

# REPENTANCE.

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MANY find great difficulty on the subject of REPENTANCE. It seems to them a gulf lying between themselves and God. To such I would speak to-night. The root of their difficulty is that they do not believe the gospel. They come not to the scriptures with the remembrance that "*justification is by faith ALONE*;" their eyes, therefore, are dim to see what *repentance* is. Without denying the gospel, repentance *cannot* be made into a clog to justification by faith. Every definition of it, which does this, *must* be wrong.

If you examine scripture, you will see that *repentance* is spoken of in many different ways. The reason of this is plain enough; for the word *repentance* (*μετανοια*) means *a change of mind*. That this is the simple meaning of the term is clear; and any unprejudiced mind will, I think, perceive this—in Matt. xxi, 28—32, when Jesus said "What think ye? A man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to-day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterwards he *repented* and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he said, I go, sir; and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, the first. Jesus saith unto them, verily I say unto you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not; but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him." Arguments unanswerable might be drawn from the substance of this text to establish that which I have suggested as the signification of *repentance*; but I forbear, believing that it will be conceded that the testimony which lies upon the surface of the passage (the general drift of it), is sufficient; for the passage does not call the mind to

sorrow or regret in the mind of the party repenting, but simply to the CHANGE OF MIND which leads to change of conduct. Now, the value of *a change of mind* can in no case be ascertained until two things are known. I cannot say whether *a change of mind* is a good or bad thing until I know what was the former mind, (FROM which the change took place) and also what is the after mind (TO which the change takes place); till these things are explained, I can form no idea as to whether or not the person has been a gainer or a loser, or neither the one nor the other, by the change; much less can I tell whether the (repentance, or) *change of mind*, is that which is connected in scripture with the remission of sins and with eternal life.

This is illustrated in scripture abundantly: for instance, when Judas (Matt. xxvii, 3,) *repented himself* and brought again the thirty pieces of silver, and departed, and went and hanged himself, and went unto his own place, (Acts i, 25,) there was clearly a great change of mind in him about the wisdom of his own conduct and the value of the money; but the change, alas! was from one thing about self to another worse thing about self, and there was no change of mind about God, such as could lead unto eternal life.

Again.—The people of Nineveh (Matt. xii, 41; Luke xi, 32) changed their minds, and instead of not thinking at all about the evil of their ways before God, believed He would take vengeance, and therefore they humbled themselves, and they and their cattle were spared the temporal judgments threatened.

Again.—The Gentiles (Acts xi) received Peter's preaching about God and Jesus, and it gave them quite a new view,—another mind, and other thoughts about God; and this was "*repentance (or change of mind) unto life.*" (Acts xi, 18.) This was a change of mind, as we shall see, about God Himself, and is an instance of that repentance which saves the *person* of the believer.

Again.—In Rev. ii, 5, 16, 21, 22; iii, 3, 19, we find persons who have repented, or had a change of mind, unto eternal life (and such are recognized as being *in* the church of God) are told to repent, or change their minds as to sundry works which their practice showed they did not think inconsistent with their being members of Christ,—children of God, and heirs of the kingdom of heaven, but which works the Lord

Himself thought quite wrong for saved persons. A similar case is to be seen in 2 Cor. vii, 9, 10:—"I rejoyce, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed unto repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death." This is a very plain passage, showing that change of mind about the consistency and inconsistency of their conduct as christians which the apostle's former letter had produced. These changes of mind were not about the character of God as revealing Himself to the world as a just God and a Saviour, the knowledge of which is eternal life, as it is written, "This is eternal life, to know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent," but consisted in a change of mind as to what God's thoughts were about the works of those whom He *had* saved. And clearly to know that in God which is the salvation of a poor sinner is a very different thing from knowing what God expects from those whom He has saved.

