

# Free Grace Broadcaster

ISSUE 156

## ASPECTS OF REPENTANCE

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*“For godly sorrow worketh  
repentance to salvation  
not to be repented of.”*

2 Corinthians 7:10

### Our Purpose

*“To humble the pride of man,  
to exalt the grace of God in salvation,  
and to promote real holiness in heart and life.”*

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# 156

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# HE IS FAITHFUL AND JUST TO FORGIVE US OUR SINS

C.O. Rosenius (1816-1868)

*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins,  
and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.—1 John 1:9*

**I**S not this a short summary of the whole doctrine of the Scriptures concerning the acceptance of a poor sinner by God? Both with express words and with innumerable examples God has from the beginning of the world explained that the children of Adam are in this way to come to the grace of God. Let us therefore meditate upon these words of the beloved apostle. He says, “If we confess our sins.” We understand readily from the context what is meant by the term “the confession of sin.” The apostle has in the preceding verses spoken of them who “walk in darkness,” who say that they “have no sin,” but who “deceive” themselves (1Jo 1:6-8). By way of contrast he adds, “But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

In the first place, we learn from the passage cited that the apostle is not speaking of an external, accidental, or prescribed confession, but rather of the confession made by a poor, troubled sinner. A distinction must be made, however, between contrition and contrition. There are many who confess their sins with a certain kind of contrition, who yet continue in sin. We find this contrition in King Saul, who made this confession: “I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD, and thy words” (1Sa 15:24). But he never gained reconciliation and peace with God. Furthermore, King Pharaoh, who said, “I have sinned against the LORD your God, and against you” (Exo 10:16). But his confession was impelled by the fact that the eighth plague was already terrifying him. It was not actuated by a contrite heart and a repentant purpose to become reconciled with the God of Israel... Judas exclaimed in the bitterness of his soul, “I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood” (Mat 27:4).

*From all these examples we see that a true confession of sin can result only from a complete conversion produced by the Holy Spirit in the heart. Sin, as a crime against God, then causes sorrow and compels the heart to pour out its anguish before God, confess the sin, and pray for for-*

givenness. Many an impenitent slave of sin may at times confess his sins with bitter regret. But he confesses from sheer dread of the consequences of his sin. It is not sin itself as a crime against God that worries him. Neither has he any special desire to be wholly reconciled and united with God. The thing that troubles him is nothing more than an incidental taste of the bitter fruit of sin. Therefore he remains a slave of sin.

*A true confession of sin presupposes first of all the awakening of the conscience by the voice of God and the realization that sin has brought the soul under the condemnation of God.* Then, secondly, true confession premises that the sinner, thanks to the gracious call of God and the power of the gospel, has some hope of compassion and therefore throws himself before the Mercy-seat and begs forgiveness. He who knows nothing of grace, but only of sin and damnation, will never come to God. As a prime condition of confession a spark of faith is essential. As long as Adam and Eve knew nothing but their sin and the penalty, they fled from the face of the Lord. Thus it was for a time with King David. He kept away from God and would not confess his sin. “When I kept silence,” he says, “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.” But then he continues, “I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin” (Psa 32:3-5).

*He who would learn what a true knowledge of sin is, as also a true confession of sin, let him consider the fifty-first psalm.* We would note two elements only in this outpouring of David’s heart. Although King David by his notorious sin had caused great offense to the people, and had committed a grievous sin particularly against Uriah, God and his sin seem uppermost in his mind, and he, as it were, passes by his sin against men and says to the Lord, “Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight” (Psa 51:4). There you have the picture of a truly contrite heart.

Then again it is not the coarse outbreakings of sin alone which distress him. He sees with sorrow the evil in his very nature and goes to the deepest root of it when he says, “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psa 51:5). The most important thing is to recognize the evil in our nature and the deep depravity of our essential being. As long as men look only to the individual outbreaks of sin, and not to the sinfulness of the heart, it is always possible to construct some false consolation. They never feel that they are lost and condemned sinners. Consequently they are nev-

er made free and happy in Christ. It is therefore the most vital element in a true knowledge of sin that we recognize the deep depravity of the heart, the shameless contempt of God, the carnal security, unbelief, obduracy,<sup>1</sup> and hypocrisy, in order that our knowledge of sin may articulate<sup>2</sup> with God's own description of the heart as "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jer 17:9).

Look now and see if this is not precisely the thing that troubles the weak and trembling souls who constantly complain in this wise: "My heart is desperately wicked. It is hard, cold, hypocritical, deceitful, false, unstable, frivolous, and inclined to evil, yea, even diabolical." Then you know your heart is as God portrays it. Does it now seem to you that the judgment of God's Word concerning your heart is too drastic? On the contrary, you will find no condemnation that is too strong to fit the case.

"But I do not know my sin," you say. "I am secure, hard-hearted, frivolous, and hypocritical."

*Reply:* It is a great wickedness to be thus carnally secure, hypocritical, and worldly-minded. That spirit is the fountain of all sin. It is the natural depravity of the heart itself which you thereby recognize. Such acknowledgment is necessary. You have arrived at the stage where you sit in judgment upon yourself out of a clear conviction. You believe from a full heart that you are the meanest and most unworthy of God's creatures.

"Well, but it is true that I have not a broken, contrite, and humbled heart. I am, as a matter of fact, worldly-minded, vain, obdurate, and frivolous."

*Reply:* It is indeed true that such are the characteristics of the natural mind. You must recognize this depravity. It must become a frightful reality to you.

They, however, who confess their unhappy state of sinfulness should comfort themselves with the blessed assurance given in the Scripture under consideration: "[God] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1Jo 1:9). Know, then, that the Law can do no more than make you wretchedly conscious of your sins, that sin "might become exceeding sinful" (Rom 7:13). God desires only to impart to you the riches of His grace.

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<sup>1</sup> **obduracy** – obstinacy.

<sup>2</sup> **articulate** – agree.

The resistance of your mind is now broken. You admit the justice of God’s judgments. You no longer shun the light. You condemn yourself. You would be glad to accept Christ if only you dared. Hear what this same apostle says in another connection: “As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name” (Joh 1:12). Who are fit recipients of grace and forgiveness if not these wretched souls who condemn themselves?

**Untamed human nature defends itself. It rouses itself against the judgments of God and becomes embittered. But he who condemns himself is open to the grace of God. To such all mercy is shown and declared.** We should realize that the punishments referred to in the Scriptures, the judgments and penalties, are not addressed to those who condemn themselves and long for grace and reconciliation with God through the Savior. They are aimed at the arrogant despisers and contemners,<sup>3</sup> who either openly resist the Spirit and the Word of God or as hypocrites go about with Judas Iscariot among the disciples of Jesus, cherishing some pet sin, which they refuse to give up, and even defending it.

*From A Faithful Guide to Peace with God.*

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**Carl Olof Rosenius** (1816-1868): one of the leaders of the great revival of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He was born in Sweden to a clergyman father. He preached powerful sermons, and also authored and edited the Pietist magazine, which reached a circulation of 10,000. His best works include *Day by Day with God*, *A Faithful Guide to Peace with God*, and *The Believer Free from the Law*. Today he is known for these writings and his hymns, which emphasize two major themes: the sinfulness of man and the grace of God.



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<sup>3</sup> **contemners** – those who treat or regard God’s warnings with contempt.

# EVANGELICAL REPENTANCE

John Hill (c. 1711-1746)

*Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed,  
I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because  
I did bear the reproach of my youth.—Jeremiah 31:19*

**T**HESSE words refer to the children of Israel as a nation, the subject matter of comfort, in their exile state; but they must not be confined to them or to the Jewish dispensation.<sup>1</sup> “Whatever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Rom 15:4). The Old Testament is as much the Word of God as the New, and no part of the inspired writings is of private interpretation, since the whole is left upon record, that it may be “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2Ti 3:16). So far therefore as our circumstances, cases, and conditions are like to theirs, which are spoken of under that dispensation, so far may we justly apply the word to ourselves, which was delivered by God to them. Applying this general rule to the words before us, they present us with a very just and beautiful account of the difference which there is in man in his converted state, to what he was before the grace of God had reached his heart. The language of every sincere penitent is the same wherein Ephraim is represented as bemoaning himself in the verse before my text: “Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the LORD my God.” These words are very moving and emphatical, and plainly do they show us how ineffectual is all the moral situation in the world to bring a soul to Christ without the powerful operations of the blessed Spirit. We slight His promises, disregard His threatenings, and remain stupid and secure even under His afflicting hand, until “the dayspring from on high” visits us (Luk 1:78). “Thou hast chastised me,” saith Ephraim, “and I was chastised; but I continued, notwithstanding this, an undaunted heifer, and behaved under it as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke, till I was enabled by the blessed Spirit to cry out with my whole heart, ‘Turn thou me, and I shall be turned, for

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<sup>1</sup> dispensation – age; period.

thou art the Lord my God: I desire none other but thyself.” Then follow the words of our text: “Surely after that I was turned, I repented,” etc.

The easiest method I can take is to divide the text into the three following general heads:

1. We may see in Ephraim’s pathetic language the way and manner wherein true grace at first discovers itself in the man that is born of God: “I repented.”

2. We are taught the only spring from whence the amazing change always proceeds: “Surely after that I was turned, I repented,” etc.

3. We have further an account of the progress of the work in the hand of the Spirit, wherein the true nature of repentance unto life is particularly described: “After that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth.”

**1. THE FIRST THING OBSERVABLE IN THESE WORDS IS THE CONSTANT WAY AND MANNER WHEREIN TRUE GRACE DISCOVERS ITSELF WHEN ONCE IT IS IMPLANTED IN THE HEART: “I repented,” says Ephraim, “Surely I repented.”**

Agreeable to this is the language of the prodigal: “I will arise and go to my father” (Luk 15:18). Old things are passed away with the man that is born of the Spirit. His change of state is soon made to appear by his change of temper and action. Sin ceases to be the object of his delight; he cannot contentedly dwell with the workers of iniquity; his face is turned Zion-ward; and his eager steps show how desirable and delightful are wisdom’s ways to his renewed soul. The man, as our Saviour expresses it (Luk 15:17), is come to himself. The image of God is stamped upon his soul; His Law is written in his heart; and therefore he cleaves to the Lord with steadfastness and runs the ways of His commandments (Acts 11:23, compared with Psalms 119:32). Former lusts are lamented over; he is ashamed of the reproach of his youth; and he flies from the temptations of Satan and the corruptions of his own heart, desirous forever to have done with sin, and to keep at perpetual distance from all iniquity. “What have I to do any more with idols?” are the words not of returning Ephraim only (Hos 14:8), but of every regenerate man in the world, as soon as ever he receives the welcome news of peace and pardon, and tastes the sweetness of that grand promise of the covenant of grace: “I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more” (Heb 8:12). He repents and would gladly call back



again his past actions, had he but a power of mending them. He smites upon his thigh, as being thoroughly sensible that he is gone too far in so vicious a course, continued too long at a distance from God and the ways of righteousness, laying hold, at the same time, of the promises of free grace, which the Spirit, as the glorifier of Jesus, communicates to him, in the day of his espousals. Thus true grace at first discovers itself.

**2. I GO ON NOW TO CONSIDER THE ONLY SPRING FROM WHENCE THIS AMAZING CHANGE DOTHS ALWAYS PROCEED:** “Surely after that I was turned, I repented.” Grace first enters the heart before it can be discovered in the life and conversation. The God of all grace first of all draws us; for else we shall never move towards him. “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him” (Joh 6:44). We have neither the ability nor will to repair to the blessed Jesus; nor do we see ourselves in need of a Saviour till the eyes of our understanding are opened. Great darkness is fallen upon our eyes; a double veil is drawn over our hearts; and who but the mighty God can cause light to arise unto them that sit in darkness and in the region of the shadow of death? This He claims as His peculiar honour, His sole prerogative; and we who believe will readily acknowledge that “God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2Co 4:6). We should never else have known ourselves, our sins, or Christ Jesus the great atonement. We should never else have been led into our own hearts, or the purity and spirituality of the divine Law, whereby the offence came to abound, and sin to appear in its proper light and colours as exceeding sinful (Rom 7:9, 13).

