

T H E

# UNION PULPIT.

A COLLECTION OF SERMONS BY MINISTERS  
OF DIFFERENT DENOMINATIONS.

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“In essentials, unity ; in non-essentials, liberty ; in all things, charity.”—*Augustine.*

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FIRST EDITION.

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WASHINGTON, D. C.

PUBLISHED BY WILLIAM T. SMITHSON,  
FOR THE YOUNG MEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION OF WASHINGTON, D. C.

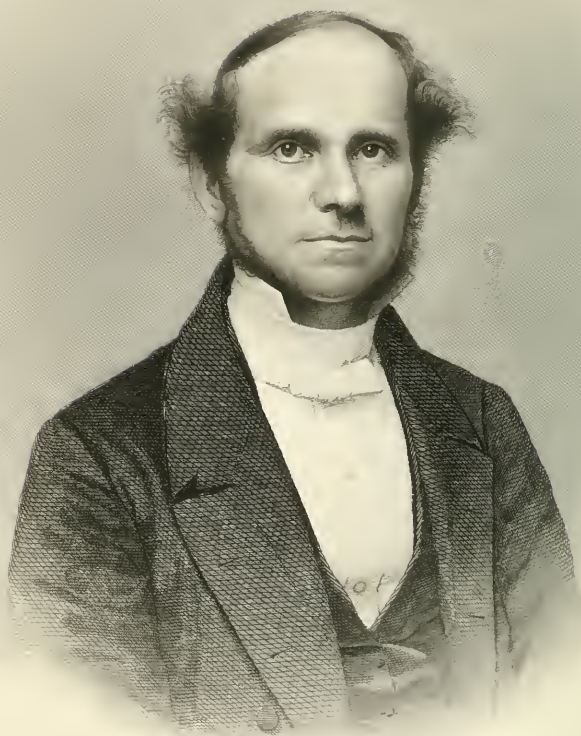
1860.

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Entered according to Act of Congress, June, 1860,  
By WILLIAM T. SMITHSON,  
in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the District of Columbia.

BUELL & BLANCHARD, PRINTERS.  
C. W. MURRAY, STEREOTYPYER.  
STEREOTYPED BY BLANCHARD'S NEW PROCESS.



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## REPENTANCE AND CONVERSION.

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Repent ye therefore, and be converted.—*Acts*, iii, 19.

The doctrine and duty of REPENTANCE AND CONVERSION TO GOD, in order to salvation, will never cease to be important, and a principal theme of discourse in this world, so long as men are found who are alienated from God, and wheresoever faithful ministers of Christ have access to their fellow men.

The blessed Saviour, the great teacher from heaven, opened His ministry with the plain assertion of this doctrine and duty, as bearing directly upon the condition and interests of *all* to whom He preached—all, without exception, who had not through the teachings of His prophets and heralds complied with these terms of salvation.

The disciples, who received the commission from Christ to preach His truth in His name, to the end that men might be saved—these, also, went everywhere, among all classes of society, preaching the doctrine and duty of repentance, and conversion to Christ, as things of universal concern and obligation, the invariable conditions of salvation from sin and hell, to all mankind.

The Epistles, also, abound in appeals and arguments setting forth this doctrine and duty; and in the closing book of the inspired canon, this same doctrine and duty are still and again endorsed by the Alpha and Omega—to be prominently maintained in the churches; whilst *heaven* and *hell* are there set one over against the other, the one as the final abode of the *penitent* and *converted*, and the other as the final abode of the *impenitent* and *unconverted*.

It is to be presumed that, among those to whom this discourse is addressed, there will be found *some* who are yet in their sins, without God, and without a scriptural hope of heaven. The divinely-

warranted terms of salvation are *yet to be complied with* by some of you, if you are to escape the death that never dies. By *preaching*, God saves them that truly repent and turn to Him. Our business, in preaching, is to bring the truths, whereby God convicts and converts sinners and edifies believers in the ways of holiness and peace, home to their consciousness and hearts. I come, then, to urge *this message*, in the name of God, upon all whom it concerns—"REPENT YE THEREFORE, AND BE CONVERTED."

Plain, straightforward language is consistent with true kindness, and best becomes this theme; with such language would I speak to my fellow men—my fellow sinners.

In addressing you as *sinners*, let it be understood that you are *not arraigned*, nor called upon to "repent and be converted," upon the ground that you are *exceptions* in the scale of general morality, or that you are *more ungodly* than your impenitent and unconverted neighbors and acquaintance around you. Our Saviour made no such discriminations in His preaching; but among sinners of every grade, and of all social positions, and in every path of wrong-doing, He and His true disciples went everywhere, urging the same immediate duty, and enforcing the appeal upon *all* with the same solemn and tremendous alternative of the soul's eternal ruin.

