

REPENTANCE and FAITH

A Treatise on the above Subject

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REPENTANCE AND FAITH*

Repentance is given a large and important place in the Word of God, whether in the present or past dispensation—before law, under law, or now under grace. Ever since the fall, men have been a prey to sin, and God has ever been calling man to repentance. The teaching of the Word therefore is perfectly distinct, and with no uncertain sound it cries, “Repent, repent!” This was the voice of the Spirit in the prophets of old; it was the special mission of John the Baptist; and when the Saviour Himself appeared, His call to men was, “Repent ye, and believe the gospel” (Mark 1: 15). When He sent out the twelve, they went out and preached that men should repent (Mark 6: 12); and His answer to those who spoke to Him of the dreadful end of the Galileans was, “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13: 1-5).

But let us note the order in which the Holy Spirit

* This article was first published some 20 years ago. Repentance being little spoken of nowadays, yea, even denied by some as of first necessity in the work of the gospel, it is revised and reprinted.—[Ed.]

presents that truth to us. Let us first say, however, that repentance is not the gospel. We need to distinguish, but not separate them. Serious results ensue from overlooking or neglecting either one or the other. If repentance is not preached the deep searching effect of truth will be wanting, and there will be but little fruit to God's liking. And if the glad tidings of God's grace be lacking, the soul is left in darkness and lack of peace.

Repentance is the call of a righteous God to His disobedient, sinful, and responsible creatures. He has entrusted the preaching of it to the evangelist as he goes forth among the masses of mankind. It is a message sent to *sinner*s. "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Matt. 9:13). This is where God's work begins in souls; it is that which prepares the heart and the conscience to receive the gospel—on the same principle as the plow prepares the ground for the seed. One precedes the other, and the same hand that holds the plow sows also the precious seed which will produce life with its golden harvest. The plow and the seed-basket are to be distinguished, but not separated. To use one without the other is a serious mistake. The plowman keeps the sowing in view; the sower, the harvest.

As is God's order in nature, so, we believe, is His order in spiritual things. That the work be solid and abiding, and that souls be not deceived or led in a free and easy way of confessing Christ, the conscience must be plowed.

We have often heard the expression, "I believe in the Lord," with little conscience about sin. We would keep in mind this danger, and warn everyone who preaches the Word, Sunday-school teachers and parents also, to look for exercise of heart and conscience in all cases of professed conversion, remembering that it is written, "God commandeth all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30).

Repentance is the work of the Holy Spirit in sinners. It may be deeper with some than with others. It will grow deeper in all as they go on with God, but let us accept nothing as genuine apart from manifest repentance.

But what is repentance? We have already quoted from the words of the Lord Himself that it is sinners who are called to it, hence it is a work of the Spirit of God with *sinners*. It is the breakdown of the responsible man before God, and the confession of what he is. It is strikingly illustrated in the case of the publican in the temple (Luke 18: 13). When man is brought into God's presence by the Spirit of God, and gets a right view of himself and his sins, there will be conviction, and confession too—the soul gives in, and is humbled before God. This is repentance; it is a great struggle with the enemy of souls who ever seeks to hinder men from it. It is the time when the preacher needs to be especially watchful and prayerful. When the cry is heard, "I have sinned," the answer is readily given, "Deliver him from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom" (Job 33: 24).

New birth introduces the soul into a new relationship with God; the man is no more a "sinner," but a "child of God;" forgiveness of sins and peace with God are his. God, who is sovereign in all His works, may use various means to produce this—to reach the conscience and heart of man: but whatever means He uses, it can be said to be His *goodness*; it is "the *goodness* of God that leadeth thee to repentance." It may be through an earnest warning of the judgment to come; or, an appeal as from God's love; or, the holding up of the Cross as God's judgment of sin,—the holiness of God—the second coming of the Lord, or any other part of the truth to subdue man's will and pride. Whatever it be, the Spirit uses it as He wills, to get at the heart and conscience of man, and lead him to repentance.

The soul is thus made ready for the good seed of the gospel; and when the gospel message is received by faith into the heart, life, new birth, and salvation follow. The Scripture order is repentance first, followed by remission of sins (Luke 24: 47); repentance and conversion (Acts 3: 19); repentance unto life (Acts 11: 18); repentance towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20: 21). Repentance is a divine *work*, but must not be confounded with divine *life*. Repentance is connected with the conviction of sin; divine life with new birth. One is the closing up of the old life and its history; the other, the beginning of the new.