Converted we may be through grace, but convert ourselves we cannot, for “the way of man is not in himself” (Jer 10:23). There may be a change in some outward actions where a principle of life and grace is wanting in the heart; legal convictions there may be, and often are, to a very high degree in a sinner where saving faith is not implanted. But the end of these things sufficiently declares the partiality and unsoundness of their first beginning; for as the apostle saith in another case: “The end of those things is death” (Rom 6:21). Terror and despair on one hand, or presumption and carnal security on the other, are the constant attendants of all legal convictions. That alone is the repentance which is not to be repented of, which begins with a thorough change of heart. This the apostle lays down as the ground of our future obedience and the way in which discriminating grace at

first discovered itself in the day of our effectual calling: “And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1). Had not the same mighty power which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead been exerted towards us, we should still have continued in the same conversation which we had “in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind” (Eph 2:3). Our love of sin would still have remained though we might have abstained, through the influence of some lower motives, from the grosser acts of sin. But quickening grace opens the way to godly sorrow, and this always issues in evangelical repentance (2Co 7:10). “Surely after that I was turned, I repented.”

**3. THIS LEADS TO A MORE PARTICULAR CONSIDERATION OF THESE WORDS, AS CONTAINING AN ACCOUNT OF THE PROGRESS OF THIS GREAT WORK IN THE HAND OF THE SPIRIT, WHEREIN THE TRUE NATURE OF REPENTANCE UNTO LIFE IS CLEARLY DESCRIBED.**

Here it is necessary to enquire:

a. What are the things in which the soul is instructed by the Spirit when once a principle of grace is wrought in the heart?

b. What are the various actings of the soul in consequence hereof?

**a. What are the things in which the soul is instructed by the Spirit when a principle of grace is wrought in the heart?**

This work of the Spirit usually begins with leading the soul into the knowledge of sin, after which he instructs him in the nature of pardoning grace and mercy. Under both these heads a few particulars are necessary.

*First, the Spirit begins his work, with leading the soul into the knowledge of sin, and this in three things:*

1. The Spirit shews us *the nature of sin, as attended with guilt*, whereby we are obnoxious to the curse of the law. So long as we are ignorant of God’s righteousness, we go about to establish our own righteousness (Rom 10:3). Nothing formidable appears in sin, nothing faulty in our vain attempts to wash it away. Even our own iniquity is a little transgression, and with Ephraim we conclude that in all our labours He shall find none iniquity in us that were sin (Hos 12:8), till the Spirit takes the work into His own hands, and lays down the strait rule of truth to our actions, causing our eyes to behold our errors, till He presents Sinai’s covenant to our view, attended with the “blackness, and darkness, and tempest” with which it was at first promulgated (Heb 12:18). Sin will never revive till the commandment comes

(Rom 7:9), but then we die at once; our hopes vanish, and all our expectations of pardon and life by our own obedience fall to the ground. Then we “see that it is an evil thing and bitter” (Jer 2:19), that we have forsaken the Lord our God and know, to our sorrow and amazement, what is the just demerit of our many abominations. Indignation and wrath hang over our heads; tribulation and anguish are already begun in our souls; hell does often-times flash as it were in the face of the awakened sinner; and the terrors of the Lord make him afraid. The curse of the Law is continually sounding in his ears, and the bottomless pit seems ready opened to destroy him. The guilt of sin, as exposing to wrath and punishment, the Spirit leads the soul first into the knowledge of.

2. The Spirit shews the sinner *the defiling nature of sin*, as opposed to the holiness of that God with whom he hath to do. As attended with guilt, sin is the object of our fear; as attended with filth, pollution, and defilement, it is the object of our shame. An almost Christian sees sin in the first light, but the man who is altogether such is the only person that can behold it in the second. We may dread the punishment of sin from God and be afraid of the shame of our sins, should they be known to men; but to hate sin, as offensive to the pure eyes of infinite holiness, to loathe it because it is the abominable thing which His soul hateth, this is an attainment which only the renewed soul arrives at. Cain was afraid lest ever one that met him should take vengeance upon him for his sin. “My punishment is greater than I can bear” (Gen 4:13), was his constant complaint, and his only concern. But David says, “Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin” (Psa 51:2). And Job breaks forth, “I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:6). And to whom God gives a new heart and a right spirit, it is said, they shall remember their own evil ways and their doings which were not good and shall loathe themselves in their own sight, for their iniquities, and for their abominations (Eze 36:31). We never take a view of the holiness of God with a spiritual eye, but we always immediately reflect upon ourselves with shame and confusion of face. Thus it was with the prophet Isaiah: “Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone [a man cut off]; because I am a man of unclean lips...for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts” (Isa 6:5). The Spirit leads us by the Word into a thorough sight of the defiling nature of sin.

3. The Spirit shews the sinner *the many heinous aggravations* where-with his sins in particular have been attended. The Word of the Lord “is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb 4:12). It

searches “all the inward parts of the belly” (Pro 20:27), and unrips the many secret cavities wherein our abominations have been concealed—the brooding-place of sin, where all our vileness hath been hatched and every lust conceived. And “thou art the man” is the awful sentence which every convinced sinner hears and feels (2Sam 12:7) before he turns to the strong-hold as a prisoner of hope. The Spirit thus shews us the plague of our own hearts; and how sad is the sight! How affecting the prospect when we have no view of the blood of Jesus or that propitiation which He hath made for the sins of His people! But praised be His name and adored be the exceeding riches of His grace! The Spirit doth not leave the soul here in this forlorn bewildered state; no, He takes him further and instructs him.

*Secondly, the Spirit instructs the soul in the nature of pardoning grace and mercy*, which is the sweetest sound that an awakened conscience can ever hear, the most agreeable message a self-condemning sinner can ever receive. Concerning this,

1. The Spirit instructs the sinner, that *the privilege is attainable*; that there is forgiveness with God, that He may be feared. Some promise is the soul directed to; some example of sovereign grace appears in his view; or He makes all His goodness to pass before him, proclaiming in the most reviving language, “The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin...” (Exo 34:6-7).

2. The Spirit instructs the sinner in *the only way through which His grace and mercy is to be attained*, lets him know, that an absolute God is a consuming fire, and directs him to Christ Jesus, Who is the way, the truth, and the life. The Spirit is, for this reason, said to glorify Christ (Joh 16:14), because He takes of Christ’s things, and shews them unto those for whom He died. Of Him He always testifies (Joh 15:26), and to Him He ever leads the returning sinner. It is “through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins” (Act 13:38). The righteousness we need is already wrought out; our pardon is bought; our reconciliation is procured; Christ is our peace. This the Spirit shews when we are led to the Father by Him.

3. The Spirit instructs the sinner into *the way through which pardon is communicated to him*: that it was obtained by Christ; that it is received by faith; and that whosoever will may take of the waters of life freely (Rev 22:17). This is the use of those many and exceeding precious promises which are upon record in the gospel. They are all designed for the encouragement of faith. And let me tell you, poor soul,

that be thy faith but as a grain of mustard-seed, which, says the Lord, is the least of all seeds (Mat 13:32), it shall in nowise be despised; for saith God himself by the prophet Zecharias, “Who hath despised the day of small things?” (Zec 4:10). Weak faith may lay hold of a strong Saviour, and a trembling hand often receives a whole Christ and pardoning grace and mercy from Him. “These [things]”, saith the beloved disciple, “are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name” (Joh 20:31).

4. The Spirit further instructs the sinner, who are *the persons to whom this pardoning grace and mercy are applied*. This He teaches by the absolute promises of the Word which reach the case of the most rebellious criminals. When the Redeemer of Israel ascended up on high, He led captivity captive: He “received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also” (Psa 68:18). What an emphasis doth the Spirit lay upon that word, “yea, for the rebellious also”; but not a greater than the poor sinner may pronounce it with. The good Lord help some poor soul at this time to lay hold of it, to put in for a share in so great mercy, so invaluable a blessing! Grace and glory were purchased for the chief of sinners—for “this is a faithful saying [a truth that may be depended upon], and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting” (1Ti 1:15-16). Is this a saying worthy of all acceptation? Then carry this saying and this example of grace, both of them, to the throne of grace and give Him no rest who sits thereon, till He afresh verifies the one, and confirms the other. These things the Spirit never fails to instruct the man in, when once a principle of grace is wrought in the heart. These particulars I have had opportunity only to hint at; I trust the Spirit, Who is the best teacher, will bring them to your remembrance, in your private thoughts, with double sweetness and enlargement. I am now to enquire:

**b. What are the various actings of the soul in consequence of these instructions.**

These lie all of them very plain in the text before me, “After that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth.”

First, *the soul thus instructed, sorrows after a godly sort*. This is the first thing in which gospel repentance discovers itself to be genuine

and of the right kind; of which smiting upon the thigh, is very expressive. The phrase is used in another place, by which this passage may be justly explained: “Cry and howl, son of man: for it [i.e. the sword of God’s anger] shall be upon my people, it shall be upon all the princes of Israel: terrors by reason of the sword shall be upon my people: smite therefore upon thy thigh” (Eze 21:12): i.e., give a sign of thy sorrow, a token of thy grief, that it may appear to others, that you, above all men, are affected with the judgment of the Lord, which is denounced against Jerusalem.

Sin, my friends, wounds the conscience; mercy and grace melts the heart; and no sooner doth the poor creature become sensible of the one as well as the other, but he becomes like new bottles, ready to burst (Job 32:19). Permit me to call over the former times wherein you were enlightened. How was it with you, when the dayspring from on high visited you? when the Spirit first spoke peace and pardon to the guilty and rebellious? when the Lord addressed you in the language following my text, “Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord” (Jer 31:20). Look into your hearts, while I am giving you a description of mine own. Did you not then seek a corner, wherein you might hide yourselves from every one, save the great God to Whom you made supplication? And how did you act before your offended but gracious judge? Did not you smite upon your thigh, standing amazed at the riches of His goodness, long-suffering and forbearance, and astonished at your ungrateful carriage, your most unworthy behaviour towards Him? Say, poor hearts! whether you did not sorrow after a godly sort (2Co 7:9). It may be your tears drowned your voice; but it was impossible they should spoil your prayers. Look but to the ninth verse of Jeremiah 31, and you may see your own picture, when you were thus prostrate at the throne of grace: “they shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble: for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my first-born.” There was the grand occasion of Ephraim’s bemoaning himself afterwards, because, saith the Lord, “there is hope in thine end” (Jer 31:17). The first act of the soul after the Spirit’s instruction, is his smiting upon his thigh, or sorrowing after a godly manner.

Secondly, *the soul thus instructed is filled with shame and confusion of face*, attended with an utter hatred of the sins he hath been guilty of.

“I was ashamed, yea even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth.” Shame is begotten in the soul, but it is of an ingenuous nature. The oftener and more intensely he looks upon the long and black score which grace hath forgiven him, the more is he ashamed, and the higher doth his just indignation against sin arise: an indignation against himself for what is past, and a vehement desire to keep clear of the like offences in his future course. “For behold, this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge!” (2Co 7:11). Loathing of ourselves always follows admiring thoughts of the sovereign, matchless, and distinguishing grace of God. The blood of Jesus is the best glass wherein to see the filth and defilement of sin. And that man can never be said in gospel-phrase to repent, who is unaffected with the love of a dying Saviour, or unconcerned at the purity and holiness of a sin-hating God. We shall never indeed smite upon our thighs, till God shews us, together with our sins, His own pardoning grace and mercy. There may be fear, but there will be no love till we hear Him saying, “I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee” (Jer 31:3). And is this, poor soul, the real matter of thy experience? You may then conclude that Jesus, Whom God hath exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, hath bestowed upon you repentance, with forgiveness of sins, that He hath granted unto you repentance unto life (Act 5:31; 11:18).

