they should see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and be converted, and I should heal them,” which, compared with Mark 4:12, signifies, “and their sins should be forgiven them.”

Against these clear and consistent testimonies of Holy Writ, certain men have insisted that the divine call to repentance was never made to any except those who were in covenant relationship with God. But as we have shown, Acts 17:30 and 26:20 clearly expose this error. Some have pointed out that the word “repent” is not once found in all John's Gospel, and in view of 20:31 have *reasoned* that it is not necessary unto salvation. But John's Gospel is plainly addressed unto those who are saved (see 1:16). It is that Gospel which sets forth the Son in relation to the sons of God. John 20:31 obviously means that this Gospel is written to strengthen the faith of believers; as I John 5:13 (addressed to those who already knew they were saved: see 2:3, etc.) signifies the purpose of that Epistle was to *deepen* assurance. Others have drawn a false inference from the very infrequent mention of repentance in the Epistles, but they also are addressed to the saints; yet II Corinthians 7:10; II Timothy 2:25, II Peter 3:9 manifestly confirm the fact that repentance is required throughout this dispensation.

“There is no *new* thing under the sun” (Eccles. 1:9), nor is the present-day denial of the necessity of repentance for salvation any

twentieth-century novelty. In proof of this statement we could find page after page with quotations from Antinomians and others who lived long before “dispensational truth” was first heard of. No, it is an old device of Satan's, yet under a new dress. But woe be unto those who accept his lie. God must cease to exist before He will lower His claims and cease demanding repentance from all who have rebelled against Him. Make no mistake upon this point, dear reader: it is turn or burn—turn from your course of self-will and self-pleasing; turn in broken heartedness to God, seeking His mercy in Christ; turn with full purpose to please and serve Him, or be tormented day and night forever and ever in the lake of fire.

The Nature of Repentance

“Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3). In view of these solemn words it is tremendously important that each of us should seek and obtain from God the repentance which He requires, not resting content with anything short of this. Hence, there needs to be the most diligent and prayerful examination as to the character of our repentance. Multitudes are deceived thereon. Many are perplexed by the conflicting teaching of men on this subject; but instead of that discouraging, it should stir up to a more earnest searching of the Scriptures. Before turning to the positive side of this branch of our theme, let us first point out some of the features of a nonsaving repentance.

Trembling beneath the preaching of God's Word is not repentance. True, there are thousands of people who have listened unmoved to the most awe-inspiring sermons, and even descriptions of the torments of the damned have struck no terror to their hearts. Yet, on the other hand, many who *were* deeply stirred, filled with alarm, and

moved to tears, are now in hell. I have seen the faces of strong men pale under a searching message, yet next day all its effects had left them. Felix “trembled” (Acts 24:25) under the preaching of Paul!

Being “almost persuaded” is not repentance. Agrippa (Acts 26:28) is a case in point. A person may give full assent to the messages of God's servant, admire the gospel, yea, receive the Word with joy, and after all, be only a stony-ground hearer (Matt. 13:20-21). Not only so, he may be conscious of his evildoing and acknowledge the same. Pharaoh owned, “I have sinned against the Lord your God” (Exod. 10:16). A man may realize that he *ought* to yield himself to the claims of God and become a Christian, yet never be more than “*almost persuaded*.”

Humbling ourselves beneath the mighty hand of God is not repentance. People may be deeply moved, weep, go home and determine to reform their lives, and yet return to their sins. A solemn example of this is found in Ahab. That wicked king of Israel coveted Naboth's vineyard, plotted to secure it, and gained his end by causing him to be murdered. Then the servant of God met him and said, “Hast thou killed and also taken possession?” And we are told that “he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted . . . and went softly” (I Kings 21:27-29). Yet in the very next chapter we find him again rebelling against God, and that he was cut off by divine judgment. Ah, my reader, you may have humbled yourself before God for a time, and yet remain the slave of your lusts. You may be afraid of hell, and yet not of sinning. If hell were extinguished, so would be the repentance of many church members. O mistake not fear of the wrath to come for a holy hatred and horror of sin.

Confessing sins is not repentance. Thousands have gone forward to the “altar” or “mourners' bench” and have told God what vile creatures they were, enumerating a long list of transgressions, but without any deep realization of the unspeakable awfulness of their sins, or a spark of holy hatred of them. The sequel has shown this, for

they now ignore God's commandments as much as they did before. O my reader, if you do not, in the strength of God, *resist* sin, if you do not *turn from it*, then your fancied repentance is only whitewash—paint which decorates, but not the grace which transforms into gold.

You may even do works meet for repentance, and yet remain impenitent. A sinner may be convinced of the evil of his ways, turn from them, and go so far as to make restitution for the harm, which he has wrought, and yet perish notwithstanding. A clear proof of this is furnished in the New Testament. Judas confessed his sins to the priests, and returned their money (Matt. 27:3-5), and then he went out from the presence of those evil men. Was he saved? No, he went and hanged himself! O how this ought to make each of us tremble and search our hearts.

The Greek *metanoeo*, which occurs most frequently as the word rendered “repent,” signifies a change of mind; Matthew 21:29 both illustrates and confirms that definition. Yet let it be said very emphatically that saving repentance means far more than a mere change of opinions: it is a *changed mind*, which leads to action. Now this changed mind is not brought about by any intellectual process, but is the result of the understanding being wrought upon by the conscience, and that as the conscience has been supernaturally ploughed up by the Holy Spirit. In consequence of this there is a judging or condemning of self, a taking sides with God against myself.

Fallen man is not now on trial, but is a criminal already under sentence (John 3:18). “There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one” (Rom. 3:10-12). *That* is God's indictment against each of us. No pleading will avail, no excuses will be accepted. The present issue between God and the sinner is, Will man bow to, or endorse with his heart, God's righteous verdict?

