

REPENTANCE;

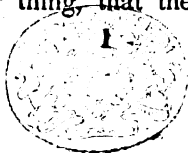
A TRACT.

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The infatuated prodigal left his father's house, where he enjoyed happiness and safety, and went into a far country. There he associated with profligates, rioted in debauchery, and speedily wasted his patrimony. This reduced him to penury, and constrained him to engage in degrading employ to gain a subsistence, which he failed of obtaining. During the whole of this ruinous and criminal process, from safety, honor and plenty, to extreme danger, deep disgrace, and utter wretchedness, he lived in perpetual infatuation, without remorse for the past, and without concern about his present condition or future prospects. If conscience ever awoke and smote him, its voice was hushed in the revel of intoxication, and his agitated feelings soothed with the syren song of guilty pleasure. He was deranged, actually fascinated. The spell, however, was at last broken,—the pleasing dream dissipated by the keen gnawings of hunger, constantly and painfully demanding gratification, which he could not furnish. This brought him to his senses, and he began to act rationally and hopefully, by considering his condition, how he came into it, and how he might be delivered from it, and restored to his former standing in society. Now his folly and his guilt appeared in their true colors,—he could not hide them from his eyes, and they touched his very soul. He saw and felt that he had played the fool, in leaving his father's house—associating with the vile, and squandering all his patrimony, by indulging in crimes. Conscience told him that he deserved forever the misery he had brought upon himself. Nothing, now, prevented him from sinking into despondency, but the persuasion of the love and compassion of his father. Compelled by his own urgent necessities, and encouraged by the hope of forgiveness and reception by his father, he cordially and bumbly submitted to his father, and is welcomed with demonstrations of joy.

The returning prodigal is the exact representative, or pattern, of every converted sinner. They have, one and all, left their Father's house, service, society and enjoyment; associated with his enemies, plunged into crimes as they could, and have tasted the bitterness of misery. God has not been in all their thoughts. They have lived in pleasure, walking according to the course of this world. This has brought them into misery, either outward or inward, or both. They have been made to feel that it is an evil and a bitter thing, that they have sinned against the



Lord their God, and that his fear was not in them. They have also felt that they were wretched and could never taste felicity unless they returned to their Father's house. Persuaded that he is merciful and forgives iniquity, they have confessed to him their sins, returned to his house, and have been kindly received and richly entertained. They have been sorry for their sins, renounced them in love and practice, and returned to obedience. The views that they entertain, the feelings they experience, and the exercises they perform in their interesting progress from sin to righteousness, are expressed by the general term, repentance. The following topics, with their illustrations, are intended to embrace the substance of what the scriptures reveal concerning it.

SEC. 1. THE NATURE OF REPENTANCE.—The genuine nature of true evangelical repentance may, in part, be ascertained from the scriptural terms employed to denote it. In the Old Testament there are two terms which we translate by repentance. The one means a return. This imports, that the transgressor is departing from the Lord, and that the penitent is sensible of his mistake, and is now turned about, and is retracing his steps, in order to return to his Father's house. The transgressor is the prodigal, departing from his Father's house; the penitent, the same prodigal returning. He has heard and is complying with the divine call, "Return, return, O backsliding children, and I will receive you." The other term signifies the deep sigh drawn from the bottom of the sorrowful heart, and is expressive of strong inward commotion. The tranquil and merry hours of the prodigal have passed away, and his soul has been made like a fiery oven, by the spirit of judgment, bondage and burning. He has been at the foot of Sinai—seen the lightning and the smoke, and heard the voice of God himself, and trembled for his own safety. He is returning unto the Lord, but it is with weeping and supplication. A sense of sin and unworthiness has broken his adamant heart, and he is now humble and contrite. He is smiting on his thigh in grief and shame for his follies and his crimes. In the New Testament there are also two terms which are rendered repentance. The one, and the one which occurs most frequently denotes after-thought, consideration of our past conduct, and a change of views concerning it. Once we paid no regard to it, or deemed it indifferent, and perhaps even praise-worthy, or at the very worst, deserving little censure and punishment. But if true penitents we have seriously reviewed our past conduct, and are fully satisfied that it was an express breach of the law of God, and exposes us to its curse. This new view has filled us with much anxiety about ourselves, and this anxiety is expressed by the other term, translated repentance. Both terms denote a change of sentiment about our conduct, and deep solicitude to be delivered from it.

And according to the views we entertain of God and of ourselves, as sinners, will be our feelings and exercises. If we deem God to be one like ourselves, who may be flattered and imposed on, we will feignedly profess sorrow for our sin and hypocritically return to him. This hypocritical repentance is common with multitudes in the day of distress, and vanishes when that distress is removed. If we see our sin to be exceeding great, and despair of pardon, we will be filled with the sorrow of the world, which worketh death. This was the repentance of Cain and of Judas. If we see our sins in the light, in which the scriptures exhibit them, and view them in connection with the pardoning mercy of God, going out to the most guilty through Jesus Christ the Mediator, our souls will be filled with godly sorrow, shame and hatred of sin, and will renounce it and return to God and our duty. This is that evangelical repentance, which is not to be repented of, and is unto salvation, and is thus admirably defined:—"Repentance unto life, is a

saving grace wrought in the heart of a sinner by the Spirit and word of God, whereby, out of a sight and sense not only of the danger, but also of the filthiness and odiousness of his sin, and upon the apprehension of God's mercy in Christ to such as are penitent, he so grieves for, and hates his sins, as that he turns from them all to God, purposing and endeavoring to walk with him in all the ways of new obedience." According to this definition, repentance consists of the three following acts or ingredients :

1. Correct apprehensions of the abominable nature and fearful consequences of sin, and also of God's gracious character as the just God and the Saviour.