Thirdly, *the soul thus instructed, hath an abiding sense of these things.* He is not weary of his rags today, and pleased with them again tomorrow, humbled for sin now, and wallowing in the same mire and dirt anon. No, “I did bear,” saith Ephraim, “the reproach of my youth.” “Wherever I went, I carried it along with me. My sin was ever in my eyes, and mine iniquity was always before me. I never thought the lighter of my sin, for its being forgiven me; it was still as grievous, as hateful, and offensive in mine eyes as ever.” Happy the souls whose hatred against sin continues, when the edge of their first desires and the warmth of their first affections are lost! [Happy are] they, who can say at all times, “Lord, I cannot bear to offend Thee, howsoever Thou mayest deal with me. I love Thy law, I love Thine ordinances, I love Thy ways, though I cannot as often as I wish for find the place where my beloved feedeth, and where He causeth His flocks to rest at noon (Song 1:7). Sin is my burden, my complaint, and my greatest grievance; though I still find a ‘law in my members, warring against

the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members” (Rom 7:23). This is the fruit of the Spirit’s work in thy heart, and argues thy repentance to be genuine and sincere.

Fourthly, *the soul thus instructed is most sensibly affected with those sins to which he hath been most addicted.* Heart-sins are bewailed by the sincere Christian, and youthful transgressions are never forgotten by him. Our own iniquity is most carefully watched against, and most frequently confessed before God. This pricked us to the heart when first the law entered, and it wounds to the quick afterwards, both under the smiles of His love, and the hidings of His countenance. Ephraim’s confession and prayer every regenerate soul may join in, and often doth, only with a change of circumstance: “Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips. Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses: neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods” (Hos 14:2-3). Here he confesses and bewails the sin he had been addicted to, in the most particular and affectionate manner. “I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth.” This is the time when sins are usually most vigorous and lively. Blessed then are they who in their early part of life are brought to see their own vileness and the need they stand in of a Saviour! To be brought to Christ betimes,<sup>2</sup> oh, how desirable a thing it is! Many sins are hereby prevented, which are often the great burden of old age; and what is still more pleasing, the good ways of God do then sustain no reproach upon our account.

I might add,

Fifthly, *the soul thus instructed always applieth to the blood of Christ for pardon.* But this having been in some measure spoken to under a former head, and not expressly contained in the text, I shall wholly wave any enlargement, and conclude with mentioning three or four remarks upon the whole.

Remark 1. Repentance can never be a condition of the covenant of grace, seeing it is itself a blessing of the covenant, and a blessing owing wholly and alone to almighty power and grace. “Surely after that I was turned, I repented” (Jer 31:19). It is strange we should be so fond of making conditions for ourselves, when we have not the least warrant from God so to do. But vain man would be wise and in his natural state unwilling to be saved merely upon the footing of grace!

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<sup>2</sup> **betimes** – early.



Remark 2. What a mighty change doth grace work in the soul. Old things pass away, and all things become new (2Co 5:17). The ruins of the fall are not repaired only by Christ; but the old foundation is wholly removed, and a new one is laid, in which grace alone bears the glory.

Remark 3. See, believe, what doctrines make most for your encouragement at first and for your comfort and support afterwards. Hope that maketh not ashamed (Rom 5:5) can proceed only from Christ Jesus, Who is our hope (1Ti 1:1). And every doctrine which leads not to Him, either directly or by consequence, always damps our hopes, mars our peace, and spoils our comfort.

Remark 4. We must look to the same power and grace that laid the foundation, to rear the superstructure and finish the building. Repentance is a daily work; and we have as much need to say every day, as we had at our first setting our faces Zionward, "Turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the LORD my God" (Jer 31:18). The text holds always true; may we be led daily further into the sweetness and comprehensive fullness of it. "Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth."

From *Evangelical Repentance*.

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**John Hill** (c. 1711-1746) was born at Hitchin, Hertfordshire, UK. He became a member of the Independent Church in Hitchin, and later attended the Independent academy in London. His first charge was at Stoke Newington in 1733, later becoming the assistant pastor to Robert Bragge in London, and then successor to Dr. Thomas Ridgeley at the Independent chapel at Three Cranes, Thames Street, London. In His great grace, God used John Hill's preaching for the conversion of many souls as he traveled about the country extensively. He suffered frequent and painful illnesses, which ultimately took his life. Over thirty of his sermons were published posthumously to great interest.



I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah.—*Psalms 32:5*

O worldly formalist, if thou wouldst make sure thy hope, and obtain a discipleship that will stand all tests, begin this day at the beginning. Count all the past but loss. Fling away thy vain hopes and self-righteous confidences. Give up thy fond idea of securing both earth and heaven. Go straight to Calvary; there be thou crucified to the world, and the world to thee, by the cross of Christ (Gal 6:14). Go at once to Him who died and rose again, and drink into His love. One draught, nay, one drop of that love will forever quench your love of sin, and be the death of that worldliness which threatens to be your eternal ruin.—*Horatius Bonar*

# THE BENEFITS OF TRUE REPENTANCE

John Gerhard (1582-1637)

*Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.—Matthew 4:17*

**T**HE very foundation and principle of a holy life is godly sorrow for sin. For where there is true penitence, there is forgiveness of sin. Where there is forgiveness of sin, there is the grace of God. Where the grace of God is, there is Christ. Where Christ is, there is Christ's merit. Where Christ's merit is, there is satisfaction for sin. Where there is satisfaction, there is justification. Where there is justification, there is a glad and quiet conscience. Where there is peace of conscience, there is the Holy Spirit. Where the Holy Spirit is, present there is the ever blessed Trinity; and where the Holy Trinity is, there is life eternal. *Therefore where there is true penitence, there is life eternal.* And hence where there is no true penitence, there is neither forgiveness of sins, nor the grace of God, nor Christ, nor His merit, nor satisfaction for sin, nor justification, nor peace of conscience, nor the Holy Spirit, nor the blessed Trinity, nor eternal life. Why therefore do we delay repentance? Why put it off until tomorrow? Neither tomorrow nor true repentance is in our own power. For we must render an account at the final judgment, not only for tomorrow, but for today as well. That tomorrow shall come is not certain, but that everlasting destruction shall overtake the impenitent is certain. God has promised grace to the penitent soul, but He does not promise a tomorrow.

*Christ's satisfaction is of no effect but in the heart of the truly contrite.* Our iniquities separate between God and us, writes the prophet Isaiah (Isa 59:2); but through repentance we are again restored to His favor. Confess and bewail the guilt of thy sin; so shalt thou realize that God is reconciled to thee in Christ. "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions," says the Lord (Isa 44:22). Our sins were therefore recorded in the court of heaven. "Hide thy face from my sins," prays the prophet (Psa 51:9). The Lord hath set our iniquities before Him (Psa 90:8). "Return, O LORD," was the prayer of Moses (Psa 90:13). Thus our sins separate us from God. "Our sins testify against us" (Isa 59:12), complains the prophet Isaiah. They accuse us

therefore at the bar of divine justice. “Cleanse me from my sin” (Psa 51:2), pleads David; and thus sin is revealed as a foul defilement in the sight of God. “Heal my soul, for I have sinned against thee,” again he prays (Psa 41:4). And thus sin is a disease of the soul. “Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book” (Exo 32:33), saith the Lord. Therefore on account of our sins we shall be blotted out of the book of life. “Cast me not away from thy presence” (Psa 51:11), was the Psalmist’s earnest prayer. Thus for our sins God casts us off. “Take not thy holy spirit from me” (Psa 51:11). Therefore by sin we drive the Holy Spirit of God from the temple of our hearts just as bees are driven away by smoke, and doves by a foul odor. “Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation” (Psa 51:12). Therefore sin brings anguish of soul, and wastes the very powers of our hearts. “The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof, because they have transgressed the laws,” exclaims the prophet Isaiah (Isa 24:5). Therefore sin is a sort of infectious poison. “Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD” (Psa 130:1), says the Psalmist. Hence by our sins we are cast down even to hell. Formerly we “were dead in trespasses and sins,” according to the apostle (Eph 2:1). Therefore sin is spiritual death to the soul.

Through...sin man loses God. God is the infinite and incomprehensible good; to lose God is therefore an infinite and inconceivable calamity. As God is the greatest good, so sin is the greatest evil. Punishments and afflictions are not real evils, because much good may come out of them. On the other hand, we should esteem them good because they come from God, the highest good, from Whom naught but good can come. Christ Himself, the highest good, suffers such afflictions, and He could not be a partaker of what was really evil. They lead also to the highest good, that is, eternal life. Through suffering Christ entered into His glory (Luk 24:26); and through much tribulation must we Christians enter into eternal life (Act 14:22). Sin is the greatest evil because it draws us away from the highest good. The nearer we approach God, the farther we get away from sin. The nearer we come to sin, the farther do we withdraw from God. How salutary then is true repentance, which releases us from sin and leads us back to God. Sin is so exceeding sinful, because of the greatness of God, whom we offend by our sin; and so great is He, that the heavens and the earth cannot contain Him. And on the other hand, our repentance is so great because of the greatness of Him to Whom through our repentance we return. The sinner’s conscience, which he has defiled through sin, the Creator whom he has offended, the very

fault by which he transgressed, the blessings which he has thus abused, and the devil at whose impulse it was committed—all unite in accusations against him. How blessed is repentance which frees him from such an accusation!

Let us make haste, then, let us make haste to employ this sovereign remedy for our sinful malady. If thou shouldst repent even in the hour of death, thou wouldst not so much forsake thy sins, as thy sins would forsake thee. Thou wilt scarcely find one who has truly repented in the hour of death, except indeed the thief upon the cross. “I served thee fourteen years,” said Jacob to Laban (Gen 31:41). “It is time now that I provide for mine own house.” And thou—if thou hast been so careful for thy life in this world for so many years—is it not reasonable and proper that thou shouldst now begin to provide for thine immortal soul? Day by day our fleshly nature leads us into new sins; let the Holy Spirit then wash them away by our daily sorrow and repentance. **Christ died that sin might die in us; and can we willingly let it live and reign in our hearts, since the Son of God Himself gave up His life to destroy its power in us?**

*Christ does not enter the heart of a man unless a John the Baptist first prepare the way for Him by repentance.* God does not pour the oil of His mercy except into the vessel of a truly contrite heart. God first puts the soul to death, as it were, through contrition, that He may afterwards quicken it through the consolation of the Holy Spirit (1Sa 2:6). He casts it down to hell in godly sorrow for sin, that He may bring it up again by the blessed power of His grace. Elijah first heard the great and strong wind rending the mountains and breaking in pieces the rocks, and after the wind an earthquake, and after the earthquake a fire; and at length the still small voice (1Ki 19:11, 12). *Thus the terror of the law precedes the sweetness of divine love, and sorrow for sin the consolation of the Spirit.* God does not bind up thy wounds, until thou acknowledge and deplore thy sin. God does not cover thine iniquities, until thou first uncover them in humble penitence. He forgives them not until thou hast confessed them. He does not justify thee until thou hast first condemned thyself, and He does not afford His rich consolations until thou hast first despaired of help in thyself. May God work true repentance in us through His Holy Spirit!

From *Gerhard's Sacred Meditations*, by C. W. Heisler.

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**John Gerhard** (1582-1637): Lutheran theologian who also studied philosophy and medicine at Wittenburg and Marburg. Served as superintendent of churches of Heldburg before becoming professor of theology at Jena University in 1616.