It is just here that the gospel meets us. It comes to us as those who are already *lost*, as those who are “ungodly,” “without strength,” at “enmity with God.” When the gospel first comes to the sinner it finds him in a state of apostasy from God, both as sovereign Ruler and as our supreme Good, neither obeying and glorifying Him, nor enjoying and finding satisfaction in Him. Hence the demand for “repentance toward God” *before* “faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21). True repentance toward God *removes* this disaffection of our minds and hearts toward Him, under both these characters. In saving repentance the whole soul turns to Him and says: I have been a disloyal and rebellious creature: I have scorned Thy high authority and most rightful law. I will live no longer thus. I now desire and determine with all my might to serve and obey Thee as my only Lord. I subject myself unto Thee, to submit to Thy will.

Nor is the above all that a truly penitent soul says to God. He goes on: Hitherto I have been a miserable and forlorn creature, destitute of anything which could satisfy or make me truly happy. My heart has been set upon a vain world, which could not meet my real needs: it has flattered and mocked me often, but never contented me; it has “pierced me through with many sorrows.” I forsook the Fountain of living waters, and turned to broken cisterns which held none. I own and bewail my folly; I unsparingly condemn myself for my madness. I now betake myself to Thee as my present and everlasting Portion.

The gospel proclaims the amazing *grace* of God, which is the guilty and condemned sinner's *only* hope. Yet that grace will never be welcomed until the sinner really bows beneath God's sentence against him. This is why both repentance *and* faith are demanded of us. The two must never be separated. When our Lord was speaking to the chief priests and elders about their rejection of John's message, the charge He preferred against them was: Ye “repented not afterward, *that ye might believe* in him” (Matt. 21:32). Repentance is the heart's acknowledgment of the justice of God's sentence of condemnation; faith is the heart's glad acceptance of the grace and mercy which are extended to us through Christ.

Repentance is not simply the turning over of a new leaf and a vowing that I will mend my ways: rather is it a setting to my seal that God is true when He declares I am “*without* strength”: that in myself, my case is hopeless, that I am no more capable of “doing better” than I am of creating a world. Not until this is believed on the authority of God's Word shall I really turn to Christ and welcome Him—not as a Helper, but as Saviour!

Repentance is more than a conviction of sin or terror of the wrath to come. This is clear from Acts 2:37-38. Under Peter's searching message, the Jews were made to realize their awful guilt before God: they were made conscious of the fearful fact that they had murdered the Prince of life, and so were in terrible fear of being cast into hell. Nevertheless, though already “pricked in their hearts,” when they cried out, “What shall we do?” Peter said, “Repent.” To a superficial mind, such a demand might appear needless: yet was it seasonable counsel. Their being “pricked in their heart” was *legal terror*, whereas saving “repentance” is an *evangelical* judging of self, mourning over sin out of a sense of God's grace and goodness.

A prayerful and careful pondering of Acts 2:37-38 should correct more than one error, which is now, current in various circles. When the hearers of Peter were affrighted by their awful crime and fearful of eternal wrath, pricked in the heart—as though a sword had been run through their vitals—they cried out in anguish, “What shall we do?” The apostle did not say, “Be passive, there is nothing you can do,” thus encouraging the fatal inertia of hyper-Calvinists. Nor did he say, “Believe your sins *are* blotted out,” which is the counsel of many “physicians of no value” in our day. No, his reply was far otherwise, in substance amounting to this: “Take all the blame which belongs to you. Own the whole truth unto God. Do not gloss over, but confess your awful wickedness; let your uncircumcised hearts be truly humbled before Him. And then look by faith to the free grace of God through the blood of Christ for pardon, and in token that all your dependence is on His mediation and merits, be baptized in His

name, and that shall be to you an *external sign* of the remission of your sins.”

“It is manifest from the nature of the case, that he who hath his eyes opened to see the glory of the divine nature, the beauty of the divine law, the infinite evil of sin, the need of an infinite atonement, and so to see his need of Christ: and at the same time, views God as the supreme, all-sufficient Good, ready to receive every sinner that returns to Him through Christ; it is manifest, I say, that everyone who is thus taught of God, will repent and return to God as his sovereign Lord and supreme Good, and return through Jesus Christ, who is the way to the Father, and the only way, in the view of one thus divinely enlightened. For in the clearer light the glory of the divine nature and law is seen, in exact proportion will be the sense of the infinite evil of sin, and the need of Christ's infinite atonement and perfect righteousness. And so ‘repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ’ will be naturally and inseparably connected. Yea, they will be necessarily implied in each other.

He who repents in the view of the glory of God, the glory of the law, and of the atonement, will in his repentance look only to free grace through Jesus Christ for mercy, and he who looks only to free grace through Jesus Christ for mercy, in a view of the glory of God, law, atonement, will in doing so take the whole blame of his disaffection to the divine character, as exhibited in the law, and on the cross of Christ, to himself, *judging and condemning himself* and in the very act of faith, repent and be converted. When, therefore, it is said, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved’ (Acts 16:31), *the same* (inclusive) *thing is meant* as when it is said, ‘Repent ye therefore and be converted that your sins may be blotted out’ (Acts 3:19). For the apostolic faith implies repentance in its own nature, and their repentance implies faith in its nature. Sometimes they only mention faith, and sometimes only repentance, and sometimes both together; but the *same thing* is *always* intended. For in the view of the apostles,

repentance and faith were mutually implied in each other. (Jos. Bellamy, 1750)

Giving a more full and formal definition of repentance, we would say: Repentance is a supernatural and inward revelation from God, giving a deep consciousness of what I am in *His* sight, which causes me to loathe and condemn myself, resulting in a bitter sorrow for sin, a holy horror and hatred for sin, and a turning away from or forsaking of sin. It is the discovery of God's high and righteous claims upon me, and of my lifelong failure to meet those claims. It is the recognition of the holiness and goodness of His law, and my defiant insubordination thereto. It is the perception that God has the right to rule and govern me, and of my refusal to submit unto Him. It is the apprehension that He has dealt in goodness and kindness with me, and that I have evilly repaid Him by having no concern for *His* honor and glory. It is the realization of His gracious patience with me, and how that instead of this melting my heart and causing me to yield loving obedience to Him, I have *abused* His forbearance by continuing in a course of self-will.