A *sinner*—be it then observed—is one who is *out of the right way*; it matters not by what particular path he departs from God, or by what particular forms of sin his alienation of heart and life is distinguished; he is one of that great multitude of whom the world is so full, of whom God has declared, "*They are ALL gone out of the way.*"

Among a thousand, yea, ten thousand sinners, there may not be found any two *alike* in the outward manifestation of the alienation of their hearts from God, their true and proper sovereign; and yet, as *all* lack the predominant principle of genuine allegiance to God, *this* is the just ground of His complaint against them, and of their condemnation in His sight; and upon *this basis* the text is applicable to *each one* of their entire number—to one as logically and as imperatively as to another. This statement and view of the case must, I think, be readily comprehended and assented to by all intelligent and candid minds. Let it be supposed, by way of illustration, that, as a father or master, you discover a predominant disposition in your household, among your children and servants, to neglect your proper

claims upon their regards and dutiful services; your righteous authority is not submitted to in the true spirit of reverence and love by any of them. No two of them, it may be, act out their disloyalty in *the same way*. This one uses your name disrespectfully; that one appropriates to his own selfish use and ends the supplies of the family, or the individual gifts conferred, without any proper appreciation of your careful and kind provision and bestowments; another heedlessly tramples upon the orderly regulations of the household, producing confusion and waste. Your approbation is not prized; your honor is not consulted; your interests are not contemplated; and in respect of each and all of them you find occasion, in the sorrow of grieved love and despised authority, to exclaim, "If I be a *father*, where is mine honor? If I be a *master*, where is my fear?" In such a case, the recital of the *different wrongs* done by each—the profanity of this, the selfishness of that, the heedlessness of another, the various vices and debasing associations, habits, and resorts—all of these will painfully affect you, each perhaps in a different way and degree; but the root of the difficulty, and the common cause of complaint with them all, is, that they are *alike* alienated in heart from you; they are *all* "gone out of the way." To sit down and discriminate as to the precise and distinguishing forms and paths of their rebellion—to cast up the exact amount and degree of their several offences—this will not lead to the peace of your mind, nor will it procure the approbation of your judgment or heart for any one of them. Moreover, should this individual offender seek to justify himself, because, forsooth, he had not committed the offence peculiar to another; or that one claim your favor because his course had been less public, or possibly less injurious or shameful than that of some others—these several pleadings at self-justification would be, in themselves, offensive, while as yet genuine love and loyalty were wanting in them all.

The self-justification of one, at the expense of another, where all were "*out of the way*," would virtually be the setting up of *SIN*, in some form and degree, as the law of your household; it could be regarded only by you as a subtle plea *for sin*, and for each individual's preferred mode of transgression; thus there would be added to the injury first done to your authority and feelings, an insult to your purity and good sense. What you would most earnestly desire, and most righteously demand, would be—that each and every one of

them should immediately and truly “REPENT and be CONVERTED” from *his* way; and in every case of *genuine* repentance and conversion that might occur, there would be *this feeling* common to them all—“Against thee have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight, and am not worthy to be owned as thy child, or servant.” Each one would see and feel *his own sin* most clearly and most deeply.

It is *alienation of the heart from God* that opens the door and leads the way to all the outward forms of sin. This it is that gives the sinner up to the various forms of temptation which may assail him. In *this* he diverges from the *right way*; and this alienation of the heart from God is the corrupt stream and force which sets in motion all the wheels of transgression.

The poison of the intoxicating cup may make one man taciturn, another noisy, another mirthful, another profane, another pugnacious—all alike drunken and debased, deranged and demoralized; so the poison of *apostacy in heart from God* may put on innumerable forms of debasement, and work out ever-varying kinds of mischief, and there shall possibly be found as many kinds of sinners as there are individual men, still one thing is true of them all—each one has departed from God, each is devoid of holiness, each is obnoxious to the Divine displeasure, and in the way to hell. Therefore, to each one does the appeal of the text apply with equal force, “REPENT AND BE CONVERTED.”

The disposition, so common in the world among sinners of different classes, or of the same general class, to compare themselves one with another, and to justify themselves, each in *his own course* of alienation from God, in *his* impenitent and unconverted state and way, indicates most clearly an “*evil heart*,” opposed to the holy claims and righteous rule of Jehovah. This disposition is utterly at variance with right apprehensions of the attributes and honor of God, and cannot coexist with true reverence for His law, or penitence for sin. Indeed, where true penitence is felt, whilst each sinner will deplore the sins of *others*, be they the same or different from his own, he will be apt to think worse of *himself* than of others, inasmuch as it is the proper office of the individual conscience in the bosom of a man to press upon *him* the searching authority of his Maker and Judge, to bring up into absorbing view and to produce an abasing sense of his own depravity and guilt.