# HEART SURGERY

Robert Bolton (1572-1631)

*Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart,  
and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles,  
Men and brethren, what shall we do?—Acts 2:37*

**I**N these words there is shown a thorough wounding of the hearts of these men when they had heard of the greatness of their sin. Therefore observe that contrition in a new-born soul ordinarily is in proportion to his former vanity. To whom much is forgiven, they love much: and this is a fountain of evangelical repentance. As a traitor condemned to die, receiving a pardon, would wonderfully break his heart to think he should be so villainous to so gracious a prince, so it is with a Christian that beholds God's mercy to him.

Christians after their conversion desire to see their sins to the utmost, with all the circumstances that make them hateful, such as the object, nature, person, time, age, etc., in which, or how they were done, that so they may be more humbled for them.

If it be not so (it may be otherwise, for God is a free agent, and is not tied to any proportion of sorrow) then such troubles as these usually seize on them:

First. They are often afflicted with this, that their conversion is not thorough and sound, and so do not perform the duties of godliness with such heartiness and cheerfulness.

Second. They are many times haunted with listlessness and coldness in their progress in Christianity.

Third. They are visited with some cross or other that sticks by them, to make them lay a greater load upon sin.

Fourth. They are more subject to be overtaken with their easily besetting sin, because they have no more sorrowed for it; for the less it is sorrowed over, the more it ensnares men.

Fifth. Some of them have been assaulted upon their bed of death with sorrowful and strong temptations. Not that men should think this is always the reason of it, for God has aims in all His works known only to Himself; but I have known some have so been troubled, and this may be in great mercy to make a weak conversion more strong. Lest any Christian should be troubled at it, *note in contrition*

*there must be sorrow of heart because of sin; there must be a dislike of it in the will; there must be a strong reasoning in the mind out of the word of God against sin; this is the sinew of repentance.* There must be a resolution, and striving and watching against it, like Job who made a covenant with his eyes (Job 31:1); there must be a grieving that he is not excelling in all these; and here he must make up what he wants in the former. These be in some measure in all Christians. Some are more eminent in one part, some in another; as Joseph had little sorrow, but a strong resolution, because he had so strong a temptation, and withstood it; he had strong reasons beyond nature to resist sin, and resolve against it: so that it is not so much the measure as the truth of every part that is required. But if they be not excelling in great sinners, they are to mourn for the want of them. To help here, observe these *ten degrees of repentance, or rather helps to humiliation.*

**First help:** a sight and survey and full apprehension of all your vile-ness, iniquities, transgressions, and sins, the number and nature of them. For which purpose, take these two points:

**I. Be acquainted with all the ways by which you can possibly analyze your sin.**

1. Be perfect in the law of God, and look yourself in the pure crystal glass there. Be thoroughly catechized in the commandments.

2. Take a survey of all the wrong which we have offered to all things in heaven and earth. All things are the worse for a wicked man, so far as sin can add hurt unto them.

3. Take a perusal of yourself from top to toe. The sins of your eyes: each thing you look on, not making a holy use of them, is a sin of omission. Consider then how many there are every day, and if one part so many, what are there in the whole body?

4. Consider all the commissions and omissions, as you stand in several relationships: as a creature, how you have carried yourself to your Creator; as a husband to your wife; as a father, to your children; as a master, to your employees; as a neighbour, to them about you, or to God's children; as a subject, and so on. Take notice of all the failings in all these, and you will find sufficient matter for a day of humiliation.

5. Labour to get (as I am persuaded every Christian has) two catalogues of your sins, before conversion and since; of God's mercies, spiritual and temporal.

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**II. Take note of the guilt of original sin.** Now because a Christian may have his heart locked up more at one time than at another, let him in case of barrenness consider these six quickening points:

1. Look to the seed, and sink, and natural inclination of your heart to all sorts of wickedness. For suppose by the mercy of God you were able to say that you could not possibly find any actual sin within you; yet look back to the corrupt fountain; and there you shall find that you, and the most holy Christian on earth, whilst you live in this house of flesh and tabernacle of clay, you have it in your nature to commit the greatest sins: and what hinders but God's free mercy? This then, thoroughly considered, is sufficient matter to humble you, to consider with yourself, "What a wretch am I yet, that I have this seed still within me!"

2. Consider and thoroughly weigh the circumstances of all your sins of your unregeneration: at what time, in what place, with what scandal, etc.

3. In case of barrenness, consider: we had our hands in the sin of Adam, and so brought all the sorrow, sin, and damnation upon all men that are or shall be damned, and we are guilty of all the horrors of conscience. If we had not hearts of adamant,<sup>1</sup> hewn out of a rock, or had not sucked the breast of wolves or tigers, we should be moved at this, which is able to break a thousand adamants. I speak advisedly; it is able to open a wide gap of penitent tears in the most flinty soul of the most hardened sinner.

4. Cut off all sin, both original and actual that you have taken notice of; and do but consider the imperfections that follow the best actions, the innumerable distractions of the most holy prayer that ever you made, the sins of the last Sabbath, your deadness, fruitlessness, etc.

5. Remove all personal sins; yet consider how many ways we have had our hands in other's sins, which, it may be, they have carried to hell with them. We have a world of matter from which to break our hearts; for we may be guilty of others' sins thirteen ways. There is none but are guilty of some of these ways:

(i) By encouraging them, as those prophets which cried, "Peace, peace; when there is no peace" (Jer 6:14), when they are only so-called formal or polished preachers, those that sow pillows under men's el-

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<sup>1</sup> **adamant** – a stone once believed to be impenetrable in its hardness.

bows, that heal the wounds of the people with fair words, when there is nothing towards them but tumbling garments in blood, and vengeance, and devouring with fire (Isa 9:5: Jer 14:14: Eze 13:10).

(ii) By provoking, as Job's wife said to him, "Curse God, and die" (Job 2:9). So, "fathers, provoke not your children to wrath" (Eph 6:4), for they then are guilty of their sins.

(iii) By familiarity with sinners, with company-keeping. If you surrender your company to public house haunters, to ungodly persons, idolaters, and to God's enemies, look for that sharp check which the prophet gave to Jehoshaphat for associating himself with wicked Ahab, saying, "Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the LORD? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord" (2Ch 19:2). Or, "when thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him, and hast been partaker with adulterers" (Psa 50:18). Therefore, as Moses said to the people, "Separate yourselves from the tents of Korah, lest ye perish with them" (see Num 16:21); and, "Come out of Babylon, my people, have no communion with that whore, lest ye perish in her sins, and be destroyed with her plagues" (see Rev 18:4). David says, "I have not sat with vain persons, neither will I go in with dissemblers" (Psa 26:4). And who would vouchsafe to let their love run on such in this life, from whom they must be separated in the world to come? But for dealings in your own business calling, such as buying, selling, correspondence, etc., we must have these, or we must [go] out of this world (1Co 5:10-11).

(iv) By participation: "Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves" (Isa 1:23); so magistrates who execute not their office are guilty of all the sins which the people commit within the compass of the time of their government; and they are all set on their score, without repentance.

(v) By silence: when you hear a good man critical, and say nothing; especially dumb dogs (Isa 56:10). Every Sabbath is a cruel day to them, for their silence is the cause of all the iniquities done that day; and all these things which they do amiss, whether by swearing, public house haunting, etc., all are set on their score: so all those who are faint and cowardly for God's glory and truth.

(vi) By defending: woe to them that call darkness light, and light darkness (see Isa 5:20). Therefore if any by quickness of wit will labour to maintain usury, bribery, etc., they are all guilty of those sins.

(vii) By counseling: as Jezebel counseled her husband to kill Naboth (1Ki 21:7).



(viii) By commanding: as David commanded Uriah to be set in the fore-front of the battle, and was therefore guilty of his death (2Sa 11:15).

(ix) By commending: as those who commended Herod for his oration, saying, "It is the voice of a god" (Act 12:22). They were guilty of his sin in taking honour from God.

(x) By connivance: as Eli winked at his sons (1Sa 3:13), for which you may see what a fearful judgment fell upon that house. If we had no other sins in a day of humiliation, it were able to break the hardest heart; but especially for masters of families, who wink at their children and servants' swearing, Sabbath-breaking, etc. If these be not guilty of the former sins, yet they are guilty in not praying with them, and bringing them to extraordinary exercises.

(xi) By consenting; as Paul bewailed that he had carried the clothes of them that slew Stephen when he was stoned (Act 22:20).

(xii) By not sorrowing for them. David shows what Christians ought to do (Psa 119:136; Mar 3:5).

(xiii) By not praying against them for the suppression of them.

6. Consider the sins of the times. David's eyes gushed out with tears to see men transgress the law (Psa 119:136). So Lot's heart was vexed daily with the sins of the people amongst whom he lived (2Pe 2:8). And "Blessed are they that mourn" (Mat 5:4). Observe these several branches well, and thou shalt find sins enough to mourn for.

*Second help:* a right apprehension of God's wrath and fiery indignation, and the pure eye of God against sin. The Christian often complains that he cannot grasp God's wrath sufficiently. Let him take these helps:

1. The severity of God's judgments against sin, for which, 1. He threw down the angels from heaven to be devils for ever, who might have done Him abundance of glory. 2. For but eating forbidden fruit, which some count a small fault, He cast Adam out of Paradise, and sent a world of misery upon him and his posterity. 3. He drowned the world (Gen 7), which shows the infinite purity in God, not to abide sin. 4. He burnt Sodom for those very sins now reigning amongst us (Eze 16:49-50). 5. He rejected the Jews, who were His most dear people: for they so provoked God, and His wrath has so fiercely seized on them, that they have wandered as exiles in the earth for centuries. 6. Consider, He has created horror of conscience, which is a hell upon earth, for the punishment of sin; but above all, the torments of hell,

that woeful place and state prepared for the wicked, where the greater part of the world shall be howling for ever.

2. Consider how hard a thing it is to get pardon for sin, in that the justice of God was hard to be satisfied. Imagine all the world were turned into a mass or lump of gold, the stones of the streets into precious pearls, and the sea and rivers all flowing with liquid streams of most pure gold, they would not satisfy the wrath of God for the least sin (Mic 6:7). If all the angels and creatures in heaven and earth had joined together, and made one fervent prayer for man's sin-even if they had offered themselves to have been annihilated-it could never have been effected. Nay, if the Son of God Himself should have supplicated His Father with most earnest entreaties, He could not have been heard unless He had taken our flesh upon Him and suffered what devils and men could imagine to inflict upon Him. [This], well considered, is infinite cause to bring us to a sense of God's wrath, that He should lay and suffer such infinite torments to be on Him, that He cried out unto God, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mat 27:46). Though He loved Him infinitely as Himself, yet He would have His justice satisfied.

3. The irresistible coming of God against sinners, though He is wonderfully ready and easy to be intreated whilst He vouchsafes<sup>2</sup> a day of visitation; but if men will withstand the day, then He comes in devouring rage, and His wrath being once kindled shall burn to the bottom of hell. Then "his arrows shall drink blood and eat flesh" (see Deu 32:42). Then will He meet them as a bear robbed of her whelps, and tear in pieces when there is none to help (Hos 13:8; Psa 7:2). And in Isaiah 66:15 is set down the manner of His coming, with chariots like a whirlwind.

4. God's holiness, which opposes sin, and is contrary to it, so that He looks not on the least sin with the least allowance.