Evangelical repentance is a heart-apprehension of the exceeding sinfulness of sin. It is the recognition of the *chief* thing wherein I am blame-worthy, namely, in having so miserably failed to render unto God that which is His rightful due. As the Holy Spirit sets before me the loveliness of the divine character, as I am enabled to discern the exalted excellency of God, then I begin to perceive that to which He is justly entitled, namely, the homage of my heart, the unrestricted love of my soul, the complete surrender of my whole being to Him. As I perceive that from the moment I drew my first breath God has sought *only my good*, that the One who gave me being has constantly ministered to my every creature need, and that the least I can do in return is to acknowledge His abounding mercies by doing that which is pleasing in His sight, I am now over-whelmed with anguish and horror as I realize I have treated Him more vilely than my worst enemy.

Oftentimes example is better than the most accurate definition. The New Testament furnishes quite a number of concrete instances, even where the term itself is not found. When the “publican” stood afar off and would not so much as lift up his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, “God be merciful to me a sinner” (Luke 18:13), we behold repentance *in action*. He recognized that awful moral distance which sin had taken him from God; he was deeply conscious of his utter unworthiness to gaze upon the Holy One; he unsparingly judged himself; he realized that his only hope lay in the sovereign mercy of God. So, too, the thief on the cross: in his words to his hardened companion, “Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same *condemnation*, and we indeed *justly*; for we receive the due reward of our deeds” (Luke 23:40-41). There was no self-extenuation, but a ready owning of his sinnership and his desert to be punished.

Mark carefully the expressions of penitence used by David in Psalm 51. He talks not of his “failures,” “mistakes” or “infirmities,” but instead of “my transgression” (v. 1), “my sin” (v. 2), “this evil” (v. 4), “my iniquity” (v. 9), and expressly mentions the worst feature of his crime, namely, his “bloodguiltiness” (v. 14). True repentance abhors gentle names for sin, nor does it seek to cloak wickedness. That which, while being tempted, is thought of as no great offense, when (later) is truly repented of, is acknowledged to be heinous. Sin before its commission often appears unto the mind as a very small evil, but when grace acts in a way of repentance for it, then the false glamour disappears and it is viewed in its dreadful malignity and loathed accordingly.

True repentance is always accompanied by a deep longing and a sincere determination to forsake that course which is displeasing to God. With what *honesty* could any man seek God's pardon while he continued to defy Him and would not part with that which He forbids? Would any king pardon a traitor, though he seemed ever so humble, if he saw that he would be a traitor still? True, God is infinitely more merciful than any human king, yet in the very

passage where He first formally proclaimed His mercy, He at once added, “. . . that will by no means clear the guilty” (Exod. 34:5-7) i.e., the guilty-hearted, those with false and disloyal hearts toward Himself, who would not be subject to Him in all things, and declined to have their every thought brought into captivity to obedience unto Him (II Cor. 10:5).

What has just been said needs to be strongly emphasized in this day of lawlessness, when, on every side, the very “grace of God” is being “turned into lasciviousness” (Jude 4). Many are the Scriptures, which set forth this truth, that there must be a *forsaking* of sin before God will pardon offenders. “There is forgiveness with thee, *that* thou mayest be feared” (Ps. 130:4). Were God to grant pardon to those in whom there was no change of heart *to* fear and obey Him, then there would be mercy with Him that He might be *insulted* and dishonored still further! God's mercy is never exercised at the expense of His holiness! God never displays one of His attributes so as to dishonor another. To pity a thief while he continues his thievery would be folly, not wisdom. Well did the Puritan, Thomas Goodwin, say, “Resolve either to leave every known sin and submit to every known duty, or else never look to find mercy and favor with God.”

Of old it was announced that should any “bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart to add drunkenness to thirst [that is, one sin to another]: the Lord *will not* spare him” (Deut. 28:19-20). So, on the other hand it was declared, “If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek *my* face, and *turn from* their wicked ways; *then* will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land” (II Chron. 7:14; cf. 6:26). And the principles of God's government have not changed! The death of Christ has not caused God to *lower* His standard—how unspeakably horrible and dreadful that anyone should suppose it has! No, what God demanded of old, He demands now.

Thus, repentance is the *negative side* of conversion. Conversion is a wholehearted turning unto God, but there cannot be a turning *unto* without a turning *from*. Sin must be forsaken ere we can draw nigh unto the Holy One. As it is written, “Ye turned to God *from idols* to serve [live for] the living and true God” (I Thess. 1:9). Thus, repentance is the sinner *making his peace with God*. We are not unmindful of the fact that that expression is derided by many, yet it is a Scriptural one: “Let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me” (Isa. 27:5). It is blessedly true that Christ “*made peace* through the blood of his cross” (Col. 1:20), yet it is equally true that no sinner ever enters into the saving good of Christ's blood until he makes *his peace* with God; in other words, till he throws down the weapons of his warfare and ceases fighting against God. The Lord Jesus Himself plainly taught this in Luke 14; let the reader *carefully* ponder verses 28-33, paying special attention to verse 32 and the “so likewise” of verse 33!

The Implications of Repentance

“If God is an absolutely perfect, an infinitely glorious and amiable Being, infinitely worthy of supreme love and honor, and of universal obedience; and if our disaffection to the divine character and rebellion against God, is altogether inexcusable and infinitely criminal, agreeable to the voice of the divine law, and to the import of the cross of Christ; if God the great Governor of the universe views things in this light, and in this view calls unto us from heaven to confess our sins, repent and turn unto Him with all our hearts; if these things are so—and they are—then the meaning of God's words is certain, the ideas designed to be conveyed by them are determinate. To repent, beyond dispute, is to change our minds as to the divine character, to lay aside our prejudices, to open our eyes, and begin to look upon God as He is, an absolutely perfect, an

infinitely glorious and amiable Being, infinitely worthy of supreme love and honor, and of universal obedience; and in the light of this glory to begin to view our disaffection and rebellion as altogether inexcusable and infinitely criminal, and in the view, cordially take all that blame to ourselves which God lays upon us, and to be affected accordingly.