Let us consider next what is that repentance, or change of mind, which is unto eternal life. (Acts xi, 18.) The effect of the fall of man has been to make him believe a lie and to plunge his conscience into guilt. The lie is, "Ye shall be as gods;" and just as Adam, when he had sinned, acted upon this, and tried to save himself *from* God; so is it now all the world over. In nature, every man supposes he must himself *do* something to make provision for what God requires; for he considers himself in a certain sense, as a god, and *able* to do something. And, having guilt upon his conscience, he looks upon the true God with suspicion, as an austere one, reaping where he has not sown and gathering where he has not strewed. This is what the fall has done; and thus is it with every man while he is a child of wrath, dead in trespasses and sins. But when God will save a man, He does so by the foolishness of preaching,—sending to him a word or report of what He, the holy and just Creator, has done for the rebellious creature; and when that word is received, the poor child of wrath gets quite a new mind about God, and this new mind is "*repentance* unto life."

That this change of mind about God, has been connected by God with the remission of sins, is plain.

1st, From the sum total of the passages in scripture which

connect salvation with faith in the testimony given by God about his Son. And, observe, this change of mind is not something which has to be added to faith, but is just inseparable from faith, for it is a change of mind which the truth of the gospel produces wherever it is received ;—a new view (altogether different and opposed to that of nature) about God.

And 2ndly, by such passages as these, (Mark i, 15,) Jesus preached “ Repent ye, and believe the gospel.” Luke xxiv, 46, 47 : Jesus “ said unto them, thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day : and that repentance (or a change of mind) and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.” Acts v, 30, 31 : “ The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his own right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give *repentance* (or a new mind) to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.” Acts xx, 18, 21 : “ Ye know . . . how I (Paul) kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, 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.”

Many a one has very wrong thoughts upon this subject. If they were accurately to express their thoughts on the subject in words, they would speak thus :—“ A man cannot be saved unless he repent and believe the gospel. I believe the gospel, but I have not repented enough.” And if you said, “ What do you mean by *repentance* ? ” their true answer would be “ something or other which has to be done as to myself, preparatory to my being justified by faith.” One would explain this *something* thus :—“ I must do penance by mortifying my body ; ” another might say “ No, I must make myself sorry *in my soul and heart* for sin ; ” and another, “ No, the Holy Ghost must make me sorry for sin.” Such answers would differ in measure, but all alike be wrong, all alike subversive of grace, all alike, if accomplished, would constitute a repentance needing to be repented of. Take the best of them, and the least palpably offensive, “ that the Holy Ghost must work sorrow for sin in me ere I am justified in receiving the gospel.” What can there be evil in that ? say you. Why it overturns God’s whole plan of redemption. It denies the grace of God the Father in receiving and justifying him that believeth,

(Rom. iii, 26,) even the ungodly, (chap. iv, 5,) without works, (ver 6,) as those who have nothing but iniquities to be forgiven and sins to be covered. (ver. 7.) It sets aside the work of the Lord Jesus Christ as that whereby alone any can be "justified freely by God's grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God. (Rom. iii, 24, 25.) And it is, as to the Holy Ghost Himself, the taking from Him the service proper to Him, of witnessing of Jesus, and substituting another in its place; while, as to the poor sinner himself, it puts him out of the position of being lost and undone, and therefore cast entirely upon the compassion of God as expressed in a work which, while it condemns sin, tells the sinner there is hope for him in God. Moreover, it establishes another gospel which is not another.

Repentance is simultaneous with faith, as the reflection from a mirror is simultaneous with the presenting of an object before the mirror. The very moment an object is held up before a mirror, that self-same moment the mirror receives and reflects the image of that object. And the very same moment that any one has faith in "the truth as it is in Jesus," that very same moment he has repentance toward God, or a new mind about God.

To my own mind the Holy Ghost has Himself so accurately defined *repentance* in the scriptures, as that there is no reason for any uncertainty or difference of judgment among christians upon the subject.