"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." (Jer. xxxi. 19.) "Rend your heart and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil." Joel ii. 13.

The knowledge of sin, said an Epicurean philosopher, is the beginning of safety. This is true as gospel, and proved by this, that while all are sinners, there are few penitents. And what is the reason of this? Ignorance, sheer ignorance, is the true and sufficient cause. Some are so ignorant of the law of God that they know not when they keep or violate it. Some who have considerable knowledge of the letter of the law, are greatly unacquainted with its spirituality and extent. And some are so inattentive to their transgressions, that when reproved for them they plead, in excuse, that transgression is become habitual, and is committed without thought. All these are absolutely or comparatively ignorant of the nature, number and desert of their crimes. They have never seen the abominable nature of sin as committed against the Holy One of Israel, the Saviour and friend of sinners; and consequently are little affected with the fearful desert and ruinous consequences of transgression. The only sins that affect them, are those of the grosser kind, and they dread only their temporary consequences. The result is, that they remain at ease in their sins, have in general no concern about the pleasure or displeasure of God, and live hardened and impenitent. This is their usual frame, and it is never otherwise with them, except when aroused for the moment by some startling disaster that has befallen themselves or some fellow creature, and the momentary impression with all the good resolutions formed, passes away with their occasion, and they relax into their former carelessness and wickedness. This is manifestly the state, feeling and conduct of the generality of the human race, buried in ignorance and thoughtlessness, and as the inevitable consequence, living at ease in the commission of crimes while destruction is impending over them.

The frame of mind, and also the exercises of many are very different from those of ignorant transgressors. By means of instruction and personal reflection, they have attained much correct scriptural knowledge of God and of themselves, as transgressors of his law; certain circumstances and events of life, have frequently and intensely called their minds to their conduct, and every review of it, and comparison with the divine law makes them more and more sensible, that their transgressions are infinite, many of them dreadfully aggravated, and all, most abominable. Some of these fix their attention chiefly on the desert of sin, as exposing them to punishment, and being ignorant of the pardoning mercy of God, are dreading that it cannot be extended to them, are seized with terror, and their souls are rising up, in hatred of God, as their enemy, and in rebellion against him; others of them fix their attention

more immediately on the abominable nature of sin, and, remaining ignorant of the purifying efficacy of Christ's blood, are exceedingly distressed with an overwhelming sense of their own vileness and unworthiness. There are others whose minds are illuminated with correct views of sin and of salvation from it. The Holy Ghost has been at work upon them as the spirit of conviction, illumination and conversion. According to the language of the prophet, they have been "converted" and "instructed." They know the law in its purity, spirituality and extent. They are acquainted with God, as the God of holiness and majesty, justice and mercy. They have reviewed his providential and gracious dealings with themselves and with others. They have also contemplated him as gracious in the Son of his love, establishing the covenant of grace, and freely giving Christ and eternal life to sinners, that were rebelling against him. His kindness is not only seen but felt by them. They have known and believed the love that God has towards them. They are persuaded that he is their sovereign, their friend and their Saviour. This conviction pervades their souls, and humbles them to the dust, because they have sinned against such an one. They see and feel, on this account, that their sin is most abominable, and this sight makes them, in grief, shame and indignation, smite on their thigh and loath themselves. They can say, when they thus view sin and God, "against thee, thee only have we sinned, and in thy sight done this ill." They are perfectly sensible, that they are so covered with the loathsome pollution of sin as to be utterly unfit for pure society, pure services, and pure enjoyments. This pollution is most distressing to them; it is ever before them, and they keenly feel their need of cleansing, and earnestly desire it. They can heartily pray, "cleanse thou me, and I shall be clean." It's joyful news for them to hear, "that there is a fountain opened for sin and uncleanness." The promise of "sprinkling clean water upon them, and making them clean," is refreshing to their souls. It gladdens them to learn, on the authority of God himself, "that the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth from from all sin," and "that he is made sanctification."

They are also aware of the desert of their sins. They are convinced that they are evil as well as abominable. They are sensible that they justly and certainly expose them to all the evils of this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell forever. They are persuaded that they deserve all these, and that God would act justly in delivering them up to execution. This sense of the desert of sin, when separated from a view of the pardoning mercy of God in Christ drives to despair, but when coupled with this, impels to flee from the wrath to come, to the refuge set before us. Impelled thus by fear and hope, the trembling and alarmed sinner betakes himself to the mercy of God and cries for forgiveness for Christ's sake. He sees God appeased by the sacrifice of Christ, all the demands of the law fulfilled, itself magnified and made honorable, and the sight inspires him with such confidence, that he comes to God as his covenant God, and takes refuge in atoning blood.

These views of sin and of God, which the penitent entertains, are not unproductive, but as influential on his feelings and conduct, as the light and heat of the vernal sun, are on the earth; the earth on its productions, and the tree on its fruits. This is the necessary result of the human constitution, according to which all the feelings of the heart, and all conduct in life originate in, and are influenced by the views of the understanding. Hence we notice,

II. That the views of sin and of God, cherished by the penitent are productive of and followed by a "certain train of feelings, which constitute the second, and a very important ingredient in gospel repentance.