Repentance is saying, 'Righteous art Thou, O Lord, when Thou speakest, and clear when Thou judgest. Should justice take place, no iniquity should be imputed unto Thee. It would not be a blemish, but a beauty in Thy character, and all heaven ought forever to love and adore Thy glorious majesty, should I receive my just deserts and perish forever. But Thou canst have mercy on whom Thou wilt, through Jesus Christ. To Thine infinite grace and self-moving goodness through Him I look. God be merciful to me a sinner.' Repentance stands, then, in opposition to all our former prejudices against the divine character; and in opposition to that sin-extenuating, self-justifying, law-hating, God-blaming disposition which reigns in every impenitent soul. God is seen in His beauty; the divine law, as a ministration of condemnation and death, appears glorious, our disaffection and rebellion infinitely criminal. We justify God, approve His law, condemn ourselves, accept the punishment of our iniquity as worthy of God; and thus we confess, repent, and turn unto the Lord, looking only to free grace through Jesus Christ for pardon. (Jos. Bellamy, 1750)

A. Repentance, then, presupposes, first, a recognition and acknowledgment of God's claims upon us as our Creator, Governor, Provider, and Protector. Because God is who and what He is, namely the Sum and Source of all moral and spiritual excellency, and because of our relation to Him as creatures completely dependent upon Him, He is infinitely entitled to be loved with all our hearts, worshiped with fullest adoration, and served with joyous, perfect, and unremitting obedience. Until there is at least some measure of a clear and definite (we do not say *full*) recognition

of this, the mind is yet under the blinding power of Satan (II Cor. 4:4) and the heart is yet alienated from God (Eph. 4:18). Thus, repentance necessarily presupposes *regeneration*, in which the favored soul is “given an understanding that we may know him that is true” (I John 5:20). The first *evidence* that this supernatural enlightenment has been given, is the inward apprehension of God's excellency and supremacy, accompanied by a horrified consciousness of how dreadfully I have failed, all through my life, to give Him His rightful place in my heart and life.

B. In the second place, true repentance presupposes a hearty approval of God's law and a full consent to its righteous requirements. “The law is holy, and the commandment is holy, and just, and good” (Rom. 7:12): it cannot be otherwise, for *God* is its Author, and nothing unholy, unjust, or evil, could ever proceed from Him. It therefore follows that *such* a law can never be altered or repealed. Those who affirm that the law of God *has been* abolished cast the greatest reproach upon all the perfections of the divine character. Upon His *holiness*, whereby He loves the right and hates the wrong: for a repeal of the law would suppose God releasing His creatures from doing right and allowing them to do wrong. Upon His *justice*, whereby He gives to everyone his due: supposing Him to rescind His righteous claims. Upon His *immutability*: supposing Him to have been in one mind in the past, and another in the present. Upon His *goodness*: supposing Him to have canceled that which was designed for our highest well being.

If the reader will only make a determined effort to grasp the fact that the requirements of God's law are all summed up in “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart . . .” (Deut. 6:5), he ought to have no difficulty in perceiving how frightful is the teaching that the law has been abrogated. Men must indeed have strange conceptions of divine grace and of the gospel, if they suppose that God is now demanding something other or something less than the supreme place in men's affections and lives. Do they think for a moment that in Old Testament times God was asking for more love than was His

due? Do they imagine that God does not now deserve as much love as He once did? Such a thought would be the most awful blasphemy. Or, do they suppose that God has relinquished His rights and now freely allows His creatures to despise Him? that He has made a concession to their evil hearts by lowering His standard? Is not the *real* source of opposition to God's law the “enmity of the carnal mind” (Rom. 8:7)?!

Perhaps the reader is inclined to reply, But did not *Christ* come here to fulfill the law for us, and does not *His* obedience *free us* from its demands? Pause, dear friend, and weigh well such a question, and endeavor to see what such a concept plainly involves. Surely you do not mean that the Son of God became incarnate for the purpose of procuring an abatement of the law, or to purchase lawless liberty for His rebellious subjects. What! Could He esteem His Father's interest and glory, the honor of His law and government, so lightly? Did He shed His precious blood so as to persuade the great Governor of the world to slacken the reigns of government and grant an impious license to lawlessness? Perish the thought. Such a terrible concept would make the ineffably holy Christ the enemy of God and the friend of sin.

So far from the Son coming to earth for such a purpose, He expressly declared, “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled” (Matt. 5:17-18). If the verses which follow this quotation be carefully pondered, it will be seen that our Lord denounced the Pharisees because they had, by their own traditions and inventions, nullified God's law: while allowing that it condemned some external and gross acts of sin, they denied that it reprehended the first strivings of corruption in the heart. Therefore did Christ say, “Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:20).

That the law of God was never to be repealed is taught again and again in Psalm 119: “Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness and thy law is the truth. . . . The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting . . . Concerning thy testimonies, I have known of old that thou hast founded them forever. . . . Thy Word is true from the beginning, and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth forever” (vv. 142, 144, 152, 160). It was as though the psalmist said, “The duty required by Thy law is right and good, everlastingly right and good; and therefore, as Governor of the world, Thou hast by law forever settled and established it as duty and law never to be altered, but to endure forever and forever; therefore, will it endure.”

So far from Christ having died to disannul the law, so that now it wholly ceases to be a rule of life to believers, one great and declared design of His coming into the world was to *recover* His people unto a *conformity thereto* (see Titus 2:11-13). O how men love their corruptions and hate God's law, desiring to have it cashiered so that they may live as they please, and yet escape the reproaches of their consciences here and eternal punishment hereafter. But God “sitteth King for ever” (Ps. 29:10) and will assert the *rights* of His crown, maintain the honor of His majesty and the glory of His great name, and vindicate His injured law. He shall yet say, “But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay before me” (Luke 19:27).