**Third help:** a sense of the unspeakable misery you are liable to by reason of sin. For which purpose consider all your sins, with their circumstances, as of times past, present, and to come:

1. Time past. Look back upon all your sins past that ever you did commit, all you have been guilty of ever since you were born, original or actual, known or unknown, of thought, word, and deed. They are written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond, not to be erased out. They are all upon record, and now lie as so many sleeping

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<sup>2</sup> vouchsafes – graciously gives.

lions, gathering strength and vigour until such time as the Lord shall awake the conscience; and then they will appear, and rend your soul in pieces. I say, let natural men consider this point, and they shall see themselves miserable. For there are some for a small sin put to such frights, that they could not be comforted in a long space. If these for such small things, in men's account, have come to such a pass that they took no delight in any earthly thing, but are put to their wit's end, ready to make away themselves, wishing themselves annihilated, then what tearing of hair, what horror of conscience will seize upon you on your bed of death. With what a ghastly countenance will you look upon that black and hellish catalogue of all your sins—such as lies, oaths, railings, scoffings at God's people, impure speeches, mad passions, goods ill gotten, time ill spent, profanation of Sabbaths, and killing Christ at every sacrament, as all natural men do! These shall be summoned before you and charged upon your conscience by the just God. Then consider in proportion what horror will be in your heart! No heart can conceive it, nor tongue of men and angels utter it. Now then, attend, and let none bless themselves and say, "I never felt this misery, therefore it shall never hurt me." I tell you, it is the perfection of your misery that you are insensible of it. To be soul-sick, and feel it not, is the full completion of misery, and the reasons why you cannot see it, are these seven:

(1) The devil while you are his, will not trouble you. He is a politician of almost six thousand years' experience, and knows, if once you see your sins, he shall lose you; therefore he blinds you.

(2) Your conscience is lulled asleep with carnal pleasure and worldly contentments.

(3) A bucket of water is heavy on earth. In its own place it is not so. When men are merely natural, sin is in its own place, and the weight is not felt.

(4) The conscience of a natural man is like a wolf in a man's body. While it is fed with carnal friends, good fellowship, some great business of the world, and so on, it is quiet; but take this away, and then it is felt.

(5) A natural man is spiritually dead, and a dead man feels no weight, you know.

(6) He looks on sin through false glasses, such as upon covetousness and usury, through the glass of good business; so prodigality, through the glass of liberality.

(7) For want of consideration. If we would by ourselves consider when the minister presses Sabbath-breaking, or any other sin, and say, "This is my case, but now by the mercy of God I will be humbled," this would much help us to see our misery.

*Fourth help:* a base esteem of yourself. Consider:

If you had looked upon that man in Matthew chapter eight, possessed with a devil, who dwelt among the tombs, went naked, chains would not hold him, the devil was so powerful in him, you would have thought him a dreadful spectacle of extreme misery, to have a legion of devils, by computation six thousand, six hundred sixty-six. But I tell you, you had better have a thousand legions than one unrepented sin. The devil can have power but over the body, and so he may over a saint, and had over Christ, to carry Him to the top of a pinnacle; but never was obstinate and final impenitence found in a sanctified man.

Sin made the devil so ugly as he is, being otherwise of an angelic nature. Only sin makes him odious; therefore it is worse than either the tongue of men and angels can express.

All the devils in hell, in your body, cannot do you the least hurt for the salvation of your soul. But one sin willfully unrepented of, and so unpardoned, will damn it; so that it were better to be possessed with a thousand devils, than one sin unrepented of and unpardoned.

*Fifth help:* an inward sorrow of heart and bleeding of soul. Here take these aids:

1. Your heart has been the fountain, or rather sink, from which have issued many foul streams, where all ill has been forged, all evil words, raging passions, and wicked thoughts. Now then, by the rule of proportion, let your heart be a fountain of sorrow for sin. If Christ open a fountain of mercy for mourners, let us not be excluded for want of sorrow.

2. Consider the heart of Christ. He had not taken upon Himself a heart of flesh, but for sin, which for your sake was filled with that singular depth of sorrow and grief, that if all the godly sorrow of all the Christian souls from the beginning of the world to the end thereof, in heaven or in earth, dead or alive, were collected into one heart, they could not countervail<sup>3</sup> the depth of His anguish. Shall then His blessed soul fall asunder in His blessed breast, assaulted with all the

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<sup>3</sup> **countervail** – offset the effect of.

wrath of God, and the second death? Shall His soul be like a scorched hearth, and so pressed with the flames of God's revenging wrath, which wrung from Him those bloody drops and rueful cries, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mat 27:46). The wrath of God was so fierce on Him, that, I say, drops of blood fell from Him. And shall your heart be as a stone within your breast, and never be moved? Oh, prodigious hardness, and worse than heathenish ingratitude!

3. If your heart be not wounded here in some measure truly, it shall hereafter be filled with such endless horror that would grieve and break ten thousand hearts to think on it. Is it not better then to mourn a little here for sin, than to have our hearts enlarged to endure unto all eternity the horror of hell? Is any man so senseless as to think he shall go to heaven as in a bed of down, and never be touched for his sin? [This] is as impossible as for you to reach heaven with your hand. Hezekiah, a man perfect in all his ways, complained and chattered like a crane (Isa 38:14); David roared all the day long (Psa 32:3); Job complained, "The arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinketh up my spirit" (Job 6:4); nay, Christ Himself cried out in the agony of His spirit.

4. With this broken heart in your breast you shall bring down the glorious majesty of heaven, God Almighty with His chair of state, to sit in your soul; for He has two habitations: 1) in heaven; 2) in a humble heart.

5. Get this and get all, if you have a true title and interest unto the passion of Christ, and all the comforts in the book of God, the promises both of this life, and of that to come.

*Sixth help:* an outward bewailing with heart-piercing confession. Where,

1. Consider the practice of the saints of God. They poured out tears, as men water out of buckets. Mary washed Christ's feet with her tears. The publican struck on his breast with a sorrowful acknowledgment of his sins.

2. Consider your hands and eyes and tongue and heart have been instruments of God's dishonour; therefore, by the rule of proportion, you should have the works of your hands instrumental demonstrations of repentance: your eyes fountains of tears; your tongue should utter, and heart suffer, grief.

3. Consider that for outward things men will weep tears: such as for dejection from high places, losses, crosses, in wife or children. As Da-

vid for Absalom, so it is with many-what wringing their hands, tearing their hair, bitter crying! Then the loss of Christ, Who is infinitely better than husband, wife, child, or anything in the world-this, this, how should it break your heart! If all Job's troubles were on you, and could wring one tear from you, then one sin should wring blood from your heart.

*Seventh help:* a hatred and aversion in your will from sin. 1. Consider what sin is in itself. 2. How God is provoked with it. 3. How thou art hurt by it.

1. What sin is. Sin in itself is fouler than any fiend in hell, because it made him so vile, as fire is hotter than water that is heated.

It is extremely ill; nothing comes near it. I consider of sin here in the abstract; so it is a greater ill than the damnation of a man's soul; for when two ill's fight together, that which conquers must needs be the greater. Now, when a man has lain in hell ten thousand years, he is as far from coming out as ever; for the eternal duration in hell cannot expiate sin.

It is most infectious. It is compared to a leprosy; for the first sin that entered into the world stained the beauty of it. No sooner was sin committed by Adam than the stars seemed impure in God's sight. The beasts were at variance, the earth full of brambles, and all things cursed.

Sin soured all natural, religious, and civil actions.

If a man in authority be sinful, all under him will be infected.

Sin is most filthy, and compared to the most vile things that can be named. No dirt or filthy thing can stain a sunbeam; but sin stains a more glorious creature, which is the soul of man.

Sin is of that hellish nature, that it draws out and takes in to itself the wrath of God.

Sin is full of cursed consequences: deprivative and positive. Deprivative: loss of God's favour; the blood of Christ; the guard of angels; peace of conscience, etc. Positive: it brings all misery spiritual; hardness of heart, blindness of mind, horror of conscience, despair, etc., with all temporal losses and crosses here, and hereafter eternal torments of soul and body.

2. God is provoked with sin.

Each sin is the only object of God's infinite hatred. His love is diversified to Himself, His Son, the angels, the creatures; but His hatred is confined only to sin. What infinite of infinites of hatred you

have on your soul, with all your sins, when each sin has the infinite hatred of God upon it!

Each sin is against the majesty of that dreadful Lord of heaven and earth, who can turn all things into hell, nay, heaven and hell into nothing, by His word. Now, against this God you sin, and what are you but dust and ashes, and all that is naught? And what is your life, but a span, a bubble, a dream, a shadow of a dream? And shall such a thing offend such a God?

Every sin strikes at the glory of God's pure eye.

Sin is that which killed His Son. The least sin could not be pardoned, but by Christ's carrying His heart-blood to His Father, and offering it for sin.

Each sin is an offence to all His mercies. This aggravated the sin upon Eli (1Sa 2:29), and of David (2Sa 12:8-9). Mercy is the most eminent attribute of God, and therefore the sin against it is the greater. What therefore are our sins in the time of the gospel?

3. Consider how you are hurt by it; for,

Each sin ruins your soul, which is better than the world.

Each sin, bring it never so much pleasure in the committing, leaves a threefold sting: a. Natural; b. Temporal; c. Immortal.

a. Natural. After worldly pleasure comes melancholy-properly, either because it [pleasure] lasted no longer, or they had no more delight in it, and so on. Just as all waters end in the salt sea so all worldly joys are swallowed up in sorrow's bottomless gulf.

b. Temporal. There is labour in getting, care in keeping, and sorrow in parting with worldly goods.

c. Immortal. God will call you to judgment for it. Each sin robs you of abundance of comfort. What a vast difference do we see in conquering sin and being conquered by sin! As, for instance, in Joseph and David, the one [was] raised after his conquest to much honour; the other, scarcely enjoyed one good day after he was conquered, but, as Hezekiah, walked heavily in the bitterness of his soul all his days. As some divines have said of Guliacius and Spira: the one is honoured in Calvin's epistles for ever; the other, after his backsliding, lived a while in exquisite horror, and afterwards died in despair.

Your own conscience will accuse you one day for every sin, though now it seems hid to you. And your conscience is more than a thousand witnesses; therefore you will certainly be overthrown. For the sins which perhaps you live in now and count but of no consequence,

many poor souls are at this instant burning in hell. What misery and hurt then awaits you for the same!

*Eighth help:* a strong reasoning in your mind against sin.

1. The horror of hell. Therefore Christians wrong themselves who will not use this as a motive: the unquenchable wrath of God shall feed upon your soul if you commit this sin.

2. The joys of heaven. I shall dwell with God for ever, if, believing, I make conscience of every sin as an evidence and fruit of saving faith.

3. And above all, the glory of God. If God's glory and the damnation of our souls were in a balance, His glory should preponderate and prevail, while we prefer God's glory above our own salvation. Moses and Paul would have done that, although we cannot seek it but in and by our salvation, as the means is subordinate to the end.

Likewise, from every line in God's Book: His attributes, as, His justice and His mercy; His justice to terrify sinners, His mercy to allure us to Him; His judgments; [and] His promises.

Also, from places of Scripture. From examples in Scripture: "How shall I do this, and sin against God?" saith Joseph (see Gen 39:9). From your former estate: "Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord" (Eph 5:8). From the end of all things: "Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness" (2Pe 3:11).

Also, from yourself. Your soul is immortal. All the devils in hell cannot kill it. Your body is frail. All helps cannot long uphold it.

Also, from Christ. Look upon Him weeping, nay, bleeding on the cross, and saying thus, "Sin brought Me from the bosom of My Father to die for it."

Also, from the incomprehensible excellency of God, against Whom you are sinning.

*Ninth help:* a sincere opposition in your life to sin. These are several aids:

1. When any bait of Satan, or old companions, would allure you to sin, take this dilemma: either I must repent, and then it will bring more sorrow than the pleasure did good; or not repent, and then it is the damnation of my soul.

2. Consider your madness, which lays most desperately in one scale of the balance, heaven, the favour of God, the blood of Christ, and your own soul; in the other, a little dust, money, base lust, etc., and



lets this over-sway, which brings rottenness to your bones, perhaps loss of your good name.