The correctness of this position is manifest from experience and observation. For it is impossible to discern that we have degraded and dishonored ourselves, without, on this account, being ashamed and filled with self-loathing. It is equally impossible to discern, that our sins have already deprived us of much good, involved us in great misery, and still expose us to the torments of hell, without, on these accounts being sorry for them, really hating them, fearing their consequences, and earnestly desiring deliverance. These feelings are so natural and unavoidable in the human heart, on a perception and conviction of sin, that they are no strangers among the most abandoned of men. The most profligate, blush when detected in the commission of enormous crimes, and seek the shades of secrecy, in which to perpetrate these crimes and to conceal their shame. The criminal, conscious of his desert, dreads deserved punishment, and is earnest to escape it. The very inmates of a prison, are sorry for their crimes and actually hate them, because they have deprived them of liberty, and subjected them to punishment. But all these feelings of shame, sorrow, fear, and hatred, may exist where there is no gospel repentance. They existed in Cain and Judas, and produced in both a certain species of repentance, but not that which is saving. Their repentance was not so much for the dishonor done to God by their crimes, as for the shame and injury done to themselves. All such penitents remain strangers to shame and sorrow on account of sin till detected. The sorrow they feel is selfish, and arises, not from their sin, but from the injury they have done themselves and their friends. They love still the sin, would willingly repeat it forever, and are grieved because the law is so strict as to forbid and punish it, and that they were such fools as to incur such lasting pains and privations for a momentary gratification. Hence the very moment the fear of punishment is removed, they return to their former sins, and with pleasure again indulge in them.

Furnish, on the other hand, an individual with the views of sin and God already described, and they will be followed by a corresponding train of feelings. Let him see the intrinsic abominations of sin, its utter loathsomeness, as committed against God, and let him see himself, also, as debased and ruined by it, and he will loath and abhor himself, and hate sin with a perfect hatred. He blushes at his own degradation, and cannot lift up his face before God or man. He is really humbled, and exclaims, not in ostentation but in sincerity, "behold I am vile." And the more he contemplates the beauty of holiness and the arrangements of heaven for cleansing from sin by the blood of Christ, and the sanctification of the Spirit, the more he is affected with his sin, and sinks deeper in abasement. He now understands the language of Job, addressed to the Almighty: "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." And seeing the abominable nature of sin, every sin is odious to him, and he desires cleansing, even from secret faults, hates the garments spotted by the flesh, and carefully avoids contracting additional pollution.

Reflecting on the relations God and man bear to him, and on the interests of both, and on his own, he perceives clearly the dreadful injury he has done to God, to man, and to himself, by transgression. He perceives that he has insulted God his creator, benefactor and preserver, by tarnishing his holiness, perverting his goodness, vilifying his majesty, and setting his justice and vengeance at defiance. The holiness, justice and goodness of that law of love and authority which he has habitually broken, stand before him revealed in their true colors. The love, grace and condescension of the Saviour, and of the Holy Ghost, which he has hitherto despised and rejected with contempt, pierce, melt and transport his very soul. He looks on fellow sinners, who have been his companions

in guilt, and betrayed by him into sin, shame and wretchedness, and his guilt and self-loathing increase, and floods of tears flow for the incurable mischief he has done them. In the agony of distraction, he looks on the havoc he has wrought, and which he cannot repair. He also considers the felicity of which he has deprived himself by his own folly and crimes, and also the dreadful evils in which he is involved. These discoveries made to him by reflection, by the events of Providence, the revelations of the Bible, and the operations of the Spirit of God, fill him with shame, sorrow and indignation, deep, sincere and keen. These discoveries manifest to him what he did not before suspect, that sin is the worst foe, the foe of his God, of man, and of himself; and viewing it with disgust, his indignation burns against it, and he is determined on deadly vengeance. He is now sorry indeed for his sin, with a godly sorrow. He hates every false and wicked way with all his heart.

The degree in which any or all of these views and feelings, which we have been attempting to describe, must exist in the truly penitent, cannot be easily nor perhaps safely determined. They will be regulated in part by the clearness of their natural perceptions of sin and duty, the tenderness of their sensibility, and the extent of their spiritual illumination and conviction. The perceptions of some are far more distinct, and their conceptions far more vivid, than those of others. The low degree, however, in which these views and feelings are found in many, discovers how little real religion they possess, and to what an alarming extent they still remain under the power of a darkened understanding, and an impenitent heart. The substance of them is realised in every true penitent, and they are never to be regarded as salutary till they render it impossible for him to continue longer in sin, and bring forth their appropriate fruits in the life. This brings to notice,

III. That the above views and feelings respecting sin lead to, and manifest themselves in a certain tenor of conduct which constitutes the third, and a very important ingredient in true evangelical repentance.

The views the penitent entertains of sin, and the train of feelings excited by them, remain not inoperative, but bring forth fruit meet for repentance. The fruits they produce are various, and may also be safely regarded as infallible evidences of its genuineness. The most common and distinguishing of these fruits and evidences of true repentance, are,

1. Frank, open confession of sin. "I will declare mine iniquity, I will confess unto the Lord my trespasses. My son, give glory unto the Lord, and make confession unto him." This confession of our trespasses is no compensation to the Lord for our injustice against him, but is evidential of our views of sin, and is ever an inseparable accompaniment of true repentance. The sinner industriously seeks to hide his sin from himself, from others, and even from God, and when detected, he extenuates and palliates it; but the true penitent ingenuously confesses his sins. Convinced of their number and aggravations, and feeling the greatness of his guilt and unworthiness, he is deeply affected with his situation, and fully convinced that God would act most justly in consigning him to ruin. The permanent conviction of his soul is that he could not stand, provided God marked his iniquity. This opens his mouth in self condemnation, in justification of God, and in magnifying the riches of pardoning mercy. His secret sins he confesses unto God, and his public sins and scandals he confesses before all men, especially before the church, and those whom he has offended. His private sins he confesses with all their aggravations, but in the acknowledgment of his public sins he is more general, though equally sincere. Thus David, who confessed his secret faults, and asked for cleansing from them, confessed his public sins before his servants, his family, and his subjects, and published to the world his sorrow

for giving occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. His penitential psalms are the public confession of his open sins. The confessions of the penitent are not merely verbal, but hearty, sincere, full and particular. They are made to the omniscient God by one sensible of his delinquencies, and penetrated by a lively sense of divine mercy in his forgiveness. They are made by a returning prodigal to his justly offended Father, but who has forgiven and kindly received and entertained him. He is therefore full and particular in enumerating all his sins, with their several aggravations, declaring them openly and confessing them frankly.