Herein we may see plainly the imperative and absolute *need for regeneration*, if ever a fallen creature is to be won to God and a defiant rebel transformed into a loving subject. “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom. 8:7)—such is the terrible condition of every man and woman by nature. Nothing but the supernatural operation of the almighty Spirit of God can produce a change of heart, so that one can truthfully say, “I *delight* in the *law* of God after the inward man” (Rom. 7:22). But such teaching as this never has been and never will be popular in the world. The false prophets who

cry, “Peace, peace,” will be loved, but they who press the high and unchanging claims of a righteous God will be hated and denounced as “legalists,” and much more.

Christ came into this world and died to answer all the demands of the law, and this, not only that sinners might be saved, but also that the law itself might be the more firmly “established,” i.e., in the consciences and hearts of the redeemed. Therefore did the apostle write, “Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law” (Rom. 3:31). In this very Epistle of the Romans the apostle, moved by the Holy Spirit, lays it down as a first principle that “the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom. 1:18). From this premise, he goes on to prove that “now we know that what thing soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: *that* every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God” (3:19). But is it not clear as a sunbeam that if the law had been repealed at the cross that none *could* stand “guilty” before God, for “sin is not imputed when there is no law” (Rom. 5:13)!

If the law were repealed, what need was there for such a long train of argument to prove that “by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight” (3:20)? In such case, it had been quite sufficient to say that a repealed law could neither justify nor condemn anybody. Instead, the apostle shows that the law requires a “patient continuance in well doing” and threatens “tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil” (Rom. 2:5,7). This shows that both Jews and Gentiles have sinned and, therefore, are condemned by the law—brought in guilty— and so the apostle draws the inevitable conclusion that none can be cleared or justified by the law. Is it not obvious, then, that all this inspired reasoning supposes that the law is as much enforced as ever? Accordingly he goes on to show Christ's death answered the demands of the law, and that, *not* to make it void, but to “*establish*” it.

Hence it is that we find the New Testament Scriptures uniformly speak of those who have no saving interest in Christ's righteousness by faith, as being as much under the wrath of God and the curse of the law as though He had never died. As we have seen, Romans 1:18 declares, "The wrath of God is [not "was"] revealed from heaven against *all* ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." Again, in Galatians 3:10 we are told, "For as many as are of the works of the law *are* under the curse: for it is written: Cursed is every one that continueth not in *all* things which are written in the book of the law to do them" (compare II Thess. 1:7-9). But if the law had been repealed by the death of Christ, then all the world would have been *freed* from the curse, for a repealed law can neither bless the righteous nor curse the wicked!

Therefore it is we find that when Christless sinners are *really* awakened by the Holy Spirit to see and feel what a dreadful state they are in, they are always convinced that *they are under* the wrath of God and the curse of His law: see Romans 7:9-11, and thereby are they made to understand their dire need of a Saviour. But how could the Holy Spirit *use* the law if it had been repealed? And what of those who are never awakened and convicted by the Spirit, and who continue to despise the claims of God and flout His holy law? Ah, they shall find that after their hardness and impenitent heart they have but treasured up unto themselves "wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (Rom. 2:5).

God the Father, as the Governor of the world, *gave* the law. God the Son *magnified* it (Isa. 42:21) by expounding its purity, by obeying its precepts, by enduring its penalty. God the Holy Spirit honors the law by pressing upon the *sinner* its holy demands, and using it as a "schoolmaster" to bring him to Christ (Gal. 3:24). It is the special work of the Third Person of the Trinity to communicate unto each of the elect a sense of the infinite glory of God, the equity of His law, and the righteousness of His claims upon them. He begets within them a disposition which conforms them unto the discharge of their

duties, and this He does by putting the *law* into their minds and writing it in their hearts (Heb. 8:10). In this way it becomes their very nature to *love* God with all their heart so that they “might serve him without (servile) fear in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life” (Luke 1:74-75). Thus do both the Son and the Spirit honor the Father as Supreme Governor, and join in the same design to discountenance sin, humble the sinner, magnify the law, and glorify grace.

But this enforcing of the infinite glory of God, of His governmental supremacy, of His holy law, of His righteous claims, of His demand for loving obedience and an implicit compliance with all His commands, is what is *left out* of every false religion in the world. And today there are, perhaps, as many false religions *inside* of Christendom as there are outside—denials of the Truth, perversions of the Truth, half-truths twisted and mangled, lawlessness proclaimed under the pretense of exalting grace. “Pretense” we say, for God's grace never reigns at the expense of righteousness but “through righteousness” (Rom. 5:21). Divine grace teaches us that “denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world” (Titus 2:13). It is the ministers of Satan, “deceitful workers” (II Cor. 11:13), who are now by their one-sided teaching causing many to “turn the grace of our God into lasciviousness” (Jude 4).

Here, then, is the explanation why true repentance is so little preached today. The sense of God's governmental supremacy has been lost, the claims of His righteousness are ignored, the unchanging demands of His holy law are no longer recognized, hence, the unregenerate, not knowing God, having no sense of His infinite glory, and there being practically nothing in present-day preaching to instruct them therein, it follows that all their fancied reverence for and devotion to God takes its rise from merely *selfish* considerations, nothing but self-love (the *natural* instinct of self-preservation) lying at the bottom of modern “Christianity.” As it is natural for unregenerate men to

suppose they deserve something for their duties, so it is natural for them to be insensible of the infinite evil of their sins. And hence it is that new gospels are invented, new notions of “the way of salvation” are contrived, to *suit* the depraved taste of unhumbled and impenitent sinners, who are concerned about *their own* interests and care not what becomes of God's glory.