Oh that we were more alive to the necessity of such work as this! A servant of Christ remarked sometime ago, after this truth of repentance had been preached, "I see my mistake. I have preached the gospel, but it has been like sowing seed upon the unbroken soil of the prairie. I have not been using the plow and there has been no breaking up of the fallow ground, and little fruit." Let these words be weighed. Let our service be definite in our appeals to men. Let us yearn over sinners, plead with them, and warn them. Let the compassions of Christ fill our hearts. Let His tears be ours, His love constrain us; and in this earnest work let us remember that preaching is not teaching, nor mere expositions of Scripture; but, with the Scriptures in hand, let it be a heart-to-heart contact with men. When souls are broken down it is an easy matter to unfold the gospel; the heart is ready then, the soil is prepared, and the precious seed of the gospel has but to be sown for life and fruit to follow.

The natural man's need is twofold—life and forgiveness. The sinner is dead in trespasses and in sins, therefore life is needed; and a sinner needs forgiveness. Moral death, like natural death, is not the extinction of the responsible man, but a condition of separation or alienation from God. The fall brought in this condition. When the soul is brought under conviction and the cry is heard, "What must I do to be saved?" the *plow* has wrought in that

dead sinner; and his heart is ready for the good news, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." This is the incorruptible seed, the word of God (1 Pet. 1: 23), which, received into the heart by faith, imparts divine life through the power of the Holy Spirit, and relationship as a child in the Father's family is now established (John 20: 31).

With this new life, forgiveness is also bestowed. Can we imagine a child in God's family, a possessor of this new life, and yet not forgiven, not yet cleansed by the blood? We can readily understand that one newly born again by the Word and the Spirit may not yet have the *intelligence* of these blessings, and needing the light of Scripture to enter into the *conscious enjoyment* of what is given him; but *the fact itself*, that is, God's forgiveness as the portion of every soul born of God, who can question it? (Acts 13: 38, 39; 1 John 2: 12.) Cleansed from our defiled state, and given new life, the blood of atonement removes all that was against us—puts our guilt forever away (1 John 1: 7).

We repeat, every soul who receives God's testimony is born of God, is forgiven, is a child in God's family and possesses eternal life. The *knowledge* of these things will, as with any other beginning, at first be very limited; the apprehension of it more or less vague. Growth, development, intelligence, will all follow; and grace, relationship, our privileges and responsibilities, will all be better under-

stood as the soul goes on with God, and searches the Word of Truth. We are all babes at first, young men in time, and fathers when we become matured Christians; but our relationship with God is established at new birth; for eternal life is what every one born of God receives in the new birth (John 20: 31; 1 John 5: 1, 11-13).*

New birth, with all its blessed relationships—the endearment and the nearness to the Father’s heart and to every one that bears the marks of it—has been little understood, and often misapprehended. Some sign of exercise or conviction about sin has been placed at times as a substitute for it. This degrades new birth, and deceives the person. We read in Scripture, as God’s order, “Repent ye, *and believe* the gospel.” It is guilty sinners who are to repent, and repenting sinners who are to believe the gospel. Again, “Repentance *and remission* of sins.” It is evident that repentance is not remission of sins, but prepares for it. “Repent, *and be converted*.” Repentance, therefore, is not conversion, but precedes it. Again, “Repentance *unto life*.” Repentance is not from life possessed, but “unto life” needed. Again, “Repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” Here is a clear

* Verse 13 in the Revised Version reads thus: “These things have I written unto you, that ye may know that ye have eternal life, *even* unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God.” With this agree J. N. D.’s Translation, and Numerical Bible.—[Ed.]

distinction between repentance and *faith*. "Repentance," to use the words of another, "is the soul's view of self, confessed to God; faith, the soul's view of Christ." Once more, "Repentance *unto salvation*." In all these quotations from Scripture, the order is always the same.

"Repent!" is the preacher's trumpet-call to careless, sinful men—not his message to anxious inquirers. Christ came "not to call the righteous, but *sinner*s to repentance," and "there is joy in heaven over one *sinner* that repenteth."

This responsibility which God has laid upon all men, upon *sinner*s, has been sadly overlooked by two classes: First, those *who are indifferent as to the value of immortal souls* (oh, that we were everywhere stirred from this sloth and slumber!) Second, those *who shape everything by schools of doctrine and preconceived ideas*. For instance, when man's responsibility is presented, it is often opposed by, "But you wouldn't ask sinners, dead in trespasses and sins, to repent, would you?" We readily answer, Decidedly *we should*, and warn them of the fearful danger in which they are; for "*God commandeth all men, everywhere, to repent*." Death (the state of the unconverted) does not mean that they are not living, responsible creatures. It does not mean that they are mummies. No! They are active in sin, though dead in their affections toward God. We are increasingly impressed with the thought that many do not seek enough to break up the fallow

ground with God's loud call to men on account of their sins, and in view of their eternal doom. Death here means moral separation from God—the condition into which Adam fell and in which all are now by natural birth. Hence, as the child grows, it is as natural for it to do what is wrong as it is for water to run down. "Dead in sins" is separation from God, as physical death is separation of the soul from the body, for "the body without the spirit is dead." The lake of fire is declared to be "the second death"—separation from God forever. In no case can death be interpreted to mean the extinction of man or his responsibility. Death is not a state of irresponsibility, wherever applied. It is a separation in the relations which had existed.