2. The true penitent sincerely endeavors to have all undone which he has done amiss, and particularly to make restitution to all he has defrauded or in any respect injured. The true penitent sincerely desires that undone which he has sinfully done, and uses every exertion to counteract its pernicious consequences. In accordance with this disposition, the trespass offering was to be accompanied with ample restitution to the injured party. Our Lord thus comments on the import of this transaction. "If thou bring thy gift unto the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar and go thy way, first be reconciled unto thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." In conformity to this, the penitent who is sensible that he has defrauded or injured a fellow creature, will endeavor to make ample restitution. If his circumstances permit, he will refund principal and interest to the injured party, or, if he be dead, to his heirs, or even to the poor. If he has been compelled, in the course of events, to avail himself of the law of insolvency, provided he is now able to refund, although the laws and usages of society would protect him in detaining what is not his own, he will treat others as he would be treated by them. He will shake his hands from detaining what in righteousness belongs to another. If unable by labor, or by retrenching all superfluous expenses to make restitution to those he has defrauded or injured, this very inability will be matter of serious regret and open confession. Thus felt and acted Zaccheus. If I have injured any man, I restore him fourfold. And that man's repentance wants one substantial evidence of sincerity who displays not the same disposition, and emulates not the example of this penitent publican.

But we may injure others in their name, peace, relations and principles, as well as in their possessions, and if penitents, we will do what we can to undo and counteract what we have criminally done. In any or all of these cases, we will hasten to clear and vindicate the characters we have calumniated, to heal the breach we have made, and to confess, confute and abandon the erroneous tenets we have advocated. Thus Paul abandoned and retracted his pharasaical errors, retracted his slanders against the gospel and its friends, commended to all, Christ and his cause, and labored assiduously to counteract the pernicious effects of his former mistakes and crimes.

3. The sincere penitent renounces the love and practice of every sin, and determines to walk henceforth in the way of new obedience. He ceases to do evil, and learns to do well. It is just as easy and natural for him to renounce and forsake sin, as to abandon a once beloved, but now hateful companion. It would do violence to all his present views and feelings to constrain him to serve sin any longer. He has seen its loathsomeness, felt its horrible effects, and trembled at its consequences; and now hating it with a perfect hatred, he forsakes it, resolved never to return to it. He has seen also the beauty of holiness, and the preciousness of Christ, and is determined to submit to his righteousness, and to keep his law. His old things are passed away, and all things become new. The tree is made good, and the fruit is good also. And without this renunciation, in profession, principle and practice, of all sin, even of

the most beloved lust, and a hearty determination and endeavor to fulfil the whole law, there is no sound evidence of genuine repentance. A Judas may confess his sin, even with grief and shame, and make restitution, but the sincere penitent goes beyond him; he renounces and forsakes all sin, and commences the faithful servant of Jesus Christ. He delights in the law of the Lord, after the inward man, and it is his meat and his drink to do the will of his heavenly Father.

The correctness of the description of evangelical repentance now given, may be tested and exemplified by a reference to some passages of scripture. These will evince that it comprises right views of sin and of God, and that train of feelings, and tenor of conduct of which these views are productive. Take, as an exemplification, the account given of penitent Ephraim, Jer. xxxi. 18, 19. "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus: 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. 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." He was instructed by being made acquainted with himself and with his God, the law he had broken and the penalty he had incurred. This instruction awakened in him feelings of shame, sorrow and hatred of sin. He then smote on his thigh, was ashamed, even confounded. He then confessed unto his God, renounced sin and returned to his station and duty, and experienced the kindest reception. "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."

Let us cast a brief glance at the prodigal, as another exemplification of repentance unto life. (Luke xv. 11—32.) Want aroused him from the stupor induced by sin, and brought him to his senses. Now he considered his ways; and his folly and guilt in leaving his father's house, associating with the vile, and squandering away his whole patrimony, passed in review before him. He also dwelt on the character of his father, whom he had abandoned, and the happiness enjoyed by the very servants of the household. These reflexions enlarged his views of his sin, folly and dishonor on account of the course he had pursued, and deepened his shame, regret and heart-loathing of himself and of his ways. Persuaded that his whole course was dishonorable and ruinous, and that it could not be too soon abandoned forever, he determined to arise, return to his father, make ample confession, and humbly submit. No sooner was this resolution formed, than it was carried into effect. He arose, returned, and was kindly received and generously entertained. The father saw him afar off, ran to meet him, fell on his neck and kissed him, ordered the servants to bring forth the best robe and put it on him, to put a ring on his hand, shoes on his feet, and to kill the fatted calf for his certainment.

Repentance is such a necessary and excellent grace, that there have been many attempts to counterfeit it. The Bible specifies many of these. It mentions the hypocritical repentance feigned by Israel when "they did flatter God with their mouth, and and lied unto him with their tongue." Ahab too humbled himself on the denunciations of his punishment, rent his garments, put on sackcloth and walked softly, but his heart was not rent from sin, neither did he walk in newness of life. Judas so far repented, that he brought back the money for which he had sold his master, cast it down at his employers' feet, and went away and hanged himself. His repentance was emphatically that sorrow of the world which worketh death. To enable the true penitent to understand more

fully that repentance which is unto salvation, and to distinguish it from that hypocritical repentance which may exist in a sinner still unchanged in heart and life, we shall mention a few of the most prominent differences between them.