C. In the third place, true repentance presupposes a frank and *broken-hearted acknowledgment of our wicked failure to keep God's righteous law.* When the Holy Spirit opens the eyes of a sinner to see, in some measure, the supreme excellency and loveliness of the divine character, and shows him how infinitely worthy God is of our sincere adoration: when He assures us of the righteousness and goodness of God's law, and how justly He is entitled to be loved by us with *all* our hearts; and when He convicts us of our wretched and lifelong failure to respond unto His most just claims upon us; when He makes us feel that so far from having delighted ourselves in this infinitely glorious God, we have sought to dismiss Him from our thoughts, and set our hearts upon the perishing things of time and sense, seeking our satisfaction in *them*; and that so far from having owned His rightful supremacy over us and His just claim for our lives to be governed by Him, we have scorned His authority, ignored His commandments, and acted only in self-will—then it is, for the first time, we begin to *perceive* the infinite evil of sin, and are filled with self-loathing, horror, and grief at our terrible course of conduct.

What we have just endeavored to set forth is as different from what the strivings of an uneasy conscience produces as light is from darkness. One who has never been the subject of the supernatural and gracious operations of the Spirit may blame himself for sabbath-breaking, taking the Lord's name in vain, lying, drunkenness, who has never felt himself to blame for being disaffected to the divine character. Even the wicked king Saul once acknowledged, “I have sinned, I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly” (I Sam. 26:21). So has many another since then, who was yet altogether blind

to *the chief thing* wherein he was to blame. While men are ignorant of the beauty of God's character, of how absolutely worthy He is of being loved; while they perceive not the equity and blessedness of His law, of how absolutely entitled it is to implicit, unremitting, and joyous obedience; it is impossible that they should *repent* because of their failure to render *this* to Him.

Just as the absence of love to God, together with disaffection to His holy character, lies at the root of and influences the whole course of wickedness which mankind generally live in, so when Scripture calls upon men to repent of particular sins and turn to God, it is their *lack of love* for God and their *enmity against* His law, as manifested in and by their particular sins, which they are required to repent of. There is no sin whatsoever that any man is guilty of, but what it proceeds from a disrespect of God's character and a disregard of His authority. Thus it was said of David's sin that he not only had "despised the commandment of the Lord," but had "despised me," the Lord (II Sam. 12:9-10). Therefore in repentance we are required not only to judge our particular sins, but also that *insubordination to God* which produced them: we are to unsparingly and bitterly condemn ourselves because we have treated the Lord of glory, the King of the universe, with contempt. *That* is *the* crime for which we are, above all things else, to blame. Not until we have realized that our rebellion against God was *such* that nothing but the *death of Christ* could possibly atone for it, have we truly repented.

Thus, genuine and saving repentance is a taking side with God *against myself*. It is *not* that our repentance expiates our sins, for there is nothing meritorious about it. It makes *no* amends for our past vile conduct, nor does it move God to mercy. Yet is repentance required, yea demanded of us, and divine mercy is not shown where no repentance is. No, repentance is designed to make the heart *loathe* sin, and that through a deep sense of its infinite enormity and dreadful pollution; it is to make us *dread* sin through a heart-realization of its awful guilt. Only thus is the stubborn will

broken and the heart made contrite and prepared to turn unto the Lord Jesus and seek salvation through Him by grace alone.

D. *There are three kinds of repentance spoken of in Scripture.* First, that of desperation: Esau, Pharaoh, Ahithophel, and Judas are illustrations. Second, that of reformation: Ahab's and that which was brought about under the preaching of Jonah, are illustrations. Third, that which is unto salvation: Acts 11:18; II Corinthians 7:10. It is most important that we learn to discriminate between legal conviction and evangelical repentance. Multitudes are deceived at this point: they suppose that because they have been terrified through contemplating the wrath to come and have abandoned many of their evil ways, they have repented. This by no means follows. A legal conviction fears *hell*, evangelical repentance reveres *God*: the one dreads *punishment*, the other hates *sin*; the one informs the mind, the other melts the heart. Evangelical repentance makes no excuses and has no reserves, but cries, "I have dishonored Thy name, grieved Thy Spirit, abused Thy patience."

When a sinner is brought to truly realize that he is in great danger, he earnestly desires and diligently seeks deliverance, but that is from the natural instinct of self-preservation, and not because of supernatural grace at work in his heart. Tell him that *nothing* is required from him except to believe in Christ, rest on His finished work, and like a stony-ground hearer he at once receives the Word with joy, and no human being can make him doubt his salvation. Yet his heart has never been broken before God, nor has he any true love for Him. Such people mend their ways and become quite zealous religionists. They pray earnestly, read the Bible frequently, and sometimes become active workers in warning their fellows. But tell such that notwithstanding their tears, zeal, and believing the letter of Scripture, they deserve to be damned as much as ever they did, and that God can justly *refuse* them mercy, and their enmity against Him is likely to become swiftly apparent.

Thousands of deceived souls in Christendom, deluded by the false gossellers of the day, love a God who has no existence except in their own disordered imaginations. And terrible beyond words will be their disillusionment in the next world.

How sad and dreadful a thing will it be for such poor sinners when they come to die, and enter into the world of spirits, there to find that the God they once loved and trusted in, was nothing but an image framed in their own fancy! They hated the God *of Scripture*, and hated His *law*, and therefore would not believe that either God or His law were indeed what they were. They were resolved to have a god and a law more to their own minds. How dreadful will their disappointment be! How terrible their surprise! They would never own that *they* were enemies to God; now they will see that their enmity was so great as to make them resolutely—notwithstanding the plainest evidence— even to deny Him to be what He was. And how righteous will the ways of the Lord appear to be unto them then, in that He gave such over to strong delusion to believe a lie, because they would not love nor believe the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. (Jos. Bellamy)

While God be considered *merely* as creditor and sinners as debtors and Christ is regarded as paying the *whole* debt of all who believe, it cannot but be that souls will be fatally misled. Because Christ obeyed the law as well as suffered its penalty, it by no means follows that we are discharged from doing our duty. Yet, it is now being taught on every side that Christ has done all, and that there is nothing to do but firmly believe in Him, that Christians have nothing to do with the law—no, not as a rule of life—that they have been freed from all obligations to any duty. But Scripture affirms that Christ died to “purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Titus 2:14), and that so far from the Christian being discharged from duty, his obligations are immeasurably increased by the grace of the gospel (Rom. 12:1). But everything is viewed in a false light today, and

instead of Christ being regarded as the Friend of *holiness*, He is made the Minister of *sin*.