For instance, Paul, writing to Timothy, (2 Epist. ii, 24, 25,) exhorts him "to be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness *instructing those that oppose themselves*; if God peradventure will give them *repentance TO THE ACKNOWLEDGING OF THE TRUTH.*" If any one had said to Timothy "I receive the truth you present as taught you by Paul, and am only prevented rejoicing in it because I cannot find in myself that *repentance* about which Paul wrote to you," would not Timothy quickly have brought forth the letter and read "*instructing those that oppose themselves*; if God peradventure will give them *repentance TO THE ACKNOWLEDGING OF THE TRUTH*;" and then have argued with the man that he should neither look for repentance in himself nor

look to God to give him repentance, for that as repentance was "*to the acknowledging of the truth*," if he *acknowledged the truth* he had that repentance which was the gift of God. And if the party spoken to did not admit this, Timothy would just have said "Well, you do want repentance or a change of mind, for you do not acknowledge the truth that God is He that justifies freely for His own sake, through faith in the blood of Jesus; for if you did, you would be thinking of that blessed truth, and not about your own wants." And so he would have endeavoured in "meekness to instruct those that thus opposed themselves."

Again.—The illustration of repentance in the two parables of the 15th of Luke confirms this. The poor lost sheep *had known the guardian care* of the good shepherd, the piece of lost silver *had been found by the diligent faithful search* of the woman to whom it belonged. And every soul which has known the love of God's Shepherd, Jesus, and, though once lost, been found, is already the subject of this repentance.

The God toward whom, and about whom thou, O man, whosoever thou art, who hast such a mind as leads thee to judge that He needs something from thee ere He can be gracious, is in a certain sense the God of thine own mind, a false god, a mere idol. The God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the true God, "*so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, to the end, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*" In His grace He has made everlasting life to hang simply upon *faith*, and has said, "he that believeth shall be saved," and now "He is long-suffering . . . not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to *repentance*" (2 Pet, iii, 9): or to that new mind about Him which is unto everlasting life. And "despisest thou the riches of His goodness and forbearance, and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance," to that new mind about Him which is unto eternal life; (Rom. ii, 4;) yea, (Acts xvii, 30,) "He commandeth all men every where to repent," or change their minds, to the acknowledgment of the truth, that they may *live* and not die. He also it was who *granted* (this new mind) repentance unto life to the Gentiles. (Acts xi, 18.) And He it was who "raised up Jesus, whom ye (Israel) slew, and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a prince and a Saviour, for to GIVE repentance (or

a new mind) to Israel and forgiveness of sins." (Acts v, 30, 31.) Oh what a God is here presented to us! how does every part of the description present some trait of grace and goodness towards the poor rebels who are filled with suspicions against Him!

Men and brothers, the pillar and ground work of the soul's salvation is that for which I plead; even that most blessed truth "justification by faith." "The just shall live by faith" was the inscription on the banner under which Paul fought. (Rom. i, 17.) It is this, and this *alone* which is called in question. Let repentance be what men please, hold what place they please, still justification is *by faith ALONE*. And let us beware of those who make repentance (since we know it needful to salvation) something altogether separable from faith, and then preach "justification is by faith *and* repentance," and not by faith alone. God has finished by His Son the work whereby the chief of sinners can come to Him. His grace sends out the report of this work every where, and the declaration is added, that "he that believeth shall be saved." The knowledge of the God who has thus displayed His true character as a just God and a Saviour in the cross of Jesus, is eternal life. May God give grace to receive His testimony in simplicity.

To look at an instance of gospel repentance, we read (Acts ii, 36) as the winding up of Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost,—“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.” “Now when they heard that, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the Apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?”

The appalling fact of God having raised from the dead and placed in all power Him whom they had crucified, broke in upon their minds, and they were terrified. But why terrified? Because they did not know either the God that had raised Jesus from the dead, or that His object in so doing was to make Him a Prince and a Saviour to His murderers. “Enemies to God by wicked works,” they suspected God would be against them:—but says Peter “*Repent* and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.” As though he had said, your mind is all wrong about God—YOU think He is desiring to take

vengeance, *I* know he raised Christ to show mercy to every one that receives Him—this, as His apostle, I insist upon—receive, then, the good news, that because God has enabled you to know Christ risen, you are saved, and confess yourself a saved disciple by baptism.\* The same may be said of Acts iii, 19, only here the address is to the nation as a whole: in chap. ii, it was to individuals out of the nation.