1. Legal and evangelical repentance differ widely in their respective origins or causes. The former flows from a perception of the evil of sin and fear of its consequences. The transgressor finds to his sad experience, that sin has deprived him of peace and happiness, pierces his heart with regret and remorse, and he sees punishment ready to seize upon him. These views and feelings compelled even Cain to exclaim, "My punishment is greater than I can bear, and it shall come to pass that every one that findeth me shall slay me." This arouses the awakened sinner's selfishness, and from a regard to his own interests he is sorry for his sins, ashamed of them, hates them on account of their hateful results, and breaks off his criminal courses to avoid their dreaded consequences. The same considerations exert an influence on evangelical repentance. This flows principally from a perception of the odious, the loathsome nature of sin. Sin is seen in contrast with the majesty, holiness and love of God, and our obligation to serve him, and then it appears utterly detestable, the soul loathes it and cannot live any longer in it. Such was the view that made those of old exclaim, "We lie down in our shame, and our confusion covers us, for we have sinned against the Lord." In these the declaration is accomplished, "Then shall ye remember your own evil ways and your doings that were not good, and shall loath yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities, and for your abominations." Cherishing these views of sin, the saint can no more indulge with pleasure in it, than a cleanly person can wallow with satisfaction in natural pollution; or an affectionate child can insult a beloved and venerable parent. Fear and selfishness, then, are the source of legal repentance; love to God and hatred of sin on account of its intrinsic loathsomeness the source of evangelical repentance.

2. Legal repentance consists with the love of sin, especially of darling lusts; but evangelical repentance hates and abominates every sin. Sin is dear to the heart of the sinner as the light of heaven. The love of it is radicated in his whole soul. It is the very element in which he lives and its commission and indulgence afford him his highest gratification. It grieves him to the very heart that the divine law is so rigid as to condemn and punish sin, which he so fondly loves. To give it up is to renounce his darling gratification, and when self-preservation constrains him to part from it, he finds that he is tearing himself from his dearest friend, and still in parting wishes it well, and longs to return to it. Even when he prays for its destruction it would pain him to have his prayer answered. Evangelical repentance sees sin to be so hateful that the sight implants in the soul such an unextinguishable principle of hatred of it as will never be quenched but with its utter extirpation. This sight of sin effectually extinguishes delight in the most beloved lust. It causes to hate every false and wicked way with all the heart.

3. Legal repentance never forsakes every sin, nor inspires with the love of righteousness; while evangelical repentance abandons every sin, and turns to the love and practice of the whole law. The alarmed transgressor may desist from his more flagrant vices and engage in the performance of many duties, rather than perish in his transgression, but he can not and will not give up every sin. The sin that most easily be-sets him is dear to him as his right hand and right eye, and he will retain it and pass with it into the fire of hell, rather than abandon it. Ahab, in his alarm, put on sack-cloth, rent his garments, and walked softly, but he still retained possession of Naboth's vineyard. Herod heard John and did many things gladly, but he would not put away Herodias. Judas re-

repented, returned the price of his treason, confessed his sin in betraying innocent blood, but he never repented of his covetousness and hypocrisy. In short, the legalist rests in partial reformation of life, while the heart remains unchanged in the love of sin. Evangelical repentance changes the heart and the life, inspiring its subjects with a determination exciting them to endeavor to forsake every sin, and to keep the law. It is their sincere determination and earnest endeavor never to return to the commission of any sin, and the love of God shed abroad in their hearts prompts them to keep the whole law. The evil they henceforth do they would not, and their every failure in obedience causes them grief of heart.

4. Legal repentance is temporary; evangelical is permanent. The robber, when pursued and terrified, desists for a time from his depredations on society, and retires to his den. His condition, however, is disagreeable, the restraint is irksome, and he longs to sally forth and renew his acts of rapine and blood. The legal penitent, in the hour of alarm, may desist from his sins, and apparently commence a new course of life. The devil, the lust that haunted him, departs and wanders in dry places, and finds no rest till it returns and reoccupies its former habitation. He may abandon one, but it is in exchange for another. He may renounce for a time apparently every sin, but he returns to them, and again wallows in them. The true saint, in resolution and in endeavor, parts with all sin now and forever. His fixed determination is to return to no sin any more. He may feel inward impulses, and be solicited by outward temptations to any sin, but he resists both; and if surprised and overcome, he is restless and uneasy as the sheep in the mire, struggles to escape, and when delivered is more guarded than ever against a relapse. He is equally determined to persist in his obedience. He has returned to his Father's house, contented to take the place of a servant in it, and being exalted to the relation of a son, he is delighted with the discharge of his filial duties. He is altogether willing to have his ear struck through in token of his engagement to serve, from love, his Master forever. His language is, "Lord, I am thy servant. Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes, and I will keep it unto the end; so shall I keep thy law continually, for ever and ever."

SECT. II.—THE AUTHOR AND SUBJECTS OF GOSPEL REPENTANCE.

God is the author, and sinners, considered as regenerate and believing, the only subjects of repentance unto life. Sinful creatures, if left to themselves, would never repent, even though space was given them for repentance. Satan and his associates in crime have never grieved because of their rebellion against Jehovah. They still love iniquity, and are determined, at the expense of eternal ruin, to persist in its perpetration. Adam, by transgression, lost all the enjoyments of paradise, and exposed himself to endless misery; but instead of repenting, confessing and turning to God, he fled from him and hid himself among the trees of the garden. The severest judgments have been inflicted on sinners, and the greatest outward mercies conferred on them, yet they have remained impenitent. And the result cannot possibly be different. For how can a heart filled with hatred against God, relent, mourn for offending him, renounce iniquity, and love righteousness? It is as impossible for a fallen, proud creature to repent, as for the frost of winter to produce vegetation, or for the dead to arise and come forth to life. And no instance can be produced of it. Nearly six thousand years have passed away, and during the whole of that period the annals of truth record not a single example of a sinner, by his own exertions, repenting and obtaining salvation.