Repentance to be sure must be *entire*. Many will say, Sir, I will renounce this sin and the other, but there are certain darling lusts which I must keep. O sirs, in God's name let me entreat you: it is not the giving up of any one sin, nor fifty sins, which is true repentance; it is the solemn renunciation of *every* sin. If thou dost harbor one of these accursed vipers in thy heart, thy repentance is but a sham, if thou dost indulge in but one lust, and dost give up every other, that one lust, like one leak in a ship, will sink the soul. Think it not sufficient to give up thy outward vices, fancy it not enough to cut off the more corrupt sins of thy life; it is all or none which God demands. 'Repent,' says He, and when He bids you *repent*, He means repent of all thy sins; otherwise He can never accept thy repentance as being real. He says, 'Gild thee as thou wilt, O sinner, I abhor thee! Aye, make thyself gaudy, like the snake in its azure scales, I hate thee still, for I know thy venom, and I will flee from thee when thou comest to Me in thy most specious garb. All sin must be given up, or else you shall never have Christ; all transgression must be renounced, or else the gates of heaven must be barred against thee. Let us remember this, that repentance to be sincere, it must be *entire*.

True repentance is a turning of *the heart*, as well as of the life, it is the giving up of the whole soul to God, to be His forever and ever; it is a renunciation of the sins of the heart, as well as of the crimes of the life. Let none of us fancy we have repented, when we have only a false and fictitious repentance; let none of us take that to be the work of the Spirit, which is only the work of poor human nature; let us not dream that we have savingly turned to God, when perhaps we have only turned to ourselves, let us not think it enough to have turned from vice to virtue; let us remember it must be a turning of the whole soul to God, so as to

be made anew in Christ Jesus; otherwise we have not met the requirements of the text.

Lastly, upon this point, true repentance must be *perpetual*. It is not my turning to God during today that will be a proof I am a true convert; it is forsaking my sins throughout the entire course of my life, until I sleep in the grave. You must not fancy that to be upright for a week will be a proof that you are saved, it is a perpetual abhorrence of evil. The change which *God* works is neither a transitory nor superficial one; not a cutting off the top of the weed, but an eradication of it; not the sweeping away of the dust of one day, but the taking away of that which is the cause of the dust. You may today go home and pretend to pray, you may today be serious, tomorrow honest, and the next day you may pretend to be devout; but yet, if you *return*—as Scripture has it, like the dog to its vomit and like the sow to its wallowing in the mire—your repentance shall but sink you deeper into hell, instead of being a proof of divine grace in your heart. (from Spurgeon's sermon on Psalm 7:12)

Would that such faithful sermons were being preached in the so-called orthodox and fundamentalist pulpits today.

To learn *by* heart that which others say *from* the heart—to get the outline of a believer's experience, and then to adopt it skillfully to one's self as our *own* experience—this is a thing so simple, that instead of wondering there are hypocrites, I often marvel that there are not ten times more. And then again, the graces—the real graces within—are very easy to counterfeit. There is a repentance that needs to be repented of, and yet it approaches near as possible to true repentance. Does repentance make men hate sin? they who have a false repentance may detest some crimes. Does repentance make men resolve that they will not sin? so will this false repentance, for Balaam said, 'If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I will not go beyond the word of the Lord.' Does true repentance make

men humble themselves? so does false repentance, for Ahab humbled himself before God, and yet perished. There is a line of distinction so fine that an eagle's eye hath not seen it; and only God Himself, and the soul that is enlightened by His Spirit, can tell whether our repentance be real or no. (Spurgeon on Luke 13:24)

The Fruits of Repentance

To help the exercised reader identify true repentance, consider the fruits that demonstrate godly repentance.

A. A real hatred of sin as sin, nor merely its consequences. A hatred not only of this or that sin, but also of all sin, and particularly of the root itself: self-will. “Thus saith the Lord God, Repent, and turn from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations” (Ezek. 14:6). He, who hates not sin, loves it. God's demand is, “Ye shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for all your evils that ye have committed” (Ezek. 20:43). One who has really repented can truthfully say, “I hate every false way” (Ps. 119:104). He who once thought a course of holy living was a gloomy thing, has another judgment now. He who once regarded a course of self-pleasing as attractive, now detests it and has purposed to forsake all sin forever. This is the change of mind which God requires.

B. A deep sorrow for sin. The nonsaving repentance of so many is principally a distress occasioned by forebodings of divine wrath; but evangelical repentance produces a deep grief from a sense of having offended so infinitely excellent and glorious a Being as God. The one is the effect of fear, the other of love; the one is only for a brief season, the other is the habitual practice for life. Many a man is filled with regret and remorse over a misspent life, yet has no

poignant sorrow of heart for his ingratitude and rebellion against God. But a regenerated soul is cut to the quick for having disregarded and opposed his great Benefactor and rightful Sovereign. This is the change of heart which God requires.

“Ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner . . . for godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation” (11 Cor. 7:9-10). Such a sorrow is produced in the heart by the Holy Spirit and has God for its object. It is a grief for having despised *such* a God, rebelled against *His* authority, and been indifferent to *His* glory. It is this which causes us to “weep bitterly” (Matt. 26:75). He who has not grieved over sin takes pleasure therein. God requires us to “afflict” our souls (Lev. 16:29). His call is, “Turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: and rend your hearts and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful” (Joel 2:12-13). Only that sorrow for sin is genuine which causes us to crucify “the flesh with the affections and lusts” (Gal. 5:24).