Now here is where the evangelist is called to press God's claims upon sinful man—himself being a subject of grace, one who has been delivered from the pit. Awful indeed are the realities of eternity for the lost! With this before him, and the sense of the value of precious souls, he goes to sinners filled with compassionate love, and with the glory of God in the salvation of men upon his heart. His preaching may vary according as the need calls. At one time he declares, "God is light," and all that it means for men; at another, he declares that "God is love," and what that means for them. At one moment he uses the plow to prepare the soil; at another, he unfolds the gospel, telling of God's love and righteousness bound up in that

gospel. In every case the object in view is to reach the conscience and heart of men, in order to win them for the Lord: if careless, to reach their conscience and lead to conviction and repentance; if under conviction, to show them the way of life and salvation.

Let us look, as the apostle did, for "works meet for repentance" in those who profess conversion. That is the evidence and sign that the conscience has been reached, that sin has been judged, and the proof of a new life received. A mother once said to me that all her boys were the Lord's. I asked what were her reasons for thinking so. She answered, "They all say they believe." "But," I continued, "have you discerned any exercise about their sins?" "Why—no," she answered. I then said that children may learn as parrots to say, "I believe." Let us not be deceived about such a vital question. *The devils* believe, and tremble; but they do not *repent* and believe. Let parents, teachers, Christian workers, one and all, make sure of a thorough work in people's souls about the issues of eternity!

"Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish," said our Lord when here on earth. This, we grant, is deeper in some than in others. By some the sense of sin is more keenly felt, and more fully judged before God. With others there may not be the same apprehension, and hence not the same depth; but we insist that the fact itself must be there. Where the fallow ground has not been broken

up there may be profession; but, like the stony-ground hearers, they will wither away, because there is *no root* (Luke 8). In the 8th of Acts Simon affords us a serious lesson in this respect. Three things are said of him: First, "himself believed;" second, "was baptized;" third, "continued with Philip;" but what follows shows us how far the man's heart was from God. Peter faithfully said to him, "Thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness. . . if perhaps the thought of thy heart may be forgiven thee." His sinful condition is exposed. The need of repentance is pressed, that forgiveness might be looked for.

John the Baptist, the man who so powerfully brought men's consciences into God's presence, preached repentance. His ministry preceded that of the Lord, as a necessary work to prepare men's hearts for the Saviour whose characteristic ministry was the glad tidings, which is "the power of God unto salvation."

We verily believe we are in the time when God is giving His last call to those in Christendom who have been so long privileged with light. His word to the profession in general is the same as His words to Sardis, "Repent" (Rev. 3). The coming of the Lord draweth nigh, and the parable of the ten virgins is given us as a solemn warning. The first love of many Christians has departed; and the Lord, who is ever true, says, "Repent, and do the first works" (Rev. 2). "When Christians are thus in the

freshness and power of God's truth, the Spirit will fill our hearts, and we will go forth with His message of loving warning and of grace to our fellow-men. The Lord's words in Mark 1, "Repent ye, and believe the gospel," will be the burden of our message to the world. "Feed my sheep. . . Feed my lambs," will urge upon us a loving pastoral care over those saved by His grace. Are we ready for this? Are we self-judged? Are we ready to say, "Here am I, Lord; send me?" Then the hatefulness of sin will deepen; self-judgment will become characteristic of the whole life; the indwelling Spirit will unfold through the Word the beauties and perfections of Christ, and His graces will be manifested in our daily life. A. E. BOOTH.

FORGIVEN!

“Wherefore, I say unto thee, *her sins, which are many, are forgiven*” (Luke 7: 47).

Because my transgressions are many,
 Yea, more than the hairs of my head—
 The sins that are black and secret,
 The sins that are crimson red—
 Because on Thy cross I have seen them,
 And beheld how deep was their dye,
 Because Thine own lips have absolved me,
 Here, here, O my God, am I!

The more as a dark remembrance
 Those sins in their terror arise—
 The more to my soul they are bitter,
 The more they are black in mine eyes,
 The more must I wonder and worship,
 Beholding how great was the debt
 By Thee, Lord, forgiven, forgotten,
 Though *I* must remember them yet.

For Thou on the throne of Thy glory
 Hast shown me Thy hands and Thy feet;
 Thou sayest, “Behold my forgiveness,
 Eternal, and sure, and complete:
 Well known to Me measure and number
 Of sins that *in part* thou hast known—
 By Me in mine agony measured,
 By Me in mine anguish, alone.”

... My God and my Saviour, as surely
 As Thou art in glory in heaven,
 So surely I own it, rejoicing,
 That I, even I, am forgiven!

BY A. E. BOOTH

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