Some objector may say “Is eternal blessedness or eternal woe, then, the result of *opinion*? Will one man inherit glory because he has here had *one set of notions*; and will another man partake of endless woe because he has had *another set of notions*?” If such cavillers there be here, to them I would say “your wisdom is foolishness.” The question as to eternal life is not about opinions or notions, though surely the Creator would be justified in any penalty he might attach to his creatures for holding such opinions or entertaining such *notions* about Himself as displeased Him. But the question is, not, Has a man a right to think for himself, or is he responsible for what he thinks and believes? but this rather—What can give a man a new mind? For man needs not merely the upper surface of the soil of his mind turned over, but the *renewal* of that soil from the bottom. And this change of mind is the free gift of God through Christ Jesus. And the *instrument* by which grace accomplishes it is the word of the gospel, as it is written, (1 Pet. i, 23—25,) “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: but the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.”

Ere concluding, I must notice the way many confound together repentance and works meet for repentance. Paul distinguishes them, (Acts xxvi, 20,)—I “showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judæa, and then to the Gentiles, that they should

\* The distinction between John's Baptism of repentance unto remission of sins, (Matt. iii, 2,) and this baptism is very clear. By submitting to the former, a man merely said—I admit that if I repent I shall be saved, “or that repentance is needful to a sinner in order that he may be saved.” The latter is a confession (light about God having broken into my soul,) that I am saved already.



repent and turn to God, AND do works meet for repentance." John Baptist likewise made the distinction, (Mat. iii, 2,)—"Repent ye," and (v, 8) "bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance." See also Luke iii, 3 and 8. An illustration of this is to be seen in 2 Cor. vii, 8—11. The converted Corinthians, translated "from darkness to light" by their reception of the gospel, had been the joy of the Apostle: but when he heard of their works, that they were not such as became the gospel, his soul became sad and grieved about them, and he wrote a long letter to them. After he had sent that letter, he changed his mind, and was sorry he had sent it; but when he saw the effects of it, his mind again changed, and he was glad he had sent it, (v, 8,) "Though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent, though I did repent; for I perceive that the same epistle hath made you sorry, though but for a season." And the *fruits* of this repentance which Paul's letter produced are beautifully traced out, (v. 11,)—"Behold this self-same 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!" This is important in connection with the popular view, "that repentance means a hearty sorrow for sin." A hearty sorrow for sin is a fruit, a work meet for gospel repentance, one of the certain results of repentance, but not repentance itself. For then it must have been said NOT he that believeth shall be saved, but he that hath a hearty sorrow for sin and believeth shall be saved: which is not and never would be glad tidings to any honest man; for though the hypocrite may imagine he has made himself sorry for sin before its forgiveness, the true honest heart knows that its greatest sorrow is that it loves sin. Do any of you think you can make yourselves hate and loathe sin? Try, and you will soon find you cannot. If you can make yourselves sorry a little, make yourselves very, very sorry; move your hearts with deep regret; let the floodgates of your eyes flow with tears day and night. Ah no! "*My* burden (says the poor honest soul that knows its own plague) is that I love darkness rather than light; and as Adam tried to get away from God, so by nature should I." God, dear friends, alone has the power to make His people sorry for sin, and to hate and loathe it *for its own sake*, and nothing but the secret of grace will do THAT. Nature may look into

hell—nature may see the abyss below, and the black thunder-storm above coming down on account of sin, and truly say “the consequences of sin are very fearful”—but it is one thing to dread the consequences and results penally inflicted by God on sin while we love the sin itself all the while perhaps, and it is another thing to hate the sin itself while we have no evil consequences to dread. What is sin? The love of self is sin—want of subjection to God is sin. And can any sinner make himself heartily sorry that his own love of himself predominates over his love to God? No—he may dread and fear the result of this; he may, in judgment, condemn it as an evil thing; but still his love to himself predominates after all. But God has a secret, by which He can not only give a new mind about Himself to one who was His enemy, but that secret is such, that when it is known, it works a deep hatred, a loathing against sin itself, and a deep sorrow for it, not only so far as it may touch the individual himself, but for the thing itself.