C. A confessing of sin. “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper” (Prov. 28:13). It is “second nature” to the sinner to *deny* his sins, directly or indirectly, to minimize, or make excuses for them. It was thus with Adam and Eve at the beginning. But when the Holy Spirit works in any soul, his sins are brought to light, and he, in turn, acknowledges them to God. There is no relief for the stricken heart until he does so: “When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long, for day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer” (Ps. 32:3-4). The frank and brokenhearted owning of our sins is imperative if peace of conscience is to be maintained. This is the change of attitude which God requires.

D. An actual turning from sin. “Surely there is no one here so stupefied, with the laudanum of hellish indifference as to imagine that he can revel in his lusts, and afterward wear the white robes of

the redeemed in Paradise. If you imagine you can be partakers of the blood of Christ, and yet drink the cup of Belial; if you imagine you can be members of Satan and members of Christ at the same time, ye have less sense than one would give you credit for. No, you know that right hands must be cut off and right eyes plucked out—that the most darling sins must be renounced—if you would enter the kingdom of God” (from Spurgeon on Luke 13:24).

Three Greek words are used in the New Testament which present different phases of repentance. First, *metanoeo*, which means a change of mind (Matt. 3:2; Mark 1:15, etc.). Second, *metanolomai* which means a change of heart (Matt. 21:29, 32; Heb. 7:21, etc.). Third, *metanoia*, which means a change of course or life (Matt. 3:8; 9:13; Acts 20:21). The three must go together for a genuine repentance. Many experience a change of mind: they are instructed, and know better, but they continue to defy God. Some are even exercised in heart or conscience, yet they continue in sin. Some amend their ways, yet not from love to God and hatred of sin. Some are informed in mind and uneasy in heart, who never reform their lives. The three *must* go together.

“He that covereth his sins shall not prosper, but whoso confesseth and *forsaketh* them shall have mercy” (Prov. 28:13). He who does not, fully in his heart's desire and increasingly so in his life, turn from his wicked ways has not repented, If I really hate sin and sorrow over it, shall I not abandon it? Note carefully the “wherein in time *past*” of Ephesians 2:2 and “*were* sometimes” of Titus 3:3! “Let the *wicked forsake* his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him” (Isa. 55:7). This is the change, of course, which God requires.

E. Accompanied by restitution where this is necessary and possible. No repentance can be true which is not accompanied by a *complete* amendment of life. The prayer of a genuinely penitent soul is, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me” (Ps. 51:10). And where one really desires to be right with

God, he does so with his fellow-men too. One who, in his past life, has wronged another, and now makes no determined effort to do everything in his power to right that wrong, certainly has not repented! John G. Paton tells of how after a certain servant was converted, the first thing he did was to restore unto his master all the articles which he had stolen from him!

F. *These fruits are permanent.* Because true repentance is preceded by a realization of the loveliness and excellency of the divine character and an apprehension of the exceeding sinfulness of sin for having treated with contempt so infinitely glorious a Being, contrition for and hatred of all evil is abiding. As we grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord, of our indebtedness and obligations to Him, our repentance deepens, we judge ourselves more thoroughly, and take a lower and lower place before Him. The more the heart pants after a closer walk with God, the more will it put away everything which hinders this.

G. *Yet repentance is never perfect in this life.* Our faith is never so complete that we get to the place where the heart is no more harassed with doubtings. And our repentance is never so pure that it is altogether free from hardness of heart. Repentance is a lifelong act. We need to pray daily for a deeper repentance.

In view of all that has been said, we trust it is now abundantly clear to every impartial reader that those preachers who *repudiate* repentance are, to poor lost souls, “physicians of no value.” They who leave out repentance, are preaching “another gospel” (Gal. 1:6) than Christ (Mark 1:15; 6:12) and His apostles (Acts 17:30; 20:21) proclaimed. Repentance is an evangelical duty, though it is not to be rested in, for it contributes *nothing* unto salvation. Those who have never repented are yet in the snare of the devil (II Tim. 2:25-26), and are treasuring up to themselves wrath against the day of wrath (Rom. 2:4-5).

If, therefore, sinners would take the wisest course to be the better for the use of the means of grace, they must try to fall in with God's design and the Spirit's influences, and labor to see and feel their sinful, guilty, undone state. For this end they must forsake vain company, drop their inordinate worldly pursuits, abandon everything which tends to keep them secure in sin and quench the motions of the Spirit; and for this end must they read, meditate, and pray; comparing themselves with God's holy law, trying to view themselves in the same light that God does, and pass the same judgment upon themselves; so that they may be in a way to approve of the law and admire the grace of the gospel; to judge themselves and humbly apply to the free grace of God through Jesus Christ for all things, and return through Him to God. (Jos. Bellamy)

A summary of what has been before us may be helpful to some.

1. Repentance is an evangelical duty, and no preacher is entitled to be regarded as a servant of Christ's if he be silent thereon (Luke 24:47).
2. Repentance is required by God in this dispensation (Acts 17:30) as in all preceding ones.
3. Repentance is in nowise meritorious, yet without it the gospel cannot be savingly believed (Matt. 21:32; Mark 1:15).
4. Repentance is a Spirit-given realization of the exceeding sinfulness of sin and a taking sides with God against myself.
5. Repentance presupposes a hearty approval of God's law and a full consent to its righteous requirements, which are all summed up in "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart
6. Repentance is accompanied by a genuine hatred of and sorrow for sin.
7. Repentance is evidenced by a forsaking of sin.
3. Repentance is known by its permanency: there must be a continual turning away from sin and grieving over each fall thereinto.
9. Repentance, while permanent, is never complete or

perfect in this life. 10. Repentance is to be sought as a gift of Christ (Acts 5:31).

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