Jehovah himself, Father Son and Spirit, is the sole author, the only efficient cause of evangelical repentance. "Then hath God to the Gen-

eyes also granted repentance unto life." "If God will peradventure give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth." "And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplication, and they shall look upon him 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."

Christ, as Mediator, is exalted to be a prince and a saviour, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. As a priest, he has appeased the anger of Jehovah, and opened a way for the return of the guilty to his favor, and thus presents the strongest encouragement to repent. As a prophet, he has revealed the scheme of mercy, and is inviting sinners to consider their ways, and return unto the Lord. As a king, he is proclaiming pardon to the guilty, commanding every rebel to repent and return to his allegiance, and shedding down the Spirit to dispose, and enable transgressors to repent and return to the Lord. He thus opened his personal ministry: "Repent ye and believe the gospel."

The Spirit of the Lord is also intimately concerned in repentance. He is the immediate cause of it, the Father and the Son operating through him. It is his province in the economy of mercy to set the sinner's transgressions before his face in their number, aggravations and deserts; to convince him of his pollution and danger, and reveal unto him the pardoning mercy of God, and the justifying righteousness of Jesus Christ. When he is poured out as the spirit of grace and supplication, and acts as the spirit of grace, convincing the hardened of their sins, enlightening the understanding of the blind, renewing the will of the obstinate, and purifying the affections of the polluted, then the subjects of his work look on Christ, whom they have pierced, and mourn for that piercing with godly sorrow.

Sinners considered as regenerated and believing are the exclusive subjects of evangelical repentance. In innocency Adam was implicated in no crime, and repentance was not his duty. The inhabitants of heaven, though actuated with hatred of all sin and love to holiness, have no consciousness of guilt, no painful feelings for present transgression, and so cannot be the subjects of repentance. All men on earth being sinners, repentance is become the imperious duty of all. "God commandeth all men, every where, to repent." Paul, proceeding on this divine command, testified both to the Jews and also to the Greeks, repentance towards God. Hence it is called repentance from dead works, sin being its proper object; of these, whether public or private, of omission or commission, of greater or less magnitude, all men are bound to repent; and to turn, in purpose and in reality, to the love and practice of new obedience.

But while it is the duty of all men to repent, and many of them do repent, according to the sorrow of the world, that worketh death, none do repent unto life, but elect and believing sinners. Some transgressors are so hardened in crimes that they are past feeling. Their neck is an iron sinew, and their brow brass. They cannot blush, and they refuse to be ashamed. Others of them live in great thoughtlessness and stupidity, and when any alarming occurrence arouses them, they either delay repentance, till some convenient season, or cherish a momentary regret, terminating in some superficial and transient reformation. This is that legal repentance, found in ungodly, reprobate men, as Cain and Judas, and in many of the elect themselves, previous to any change of heart. In adults this is properly the precursor and preparation for evangelical repentance. The latter is found only in true believers. For there is a looking to Christ with the eye of faith, previous to mourning for him. It is a sight by faith of Christ as crucified, and of God as reconciled, the

produces that kindly sorrow which true penitents feel; and which brings them to Christ. Hence Ephraim saith, "Surely *after* that I was turned I repented, and *after* that I was instructed I smote upon my thigh; I was ashamed, even confounded, because that I did bear the reproach of my youth."

If this representation be correct, then gospel repentance precedes not, but follows faith. Legal repentance may, and generally, if not uniformly, does precede faith; but gospel repentance proceeds from faith, as its fruit and effect. Indeed, none but believers can have such a sight of sin, of God, of themselves, and of righteousness, as is productive of genuine repentance. And this repentance is indissolubly connected with grace and salvation. It is repentance after a godly sort, not to be repented of, and repentance unto salvation. Every other kind and grade of repentance may be found in the reprobate, but evangelical repentance, as well as faith and salvation, is confined to elect and believing sinners.

SECT. III.—THE MEANS OF REPENTANCE.

The means of repentance are various, and variously contribute to it. The Holy Ghost, though the efficient cause of repentance, does not usually operate in its production immediately, but mediately, through the instrumentality of a system of means. Some of these are occasional, merely exciting and calling the attention of the sinner to himself and salvation. Of this description are the events of Providence, whether prosperous or adverse. The goodness of God, although despised, should lead the transgressor to repentance, by calling his attention to the beneficence and mercy of God, as encouragements to the guilty to repent and expect forgiveness. The ills of life being manifestations of God's displeasure against sin, are admirably calculated to arouse from stupidity and induce serious consideration, and have often produced these effects. It is, indeed, God's usual procedure, to bring into the wilderness, and then and there begin the good work. It was Ephraim's *wounds* that made him bemoan himself. It was *want* that brought the prodigal to himself, and was overruled to produce the disposition and resolution to return to his father's house.

The grand standing and instrumental means of repentance is the word of God, read and preached. The law exhibits to the sinner his vileness and danger, and thus fills him with hatred of sin, and shame and sorrow on account of it, and awakens an earnest desire for deliverance. "By the law is the knowledge of sin." It is the fire to heat and the hammer to break in pieces the flinty heart, and thus to prepare it for the gospel. It produces however nothing, even when applied by the Spirit, but a legal repentance, and separate from the gospel would never fill the heart with the love of God and of holiness, and produce kindly relentings for iniquity, because committed against infinite majesty, grace and goodness. To this the gospel is as essential, as the law is necessary to prepare for its operation. It exhibits God as hating sin with a perfect hatred, and determined, as the righteous Governor of the universe, to maintain the honor of his law, but at the same time it reveals him as our gracious Father, giving, from pure love, his Son to die for our salvation. This discovery awakens a new train of feelings; our views of God are entirely changed: we see him to be at once the greatest and best of beings, and cannot forgive ourselves for ever having treated him as we have done. The very thought that he is pacified towards us, notwithstanding of all that we have done, leads us to loathe ourselves, and we cannot forgive ourselves for having sinned against him. We now feel willing to be hired servants in his house, contented to take the lowest place, and count his service freedom, pleasure and honor.