See the picture God gives of this in Zech. xii. The subject is the repentance and fruits of repentance of the stiff-necked rebellious house of Israel. For nearly 4000 years Israel has persisted in its own competency to render something to God—yet all the while it has had a lurking suspicion of Him, and a mistrust of His goodness; but when they know the truth of the gospel of the grace of God through Jesus Christ, then they have another mind toward God, another view about themselves, and deep mourning and bitterness fills them. “And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for Him, as one that is in bitterness for his first born. In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadad-rimmon in the valley of Megiddon. And the land shall mourn, every family apart; the family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Nathan apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Levi apart, and their wives apart; the family of Shimei apart, and their wives apart; all the families that remain, every family apart, and their wives apart.” (v. 10—14.) And observe here, God does not give sorrow first and then

show truth—but shows truth which works sorrow. And is it not so with the Christian now? Oh yes! he can read his sin in the drops of the blood of the Lamb that was slain—the terror of the consequences of sin is passed from him—and the spirit of mourning and sorrow for sin has begun,—“All my sin was against the God of grace. I have spent all my life in insulting the God that gave His Son to die for me—all my ways have been against the blessed Lord who loved me and laid down His life on the cross for me—how have I tried and insulted the Spirit of grace and of supplication—my very being has been a living suspicion against the God of grace—all my will and all my thoughts and desires against the God that loved me—the God of love. The root of sin and all the offsets of it, are all attempted denials of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, that blessed name of God which is now my portion for ever.” Such are the sorrows of a pardoned soul, such the connections of thought which make it hate and loathe itself. And this not only as connected with the man’s own self, but with others round him. The blasphemies in the street, the revellings and riotings of wicked men: the form of godliness without the power, in nominal religion; and the hard suspicious thoughts of God which those of you have who think they are to come to God upon the ground of what they can bring with them, and not of what God is in *His own SELF*—What are these to the christian? They are sorrow, and grief, and anguish, for they are all against the love of his Father, the heart of his Saviour, and the grace of the Holy Ghost. And thus he can sorrow for, loathe, and hate sin itself, where it has no criminating power over himself, just *for God’s own sake*. Dear friends, you know that those of you who have turned from the God of grace, and His testimony about the finished work of His Christ in order to make a hearty sorrow for sin, as something you propose to add to faith, never came near this sort of sorrow.

And now, is there any one that can say, “Well, after all I do not know what you mean by this repentance or new mind about God?” If such there be, I speak to thee, man, woman, or child, “Was there no change of mind towards God in those Jews who, having cried out concerning His Son, Away with him, Away with him, Crucify him, Crucify him, afterwards rejoiced ‘with joy unspeakable and full of glory’? (1 Pet. i, 8.) If thou sayest nay, apply the case to thyself,—

Thou camest here this night thinking that thou hadst power to save thyself, and that thou hadst to give to God something in order to secure thy salvation. Would it not be quite a new mind in thee if thou wert to go home from this place thinking, as we that believe do, 'Well, after all I have been my own enemy—I am without power—but God has justified me freely from all sin by the death and resurrection of His Son, and the seal of the Holy Ghost is for me. How do I know it? because I believe in Jesus, as it is said 'If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.' (Rom. x, 9.) Happy me! my trust and my hopes are now in him (Num. xxiii, 19) who 'is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent:' (1 Sam. xv, 29 :) for 'the strength of Israel (my refuge) will not lie nor repent: for He is not a man that He should repent.' Jesus is my salvation, and concerning Him 'The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent,—Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedek.' (Ps. cx, 4.) Yea I know my blessing is secure, for the gifts and calling of God are without repentance (Rom. xi, 29) on His part.'"

Dear friends, if such were the mind with which the whole congregation were now to arise from their seats and to go out of the doors of this room, would it not be to many of them quite another mind to that with which God and themselves know they came in through those same doors and sat down upon those seats? Oh yes! it would be a new mind toward God, and a blessed one indeed; one which would open the heart to God and His word, and the word to the understanding, and give a new view of every thing around them, for then with us they would look upon all things as being "of God, who hath reconciled us unto Himself." (2 Cor. v, 19.) And then, come weal, come woe! all is well.