3. And that you may yet be further armed to withstand the assaults of your three grand enemies, the world, the flesh, and the devil, which daily seek the destruction of your soul, consider these twelve antidotes:

(a) Consider the shortness of the pleasure of sin, with the length of the punishment; the one for a moment, the other everlasting.

(b) Consider the companions of sin; for one sin never goes alone, but, being once entertained, it sets all the faculties of the soul also in a combustion, and so procures a spiritual judgment, if not temporal, upon estate and person.

(c) Consider, your life is but a span, a breath, a blast soon gone. Now if we had all the pleasure in the world, yet being so soon to lose it, it is not worth esteeming.

(d) Consider, sin causes us to lose a greater good than that can be, as the favour of God, interest in Christ, guard of angels, right to created things, and so on.

(e) Consider the uncertainty of repentance. You may never have motion to repent after you have sinned, and so are damned.

(f) Consider the nearness of death to you. Some have not lived out above half their time, others almost all of it. Young and old often die suddenly.

(g) Consider, one moment in hell will be worse than all the pleasure in the world did good, though it should have lasted a thousand years twice told. So, on the contrary, one moment in heaven doth more good than all the hardness and pains in good duties, or persecution for them, did hurt.

(h) Consider the dignity of your soul. It is more worth than a world. Lose it not then for any sin.

(i) Consider the preciousness of a good conscience, which is a continual feast. This you lose by sin.

(j) Consider, you sin against a world of mercies which God has sent to you, such as to soul, body, good name, estate, and others, that belong to you.

(k) Consider, nothing can wash away any sin but the blood of Christ. And will you now pollute yourself again, as it were, to have Him killed afresh to wash away your sin?

(1) Consider, the ancient martyrs and worthies chose rather to burn at a stake than they would sin; and will you so easily be drawn to it, or rather run to it? Anselm said, If the flames of hell were on the one side, and sin on the other side, I would rather lie in those flames than sin; and others would rather be torn in pieces with wild horses. We have as precious means as they; and, if our hearts were as good, we should have the like affections.

*Tenth help:* a sincere grieving that you can do these things no better, considering,

1. Though you had a thousand eyes and could weep them all out and shed rivers of tears, and a thousand hearts to burst, yet all were not sufficient for the least sin or vanity, either of the eye or heart. How much more when our hearts are barren and dry had we need to labour for this sorrow!

2. Consider, that when you have made the best prayer, or watched most diligently over yourself, for the right and due sanctification of the Sabbath, or spent yourself in a day of humiliation, you had need to cry and burst your heart again for the imperfections and failings thereof.

In this sorrow, that you can perform good duties no better, weave up the web, what's lacking in any of the rest, here make it up; and to encourage you, you have this happiness joined with it, that though your grief be small, if it be true, to cause you to sell all, that is, to part from every sin for Christ, and take Him as a Husband and a Lord, both for protection and government, then, by the consent of all divines, it is godly sorrow, and certainly accepted in Christ.

From *Helps to Humiliation*, by Robert Bolton.

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**Robert Bolton** (1572-1631): Puritan preacher, author, classical scholar, and philosopher. He attended Oxford University, and was a lecturer in philosophy at age 35 when converted under the preaching of Thomas Peacock. He then became pastor at Broughton in Northhamptonshire where he remained until his death.



**T** rue repentance is basically three things: *1. A change of mind.* See Luke 15:11-24. This account is generally called the story of the ‘prodigal son.’ This Scripture shows us a change of mind which is the essential meaning of repentance in the Bible. Notice the son’s words in verse 21: ‘Father I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.’ See the change! The son had before taken his portion of goods and went into ‘a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living,’ but now he is quite different! See also the following passages for this ‘change of mind’: Matthew 21:28-32; Acts 2:37-41. *2. A change of feeling.* Religion without emotion is religion without life! Many love to rejoice in the promises of God, but we cannot truly rejoice until we have come to an experiential knowledge of sin and have ‘godly sorrow’ stain its dye into our hearts. Then shall we weep over our sins, with tears flowing like rivers! (See again 2Co 7:9-10). *3. A change of purpose.* ‘I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.’ (Luk 15:18-19). The Scripture says, ‘Let the wicked forsake his way’ (Isa 55:7) and ‘whoso confesseth and forsaketh them [sins] shall have mercy’ (Pro 28:13). Paul said: ‘Ye turned to God from idols’ (1Th 1:9). Men must be turned ‘from the power of Satan unto God’ (Act 26:18). From servants of sin, we become Christ’s slaves when the omnipotent One looses us from Satan’s dominion (2Ti 2:25-26).—*James C. Heard*

# THE PUBLICAN'S PRAYER

Theodore Van Der Groe (1705-1784)

*And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.—Luke 18:13*

O wonderful love of heavenly mercy which sleeps so long, until the day dawns and the daystar arise in the hearts of poor lost sinners! Mercy rains indeed like manna about our tents; but God then gives to His poor believing ones both the hunger and the strength as well to go forth without the camp of this vain world and of self-righteousness, and there to gather into their lap that heavenly manna and to bear it home with joy, while the water from the rock flows like a stream behind them. And then it is thus: “They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them” (Isa 49:10). How a merciful Christ stands here, even today knocking upon the doors of those who, alas, are still bound with the yoke of unbelief upon their jaw bone, and crying: “If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me” (Rev 3:20). What excuses shall they make if they let their Beloved stand any longer there while His head is filled with dew, and His locks with the drops of the night (Song 5:2). Now that they have seen a publican going before unto the throne of grace, shall they remain behind? If even the harlots and the publicans have gone before them into the kingdom of heaven, shall they not now follow? What would then be said of the matter? Let them but read attentively what is written: “For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him” (Heb 10:37-38).

This then is the great and blessed lesson which the publican teaches us by his prayer: that a true and unfeigned repentance is never present without true faith. Through the one the sinner loses life in himself and through the works of the law, and through the other he finds life everlasting through mercy in Christ. When a sinner is truly penitent, then his heart is wholly laid low through a sense of the heavy burden of his sins and of God's righteous condemnation and terrifying wrath. This

burden presses the poor man as it were down to the earth and he becomes completely exhausted under it. If he could not now have a view by faith of the merciful majesty of God in Christ, and could not with the serpent-bitten Israelites look upon the uplifted brasen serpent, the crucified Son of man, then the miserable and dejected sinner would utterly succumb and perish, for he finds no means whereby his life can be saved and reserved, apart from Christ and mercy. The hypocrite, in his hour of greatest need, when in danger of drowning, is always able to lay hold of a plank of self-righteousness, and on that he floats along until he comes here or there to land at last. But a true penitent who is quite cast down under the burden of sins and God's anger, can find no salvation in tears or good desires, through sudden joy or vain delusion, nor through anything else. He sees and feels himself, for all that, completely and eternally lost. There remains nothing for him than the Lord Jesus Christ and Him crucified, and God's pure mercy, promised freely to truly penitent and despondent sinners in the sacred gospel. How should he die then, without laying hold on that? Shall the name of the Lord be for us a strong tower, and shall a truly penitent soul who can find no refuge elsewhere, not run into it, and be safe? (Pro 18:10). Either repentance is not complete, or it must surely lead on to faith, to which it is God's ordained pathway. For a true repentance can never end in delusion or despair; for then the Holy Spirit's own work would be in vain, which He has begun solely in order to save poor sinners. In short, he who is once truly dumbfounded and condemned in his own conscience on account of his sins before the throne of righteousness must without delay in sincere faith appeal thence to the throne of grace if he is to be saved. Thus he must of necessity, whilst in this state of penitence, make one further step and venture with his heart in faith, looking unto the blood-red sufferings of Christ, laying hold thereon as the only complete atonement for his sins. All who are unable to do this can receive no mercy; for God never bestowed mercy upon any out of Christ. "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law" (Rom 3:28). Such then was the publican's penitent mouth.

This is the doctrine of gospel repentance, or of the true conviction of sins by means of this Scripture example clarified and sufficiently confirmed. It can now be seen what things must be considered and carefully observed when a man is disposed to make a thorough examination of his own penitence. Let each then ask these questions: Where are my penitent *feet*, my penitent *eyes*, my penitent *hands*, and my penitent *mouth*? Where are they all together? And where is each

token of my repentance in particular? For whosoever has once received truly penitent feet, eyes, hands and mouth, will not, like temporary believers, presently lay them aside and lose them; but he shall, living and walking by the Spirit, daily live before the all-high God in sincere and ever-increasing repentance for sin, in accordance with the reconciled and child-like state of a Christian. Whosoever has once become a true penitent publican shall never become a proud Pharisee. Heart repentance is not only an indwelling, but an increasing grace of the Spirit in all sincere children of God, and it shall endure as long as their sin endures. This again is an important point of difference between true and false believers, since the latter usually spring up quickly and grow high, while the former thrust their roots downward into the depths. When false believers have borne the yoke of repentance for a while, they cast it off from their necks like ungovernable cattle; or they prefer to buckle it on so loosely that they can always bear it in comfort. It seems to them that repentance is no longer a daily labour for a gospel Christian, who has too many other things to do than to be ever mourning over his sins. They consider that a flourishing Christian must have so thoroughly understood and grasped the doctrine of merciful atonement through Christ's blood, that he need stand not a moment more before God's throne. The just must live by faith: there you have it, say they (Rom 1:17). And indeed, so it is, be it but a sincere penitent faith, not a deceptive, vain, deluded faith in which shining Pharisees walk, and all such as turn the grace of our God into lasciviousness and deny, with their hearts and deeds, the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ (Jud 4).

In contradistinction to these, there is another sort of hypocrite that we may call legal hypocrites, who indeed are always mourning over sins, but who never truly hate sin, nor ever sincerely and in faith come unto Christ with their burden. The first-named sort of hypocrites have a faith without repentance; and the last-named have a penitence without faith; and for this reason neither of them has a true penitence or a true faith. Quite otherwise is the case with sincere souls whose work is in truth. The divine secret of their state lies in this: that they, through the indwelling of the Spirit, Who remains with them, always retain a believing penitence and a penitent belief, and that they ever walk and increase unfeignedly in both, according to the measure and degree of each one's particular grace. This is the right state of true Christians: the more penitence, the more faith, and again, the more faith, the more repentance. And they both serve to the furtherance of sanctification and to the deeper rooting of true be-

lievers in Christ. The close and strong connection between these three—penitence, faith, and sanctification—is the great and wondrous secret of heaven which hypocrites, as such, never rightly comprehend; for “the secret of the LORD is with them that fear him” (Psa 25:14). Let us never then in any degree loosen those three strong pivots of Christianity. Thus we shall, through God’s grace, build a solid Christendom upon the rock Christ, against which the gates of hell shall never be able to prevail, however much it may be shaken and moved.

From *The Publican’s Prayer*, by Theodore Van Der Groe.

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**Theodore Van Der Groe** (1705-1784): the most renowned preacher in The Netherlands during the Dutch national conversion in the late eighteenth century. The country had drifted away from the reformed theocratic ideal towards the ideas of the Enlightenment. Van Der Groe emphasized personal conversion in his preaching, as well as the need for the nation to return to Christ before God’s judgment upon the nation’s godlessness. He wrote a respected commentary on *The Heidelberg Catechism*, entitled *The Christian’s Only Comfort*.



The first occurrence of the word ‘repent’ furnishes the key to its meaning and scope. In Genesis 6:6 we read: ‘And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth.’ The language is figurative, for He who is infinite in wisdom and immutable in counsel never changes His mind. This is plain from ‘God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent’ (Num 23:19); and ‘The Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for he is not a man, that he should repent’ (1Sa 15:29); and again, ‘with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning’ (Jam 1:17). Thus, in the light of these definite statements we are compelled to conclude that in Genesis 6:6 (and similar passages) the Almighty condescends to accommodate Himself to our mode of speaking, and express Himself after a human manner—as He does in Psalm 78:65; 87:6; and Isaiah 59:16, etc.