To render any mean effectual for this end, our use of it and the ac-

accompanying blessing of God, are indispensably necessary. It is in vain to expect a bountiful harvest, unless we cultivate the field, and God give rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons. God hath conjoined both in the institution of the means, and it would be enthusiasm and impiety to put them asunder. The case is exactly the same in religion. Jehovah has ordained, and he blesses a system of means for commencing religion in the heart, and for carrying it on to perfection when begun; and it is absurd to expect the result where these means are neglected; or that the use of them will prove effectual when the co-operating influences of heaven are withheld. If we would then find these divinely instituted means of salvation effectual, we must diligently use them, and fiducially and prayerfully depend on God for the blessing. In particular, in respect of repentance, we should be much in the exercise of self-examination, reading of the scriptures, hearing the gospel preached, meditation and prayer.—The first, second and third of these are admirably calculated to acquaint us with our hearts and ways, our present condition and future prospects. The fourth would affect our souls, and render the knowledge attained by self-examination, reading the scriptures and hearing the gospel, influential. The last would draw down the divine blessing on all the preceding means, and we should find in our happy experience the benefit of crying with Ephraim, “turn thou me, and I shall be turned.”

SEC. IV.—THE SEASON OF REPENTANCE.

There is a time for every purpose under the sun, and every thing is beautiful in its season, and some things have such a particular season that if they are not then done they never can be done. The field that is not sown in season cannot produce a crop in harvest. There is also a season for repentance, in which we may expect the divine blessing to make our use of the prescribed means effectual. “Behold now is the accepted time, behold now is the day of salvation.” “Harden not your heart as in the day of temptation in the wilderness, unto whom I swear in my wrath that they should not enter into my rest.” “Seek ye the Lord while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near.” “O Jerusalem, if thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things that belong unto thy peace: but now they are hid from thine eyes.” These declarations of God inform us that there is a day for doing the work of repentance, and when that day is closed, and the night cometh, it can no more be done forever.

The proper season for repentance is the first moment that ensues on the commission of sin. The moment any sin is committed, that same moment repentance is to be commenced, and while sin continues and is repeated, repentance must also be continued and repeated.

Youth is the most proper period of human life to commence repentance. Early repentance prevents the waste of precious time in sin, the confirmation of vicious habits, and the accumulation of crimes and misery. The farther any travel in sin, if they ever repent, the farther they have to return with weeping and supplication. Wounds that might easily be healed when fresh, can hardly be cured when gangrened. Sins that might have been early and easily crushed in the beginning, like the young of serpents and beasts of prey, when matured require the strength of the giant and the labor of years to destroy them. Then right eyes long endeared have to be plucked out, and right hands cut off. Then a war with the flesh has to commence, and unless prosecuted with energy to victory, we must be often shamefully conquered. Ease, carnal security, and Satan, prompt to defer repentance, but it never can be easier or more profitable than it is at the present moment. For it is as difficult for those that are accustomed to do evil, to repent, as it is for “the Ethiopian to change his skin, or the leopard his spots.”

But while youth is the most proper season for repentance, the season of it in general is not past till death closes the scene. We say "in general," for the sentiment seems countenanced by scripture, that individuals, as well as societies, may so advance in impenitence that their day of grace closes before death arrests them and seals their doom. But be this as it may, the delay of repentance till old age is both foolish and criminal. We read of two that were translated to heaven without tasting death, and of but one that in the course of four thousand years repented unto salvation at the eleventh hour. This holds out a solemn warning, that the probability of repenting late in life is extremely small. And how unseasonable, to have the first and great work of life to commence at the close, when the faculties are enfeebled, and disease and pain are distracting mind and body. How great madness to continue provoking God by delaying repentance when our days are in his hand, and he may cut us off in a moment, and "swear in his wrath that we shall not enter into his rest." And if the language of the Bible give fearful intimation that the day of grace to some is terminated before their natural life ends, the admonition comes in loud and thrilling accents: "Prepare to meet thy God." "To-day if you hear his voice, harden not your hearts." "For I say unto you, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

SEC. IV.—MOTIVES TO REPENTANCE.

We have the most urgent motives and encouragements to repentance.

1. Till we repent we remain under God's sentence of condemnation, and must perish. Said Christ, and repeated it to assure us of its infallible certainty and importance, "Except ye repent ye shall all perish." We have sinned, and therefore have become obnoxious to the curse. We have sinned times innumerable, and this increases the greatness of our danger. But suppose that we had sinned but once—as one murder is fatal, so one transgression subjects the transgressor to death the penalty of the law. This penalty is denounced against every transgressor of a law that is holy just and good. It contains not one ingredient more than transgression deserves. It is what the judge of all the earth has determined, and when inflicted, every mouth will be stopped from a conviction of its righteousness. It renders the transgressor completely miserable; but this is his just desert. And it will be infallibly inflicted. As the penalty is just, its infliction is certain. "The soul that sinneth shall die." Jehovah the just would act unjustly if he did not inflict it. But he will render to every man according to his works; tribulation and anguish to every soul that sinneth, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. Nay, without repentance the crime is persisted in, and there can be no holiness here nor happiness hereafter. For till the heart is weaned from sin, it cannot accept of the grace of the gospel, or bow to the supremacy of God in the law, and thus remaining impenitent under the dominion of sin, cannot find admission into heaven, and is utterly unprepared for any of its enjoyments. Life and death, then, are suspended on repentance. Remaining impenitent, we are condemned; repenting, our sins are blotted out, and we ourselves are saved.