Now by carefully noting the setting of this word in Genesis 6:6 and attentively observing what follows, we discover: first, that the *occasion* of repentance is *sin*, for in 6:5 we read that ‘God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth’: thus repentance is a realization of the exceeding sinfulness of sin. Second, that the *nature* of repentance consists in a *change of mind*: a new decision is formed in view of the deplorable conditions existing—‘it repented the LORD that he had made man.’ Third, that genuine repentance is *accompanied by* a real sorrow for sin, for that which necessitated the change of mind: ‘and it grieved him at his heart’ (cf. 2Co 7:10). Fourth, that the *fruit* or consequence of repentance appears in a determination to *undo* (forsake and rectify as far as possible) that which is sorrowed over: ‘and the LORD said, I will destroy man’ (v. 7). All of these elements are found in a repentance which has been produced in the heart by the gracious and supernatural operation of the Holy Spirit.—*A.W. Pink*

# BIBLICAL REPENTANCE: THE NEED OF THIS HOUR

L.R. Shelton, Jr. (1923-2003)

**R**EPENTANCE and faith are inseparably connected together in the Word of God, and they must be set forth together. Let us not put asunder what God has joined together.

Listen to these verses of Scripture where these great truths are set forth together in the Word of God! In Mark 1:15, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel." In Acts 5:31, "Him [Christ] hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins." Again, in Acts 20:21, Paul declared that he had preached "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." Then one of our Lord's last commandments to His disciples before He returned to heaven, as found in Luke 24:46-48 was, "Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things."

There are many illustrations given in the Bible of those who came to Christ in confession and repentance, and looked by faith to Him to save them and forgive them of their sins. The thief on the cross repented and believed; the prodigal son repented and believed; and so we call upon men today to repent and believe.

You see, our Lord told His disciples and us as well, to follow His example in preaching repentance and remission of sins through faith in Christ, because this truly shows His ministry while here upon earth. His *first* message as recorded in Mark 1:15 was, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel." And His *last* words to His disciples and to us were those of Luke 24:46-48, "that repentance and remission of sins [through faith in Christ] should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." Yet it seems that many are afraid to preach repentance today. Our Lord was not afraid to call men to repentance, and He has commissioned us to do the same. So we desire to proclaim it to all men that they should repent: that they should lay down their arms of rebellion and turn to God with



broken hearts, sorrowing over sin, so they may receive remission of sins in Christ's name because of His blessed work of redemption.

“Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luk 24:47). These are words full of meaning which need to be proclaimed today as well as then. God requires repentance to be preached in Christ's name because He is willing for sinners to be saved. There is truly remission of sins through faith in Christ for those who see themselves to be sinners—ungodly sinners, lost, without God and without hope, full of sin, full of unrighteousness—if they would come to Christ for repentance, laying down their arms of rebellion and hoisting the white flag of surrender. Unto them God has provided remission of sins. He invites them to come, even as the prodigal came back home.

First of all, I want to declare upon the authority of God's Word that *repentance is to be preached in the name of the Lord Jesus as a grace given from above*. It is given of God. Yes, repentance has therefore been granted unto the Gentiles as well as unto the Jews because it is a gift of grace (Act 11:18). It does not come to us by the works of the law, but it comes wholly and completely out of the gracious heart of God. It should not be preached in Moses' name as a legal duty, but it is to be preached as a *grace* coming down from God. It is not to be preached as Jonah preached it, without any hope—for he proclaimed that Nineveh would be destroyed in only 40 days—but it is to be preached in Jesus' name as the *grace* of God, that for those who do repent, there is remission of sins in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Repentance is a gift given by the *grace* of God, even as *faith* is given by the grace of God. And it is given because God has highly exalted His Son, and given Him a name which is above every name, having set Him at His own right hand to be “a Prince and a Saviour” for to give repentance and forgiveness of sins (Act 5:31). So it is the *grace* of God, the *goodness* of God, that leads to repentance (Rom 2:4). For the very reason our heavenly Father, our gracious God, has set the Lord Jesus Christ as a prince, a ruler, and a king at His own right hand, is that He might *give* repentance and remission of sins!

Wherever there is real sorrow for sin, wherever there is an honest determination by God's grace to cease from sin, wherever there is a complete change of mind with regard to sin (and that is what repentance means), then we can understand and know that *by the grace of God* this repentance has been produced by the Spirit of God, and that it is as much a gift of the *covenant of grace* as ever the pardon which comes with it. And remember, God gives this grace to poor sinners—

*only to sinners*—those whose hearts He has made to realize their need of it. The song writer expressed it this way:

*Come ye needy, come and welcome,  
Come, God's free bounty glorify;  
True belief and true repentance,  
Every grace that brings you nigh;  
Without money, come to Jesus Christ and buy.*

It is the *grace* of God that He uses the Law to show us what we are, and it brings us to Christ. So Law is a grace, because it is used by the Holy Spirit to give us the knowledge of sin; therefore, never let us throw off the Law of God! Yes, it condemns us and damns us to hell, for we have broken it. Therefore it brings us under the wrath of God; but we should praise God for it, because it is by the Law of God that we see, acknowledge, and understand our sinfulness, our far distance from God, and our great need of a Saviour (Rom 3:19-20; 7:7-25). For as Galatians 3:24 tells us, the Law is the schoolmaster that brings us—guides and leads us—to Christ as our only hope.

Then it is the *grace* of God as revealed by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ that produces in our hearts the salvation that God gives; and along with it is *the gift of repentance*, a sorrowing over sin. But let me warn you, you're not to seek to draw up repentance from the depths of your own heart as you might draw up water from a well, but you are to come to Christ for it. You are to ask Christ to work repentance in you by His Holy Spirit, through belief of the truth as it is recorded in the Word of God, or as it is set before you in the preaching of the Gospel (2Th 2:13-14; Rom 1:16). And it is as you learn how terribly Christ suffered because of your sin, that this truth under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, will be the means of leading you to hate sin. And you will realize how the Holy Spirit, by enlightening the understanding and influencing the affections, produces repentance in you, even in that heart that seemed to be unbroken and so sterile that nothing could be produced! That heart will be broken and made fertile by the gentle dew of the rain of *grace* as it falls in upon your soul. Then, by the working of God's Spirit in you, you will see a beauty and a glory in the Lord Jesus Christ that will cause you to desire after Him, (2Co 4:4, 6; Job 23:3; Song 2:3). And not only will you hate sin and sorrow over it (2Co 7:10-11), you will willingly turn from it by faith in Christ as you see what it has done to Him.

So God gives repentance to sinners; it is one of the free gifts of His grace; and whoever has it may rest assured that the hand of the Lord has been upon him for good. In fact, the work of salvation has already

been begun in your soul if the Holy Spirit has been gracious to you in giving you a deep sorrow over sin (2Co. 7:10).

But let us go further. Wherever there is real repentance, it is the token of the pardon of sin, for faith is operating in your heart to look away to Christ! It is not merely a hopeful sign that it is going to be done, but it is the sure, infallible sign that pardon has already been given to you! If any man's heart be turned away from sin, if he prostrates himself in the dust before God because of his offences, iniquities, and sins; if he looks with true penitence and faith to Christ upon the cross crying, "Lord, remember me! Lord, save me! God, be merciful to me, a sinner, and deliver me from going down to the pit," it is not a question whether forgiveness may or may not be granted to that poor seeking soul. It is a fact that he already has it and that pardon has been given, because true heartfelt repentance goes along with remission of sins and true faith in Christ. You cannot separate true repentance and faith. Where you will find the one, you will find the other.

We have this so beautifully illustrated in the case of the publican, as recorded in Luke 18:13-14: "And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner." And the Lord said, "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." You see, the Psalmist's words are still true: "The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit" (Psa 34:18). It was for such as these that our Lord Jesus suffered upon the cross.

So let the message ring out from every land under heaven: wherever there is a soul that hates sin, that desires to leave sin, and that turns to God from sin (which is true repentance), then there, in that soul, eternal mercy has already been granted; and the gracious work of remission of sins and pardon has been given unto that soul; for faith will look away from self to Christ, and find in Him a sufficient Saviour for all his needs.

Let's go further. Our Lord taught us here in our text also that repentance preached in the name of Jesus means that it is preached in or upon the authority of Jesus as Lord. It is by His authority—by His power—as He tells us in Matthew 28:18-19. Listen! "All power [all authority] is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach [disciple] all nations...in...[my] name." This is what He is saying: it is in the name of Jesus, *upon His authority*, that sinners bow down in repentance before God, and that every walled fortress of the

sinner's heart falls. It is in the name of Jesus the Lord that the legion of demons must be cast out of the man in the tombs of Gadara. It is in the name and upon the authority of King Jesus that every sin must flee and die out, its power broken, its penalty met, its dominion gone, and the sinner set free through faith in His blood. It is in the authority of that name that he will flee as you plead it, coming to that throne that has been set up for poor sinners by God Himself (Heb 4:16).

Also it is upon His authority that remission of sins by faith in Christ is to be preached. Repentance and remission are so joined together, that wherever we find one, we are sure to find the other. Where there is no repentance, rest assured that there is no faith in Christ; but where there is true repentance—that godly sorrow for sin that needs not to be repented of—rest assured there you will find faith to trust Christ for full and free forgiveness of all your sins. Our Lord Jesus Christ declared with authority that “all manner of sin...shall be forgiven unto men” (Mat 12:31). The apostles declared it, and we declare this same truth today: “Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins” (Act 5:31). “Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses” (Act 13:38-39). “And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Act 20:20-21).

And there is promised in the gospel to penitent sinners a full pardon of sin—from every sin that they have ever committed, whether it has been a sin of thought, word, or deed, whether it has been a sin of omission or commission. It is a pardon as great as it is full: pardon from the most horrible and oft-repeated offences, from uncleanness, theft, blasphemy, rape, drunkenness, yea, from whoremongering and adultery, and even from murder if the murderer has truly repented. It is a pardon for crimes of deepest dye, a pardon bought with the precious blood of Christ. For when we turn to God in true repentance, and look to Jesus Christ by faith to cleanse us, it shall be done and we shall be saved!

This is the gospel, the *hope* that God tells us to hold out to sinners—not as Jonah, who said, “Forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown” (Jon 3:4). He said nothing about repentance. But we tell you with one breath that the wrath of God is coming; and with another, that if you will repent and turn to God with full sorrow for sin, with a

broken heart and a contrite spirit, there is full forgiveness and remission in the blood of the Saviour. You see, the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from *all* sin (1Jo 1:7). For all who truly repent and believe in Him, this blood cleanseth from sin—all sin, and from every sin that banishes men from the presence of the thrice-holy God. Yes, pardon is proclaimed in the name of Jesus for sins such as these. They are not too black to be forgiven by God. They are not too deeply ingrained to be washed out by the precious blood of our Lord Jesus!

But I hear someone saying, "I do not doubt that repentance and remission of sins are to be preached in Christ's name, and that this is the teaching of Christ. My difficulty is, are they for me?" Well, that is a point that you must yourself settle under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, but let me ask you a few questions. Have you really repented of your sin? Have you sorrowed over it as the plague of your heart and the curse of your life? Have you hated it? Have you turned away from it and sought to live as the holy God would have you to live? Then, I say unto you, if this repentance is yours, then this remission is yours also; for they go together. Christ put them together: "repentance and remission of sins" (Luk 24:47). And remember, God has commanded you to repent and believe (Mar 1:15); so what He has commanded, you can by His grace perform.

But if indeed you have not experientially known what repentance is, then will you breathe this prayer? "Oh Lord, show me the guilt of my sin; teach me to mourn over it, to loathe it and to leave it. Let me see Thy dear Son bearing its penalty on my behalf, and then assure me by Thy Spirit's gracious instructions from Thy Word that my sins, which are many, are all forgiven for Jesus' sake, that I may go on my way rejoicing as a sinner saved by Thy sovereign grace." Will you do it?