This doom, however dreadful, is, obviously and incontrovertibly, most reasonable and righteous. To be satisfied of this, arouse thyself, transgressor, and consider the number of thy sins. They are more than the hairs upon thy head. They are innumerable. "Every imagination of the thoughts of thy heart," God being witness, "is evil only, and that continually." Thy soul abounds with these as the tree with blossoms, and they are all "evil," either being conversant about what is evil, or as the product of a soul destitute of the love of God. Thou sustainest manifold relations to God and to fellow men, and each gives origin to many

duties, and in all these thou hast sinned, and come short of the glory of God. Art thou in youth or old age, rich or poor, sick or healthy? Each condition has its duties, and hast thou not failed in the acceptable performance of them? How needful and reasonable then is thy repentance, and how dangerous continuance in impenitence? Consider not only the number, but also the aggravations of thy many sins. They have been committed against a law holy, just and good, and clearly announced in scripture. They have been committed against thy Creator, thy bountiful Benefactor, thy indulgent Father, and thy righteous Lord and Judge. And remaining impenitent under such numerous and heinous sins, canst thou escape the righteous judgment of God? Consider also the vile, the petty motives, that have induced thee to commit thy numerous and aggravated offences. It has been to enjoy the momentary gratification of some base appetite or accursed lust. Thou hast for a thing of nought, sold thyself to work iniquity. And ought not this consideration to fill thee with shame and self-loathing? And if not, thy condemnation will be so just, that all the righteous will acquiesce in it, and thy own mouth will be shut when thy doom is pronounced. Consider also the fearful mischief thou hast wrought to compass thy vile gratification. See the havoc thou hast made. Art thou a parent? By thy pernicious maxims and example thou hast taught thy children to travel with thee to hell, and hast been accessory to their ruin. Art thou a child, a brother, a sister, a neighbor? Art thou in a private or public station? Thy transgressions have tended to seduce others from the path of righteousness to sin and ruin. They have deprived thyself of true honor and felicity, involved thee in misery, and exposed thee to eternal destruction. And remaining impenitent, will not this destruction be reasonable, just and inevitable?

2. God is expressly commanding sinners to repent, and delights in pardoning the penitent. It is not left optional with the sinner whether he will repent or remain impenitent. The great God has interposed his authority, and commanded every sinner to repent. "But now God commandeth all men, every where, to repent." This command is proclaimed to thee, O transgressor, by the dispensations of Providence, and by the voice of conscience within thine own bosom. It is also most distinctly announced to thee in the scriptures. Listen and thou shalt hear the voice from heaven, saying, "Repent and believe the gospel." He is sending his servants to preach repentance and the remission of sins. He is reiterating to thee the call, and seconding it by conferring on thee at one time favors, and, at another, by trouble, smiting and again healing. And to encourage thee to comply with this reasonable command he is assuring thee, "that he has exalted Christ Jesus, a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and the remission of sin." He is telling thee that he "delights to pardon," and that he pardons without reserve and without upbraiding the returning penitent. He sees him when afar off and afraid to come, goes forth to meet him, falls on his neck, kisses him and kindly receives and liberally entertains him. And wilt thou persist in disobeying the command of heaven and refusing to comply with the entreating voice of mercy offering to thee a full, free, and everlasting pardon? How dreadful the guilt, and how justly will he refuse to hear when thou criest, and laugh when thy calamity cometh? To day, hear his voice, harden not thy heart, lest he "swear in wrath that thou shalt not enter into his rest." "Kiss the son lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him."

3. Repentance is connected with and followed by the richest advantages to the penitent. Repentance is no vain service, but connected with the whole happiness of a sinner. In the constitution of God it has salvation annexed to it. "Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that

your sins may be blotted out." Jehovah dwells with the true penitent. "But to this man, saith the Lord, will I look even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." It leads to and terminates in true comfort. "Blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted." And well may such rejoice; for they are reconciled unto three dreadful enemies, the justice of God, their own conscience, and to death. The justice of God is the enemy of every impenitent sinner, but it protects the penitent." If we confess our sins he is just and faithful to forgive our sins, and to cleanse us from all iniquity." Conscience, when awakened, not only threatens, but wounds, piercing the vitals and destroying all peace. The believing penitent enters into peace: Death is the king of terrors to the sinner going on in sin, but to the pardoned penitent death is divested of its terrors, and he can thus triumph over it. "O death! where is thy sting? O grave! where is thy victory!" In short it opens, though not meritoriously, but by the gracious constitution of God, the gates of paradise for the reception of the penitent. Not a genuine penitent was ever rejected by him that delights in mercy, and not one of them misses heaven. They believe and are saved.

Is repentance, then, accompanied and followed by the richest advantages? Let us make sure that our repentance is genuine. Let no repentance satisfy us which is not full, sincere, prompt, constant and scriptural. Let us test its genuineness by its fruits. Paul thus enumerates these, and let us try our repentance by them. 2 Cor. vii. 10, 11. "For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation, not to be repented of; but the sorrow of the world worketh death. For 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."

4. Many transgressors have repented and have been pardoned and saved. The Lord God, merciful and gracious, has already pardoned many guilty criminals, taken them into his favor and admitted them to heaven itself. Some of these have been most atrocious criminals. Manasseh, who made the streets of Jerusalem to run with innocent blood, was pardoned by him that sent his son to save the chief of sinners.— Paul, that breathed out slaughter against the church of Christ was pardoned by him that blotteth out iniquities like a cloud, and transgressions as a thick cloud. Pardon was offered to the very crucifiers of the Lord of glory, and they were called to repentance. Let none then despair: Obey the divine and gracious call. Isa. i. 16—20. "Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do well, seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now and let us reason together saith the Lord. Though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow. Though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land. But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."

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