### *The Fruits of Repentance*

In conclusion, let us consider the fruits which will always follow genuine biblical repentance.

John the Baptist warned his hearers to "bring forth fruits...meet [*suitable*] for repentance" (Mat 3:8). Also in his address before King Agrippa, the apostle Paul tells us that his message to the Gentiles was "that they should repent, and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance" (Act 26:20). So from these two Scriptures we learn that true biblical repentance will *show* itself in the believer's life *by its fruits*. Let us look then, at some of these fruits, and pray that the Holy Spirit will open our understanding to His precious Word, and that our hearts will

be searched and opened, that we may know if these fruits have been, and are being, produced in our lives by the Spirit of the living God.

First, the fruits of true Biblical repentance will be seen in our lives in a *real hatred for sin as sin*, and not merely for its *consequences*, which are the wrath of God poured out upon every soul which dies outside of Christ, and a separation from God in hell forever. Also, it is not a hatred against this or that sin, but a hatred of *all* sin, and particularly of the root itself which is self-will. “Thus saith the Lord God; Repent, and turn yourselves from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations” (Eze 14:6). We do this with a hatred for them and a loathing of ourselves. “Ye shall lothe yourselves in your own sight for all your evils that ye have committed” (Eze 20:43). You see, the change of mind which God requires, the change of mind which God is pleased with, is a real hatred for sin as sin *against God*. Therefore I ask-do you and I have a hatred for sin in this manner? If not, then we have not brought forth the fruits of true Biblical repentance.

Second, the fruits of true Biblical repentance will be seen in a *deep sorrow for sin*. “Ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner... for godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation” (2Co 7:9-10). And such a sorrow is produced in the heart by the Holy Spirit, which has God for its object, for it consists of a grief for having despised such a God, for having rebelled against His authority, and for having been indifferent to His glory. It was such a sorrow that caused Peter to go out and weep bitterly over his sin of denying his Lord (Mat 26:75). And it is such a sorrow that causes us to weep bitterly over our sins because they have been against God. We are made to cry like David: “I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight” (Psa 51:3-4). Have you thus sorrowed for sin as being *against God*? For this fruit of true Biblical repentance causes us to crucify “the flesh with the affections and lusts” (Gal 5:24) and to follow God in Christ with all our hearts. Only this kind of sorrow for sin is genuine.

Third, the fruits of true Biblical repentance will be seen in a *confessing of sin*. We read, “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy” (Pro 28:13). Yes, there *must* be the fruit of confession of sin: confessing all and hiding nothing. You see, you and I both know that it is our nature to deny our sins, directly or indirectly, to minimize or make excuses for them. But when the Holy Spirit works in our souls and our sins are brought to light, there must be an acknowledging of them before God. If true Biblical repentance has been worked in our hearts, then there can be

no relief for these stricken hearts of ours until we confess our sins and lay them bare before God. This is brought out in these words: “When I kept silence, my bones waxed old though 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” (Psa 32:3-4). You see, it is only the fruits of a frank and brokenhearted confession of our sins that will bring us peace with God in Christ. This is the change of attitude which God requires, thereby showing true repentance. And my friend, this continues in our life until we get to glory. Confession and repentance is part of the believer’s daily prayer, as he pleads 1 John 1:9 at the throne of grace: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Fourth, the fruits of true Biblical repentance will be seen in an *actual turning from sin*. My friend, there are three Greek words used in the New Testament which represent different phases of repentance, and all three of them are seen in the life of the one who has actually turned to God from sin in true repentance. In Matthew 3:2, the word “repent” means a change of **mind** about sin. In Matthew 21:29, the word “repent” means a change of **heart**. And in Matthew 3:8 and in Acts 20:21, it means a change of **life**, an actual turning from sin to walk in it no more. So we can say again, true repentance is a radical change of mind and heart that leads to a complete turnabout of our life. It brings about in the repenting, believing sinner a change of mind, which is the understanding; a change of heart, which is the affections; and a change in the course of our life, which comes from our wills.

“He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso *confesseth and forsaketh* them shall have mercy” (Pro 28:13). If I really hate sin and sorrow over it, then I shall forsake it. I shall take to heart Isaiah 55:7, which reads, “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; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.” This is the change of course which God requires. It will show itself in the repenting, believing sinner taking heed to the Word of God which says, “Flee fornication” (1Co 6:18); “flee from idolatry” (1Co 10:14); flee “the love of money” (1Ti 6:10-11); “flee also youthful lusts” (2Ti 2:22). And it will also show itself in the putting into practice the positive graces of following after “righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart” (2Ti 2:22). My friend, the question before us is—have you and I from our hearts actually turned unto God from sin?

Fifth, the fruits of true Biblical repentance will be seen in a *desire to put into practice the Scriptures that teach us to walk in “righteousness and true*

*holiness” and to “be careful to maintain good works” (Eph 4:24; Tit 3:8).* This, to me, is one of the most distinguishing marks of true Biblical repentance: the desire to walk in a different way—a different course of life than we did before. We read in Hebrews 12:14, “Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.” So by God’s grace we desire to follow after this peace and holiness, because God has given us a new heart and a new nature. In Matthew 1:21, we read that Christ came to save His people *from* their sins (not *in* their sins), so the heart of the true penitent cries unto God daily to be delivered from sin and self because he hates them. Again, in Ephesians 1:4 we read that God’s purpose in saving us was to make us holy. So by God’s grace we desire to be holy, separate from sin and our self-will. And in 1 Thessalonians 4:7, we read that God’s purpose in calling us was not to be unclean—to stay in our sins and self-will—but to live in holiness; so by God’s grace, we desire to walk worthy of this calling unto holiness.

Then in 1 Thessalonians 4:3, we read that the will of God for our lives is for us to be sanctified: that is, to be set apart for God’s holy use. So this being true, we desire by God’s grace to be separated from sin unto Christ. It is by our desiring and walking in righteousness and true holiness and being “careful to maintain good works” (Tit 3:8), that we can know the fruits of true Biblical repentance are being manifested in our lives. For we read in Titus 2:11-12 that “the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.” And this is the desire of our hearts: to put into practice the denying of ourselves, of ungodliness and of worldly lusts, and by the grace of God to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present evil world. Our cry will be, “O Lord, help me to understand Thy Word, and by Thy grace help me walk in the way that is well-pleasing unto Thee.” Or like that of the Psalmist: “Shew me thy ways, O LORD; teach me thy paths. Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day” (Psa 25:4-5). And, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee” (Psa 73:25), so teach me Thy way, and lead me in plain paths, that I will follow Thee all the days of my life (Psa 27:11).

These then, are the fruits of true Biblical repentance: a deep desire to be finished with sin because it is the plague and sorrow of our heart; a deep desire to abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul, and to fight the good fight of faith; a deep desire never to go back to a way of self-will and self-pleasing, but to show forth the praises of Him Who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous



light; a deep desire to follow the Lord in a path of holiness all the days of our life; a deep desire to please Him in all our ways; a deep desire to judge ourselves before Him every day and to live at His feet with a broken heart and a contrite spirit.

Sixth, the fruits of true Biblical repentance will be shown in *real faith in Christ*. True Biblical repentance cannot be separated from true saving faith; the two always go together. He who truly repents will truly believe, for the same Holy Spirit Who gives us repentance to the acknowledging of our sinful conduct before God, and gives us such a desire to confess it and forsake it with a true godly sorrow, will also turn our eyes upon yon lovely Lord Who died in our place. The Word of God says that the Holy Spirit never separates these graces: repentance and faith. Where you find one, you will find the other in the life of the saved soul. For repentance without faith will despair; it would end in hell. But praise the name of our thrice-holy God, He Who gives repentance also gives saving faith!

Faith finds in the Lord Jesus Christ and His shed blood the forgiveness of God for all sin. By faith in Him we find a putting away and a washing away of all our sins. We find in Christ a complete Saviour Who has undertaken for us before God. We find in Christ peace, because Christ made peace by the blood of His cross. We find in Christ hope, and hope is not made ashamed, because the love of God has been shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5). We find in Christ a perfect standing before God, because Christ has by God been made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption (1Co 1:30). We find in Christ a perfect hiding place from the wrath of God against our sins, because the judgment of all of our sins has fallen upon Christ. We find in Christ all that God gives to poor, repenting, believing sinners; for we find that we are complete in Him, the Saviour of our souls, the Lord Jesus Christ (Col 2:10).

Small booklet available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

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**L.R. Shelton, Jr.** (1923-2003) was born and raised in New Orleans, Louisiana, where he later became associate pastor in his father's Baptist church. While he did not have the opportunity to attend college or seminary, as a young man he devoured the writings of Spurgeon, Pink, the Puritans, and Lloyd-Jones. In 1970 he began a church, Christian bookstore, and gospel outreach in Litchfield, Minnesota. There he developed a God-given burden to share classic Christian literature from prior centuries freely worldwide. In 1978 the small ministry moved to Pensacola, Florida, where Mount Zion Bible Church was founded.



Now proceed...to consider the distinction between legal and evangelical repentance. A legal repentance flows only from a sense of danger and fear of wrath; but evangelical repentance is a true mourning for sin, and earnest desire of deliverance from it.

When the conscience of a sinner is alarmed with a sense of his dreadful guilt and danger, it must necessarily remonstrate against those impieties which threaten him with ruin. Hence those frights and terrors which we so commonly see in awakened sinners. Their sins (especially some grosser enormities of their lives) stare them in the face with their peculiar aggravations. They are brought upon their knees before God to acknowledge their sins and to cry for mercy; and now conscience, like a flaming sword, perhaps keeps them from their former course of impiety.

And what is all this repentance but mere terror and fear of hell? It is true, the law sometimes proves a schoolmaster to drive sinners to Christ; and conviction of sin and a legal repentance are a necessary preparative to a saving conversion; but these alone give no claim to the promise of the Gospel. The house may be thus empty, swept, and garnished, but for the reception of seven worse spirits than were driven out of it; and a sinner may thus escape 'the pollutions of the world' (2Pe 2:20), and yet have his latter end worse than the beginning (Mat 12:45).

If, on the other hand, we consider the character of a sincere gospel-repentance, though such legal terrors may lead to its exercise, they do not belong to its nature; nor are they any part of it. Sin itself becomes the greatest burden and aversion to a truly penitent soul. 'I hate,' says the Psalmist, 'every false way' (Psa 119:104). 'O wretched man that I am!' says the apostle. 'Who shall deliver me from the body of this death!' (Rom 7:24). Thus the penitent groans, being burdened, not for fear of hell, such fear being no part of true repentance, though it may sometimes accompany it, but from an affecting, humbling *sense of sin*. His language is, 'I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me' (Psa 51:3); 'mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me' (Psa 38:4); 'deliver me from all my transgressions' (Psa 39:8); let not my sins 'have dominion over me' (Psa 19:13); 'innumerable evils have compassed me about: mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head: therefore, my heart faileth me. Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me: O LORD, make haste to help me' (Psa 40:12-13). As the true penitent longs for more and more victory over his corruptions, so is he most watchful, prayerful, and in earnest to mortify his lusts and to cut off all supplies of sin. There is nothing so grievous to him as sin, and nothing which he so earnestly desires as a nearer approach to that blessed state, where nothing can enter which defileth or worketh abomination (Rev 21:27).

Here you see the difference between being driven from a course of sinning by the lashes of an awakened conscience, and loathing ourselves in our own sight, for all our iniquities and abominations. The former is merely the fruit of self-love, which prompts the soul to fly from danger. The latter is the exercise of a vital principle, which separates the soul from sin and engages the whole man in a continued opposition to it."

—Jonathan Dickinson (1688-1747)