Conscience, as a witness for God and an accuser of the individual

man for his own sins against God, to his own shame and peril, drives the truly convicted and penitent man away from all refuges such as the unhumbled and impenitent seek to find in the greater or less sins of other men.

The average impiety of other men around him is no shield or ground of justification to one who is disposed to be honest with himself and with his Maker. A *petty defaulter*, who should plead exemption from the duty of repentance and conversion, or from the enforcement of the sanctions of law, upon the ground that there were many other instances of defalcation as bad or even worse than his own, virtually repudiates the law of honesty, and pleads for a license to commit repeated *petty frauds*. Such a plea is subversive of the primary and fundamental principles of virtue and integrity, and a defence of the principle and practice of sin. Such an advocacy of *a little defalcation*, or wrong of any kind or degree, done toward God or man, is, in itself, one of the most high-handed insults to God, and one of the most injurious sentiments among men that can be committed or proclaimed. It goes to subvert the first ideas of moral virtue. It saps the foundations of private integrity and public justice. Give it play and room, let it work out its legitimate results unrestrained, and it would dethrone God himself.

What should we say of a worshipper of *graven images*, arraigned before his Maker for *that offence*, who should excuse himself, and decline immediate repentance and conversion, upon the plea that his neighbors worshipped *a greater number of idols*, or idols of a *greater size* than his own? He pleads for *his own idolatry!* Be it but *one image*, and that *a little one*, a *cheap one*, he pleads for *it*; and in pleading for that one idol, however small, he pleads against the only living and true God, and for idolatry in the principle of the thing. That little idol, harbored and defended, shows a heart quite "gone out of the way." Thus the habitual cherishing and advocacy of the least of all sins, (as men are accustomed to speak of "*little sins*,") and a refusal to "repent and be converted," proves a heart stoutly opposed to God and holiness, in league with the devil, and an abettor of moral anarchy.

We may compassionate infirm humanity, when, under the force of strong and sudden temptation, it falls into sin; and we may rejoice over it with holy joy when, in self-condemning abasement, it prostrates itself before God in the true spirit of repentance and con-



version ; for such self-abasement, in view of its offence against the Divine rule of truth and purity, is true dignity and honor. But when apostate humanity habituates itself to known sin, in any form or degree, and pleads for it under any pretext, refusing to “repent and be converted,” then, as we are true to God and moral virtue, we must approve of the solemn expostulation and warning of the Bible, wherein the God of Mercy and of Justice exclaims, “I will judge you, O house of Israel, *every one according to his way*, saith the Lord God. Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions ; so iniquity shall not prove your ruin.”

It is doubtless true that there are different degrees of guilt among impenitent and unconverted men, of which God himself is the only infallible judge ; but as the spirit of sin is a spirit of delusion, and as every sinner is one to whom the language of inspiration may be applied, “*a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say is there not a lie in my right hand?*” hence it follows that the sinner, great or small, is not a competent witness in his own case. Each deceived and deceitful heart, in love with its own sins, and prone to evade the spirituality and extent of the law of God—prone, like Adam and Eve in the first transgression, to exculpate itself at the expense of others—prone to magnify the mote in a brother’s eye, and to be unconscious of the beam in its own—such a heart will fail to make a proper estimate of its own inward depravity, or the evil of its outward conduct.

God only knows, and can reveal, the evil nature of sin. He has expressed His estimate of it in the expulsion from paradise, and the blight sent upon the entire earth as its theatre. He has expressed it in one general deluge by water, and in one partial destruction by fire. He has expressed it in the agonies of His SON JESUS CHRIST on the Cross, endured in behalf of those who are guilty of sin ; and in the fore-threatened and fore-shadowed doom of the impenitent and unconverted, in the pains of hell forever. “The soul that sinneth, it shall die.”

In view, then, of the immeasurable and inexpressible baseness and demerit of *all sin*, considered as *opposition to infinite holiness, goodness, truth, love, and majesty* ; and in view of the deceiving power of sin in the heart where it dwells, it would seem safe for each man to act upon the *apprehension*, at least, that *his heart and his sins* may be as blind and as base as the heart and sins of any other man possess-

ing equal light and privileges. It is certain that no man, especially no impenitent and unconverted man, will ever over-estimate the corruption of his own heart or the guilt of his own transgressions against the infinitely holy God. And we have already seen that the disposition to plead even for a supposed "*little sin*" is the very height of offending.

Thus are we all, as sinners, *great or small*—and of this God is the only proper judge—all shut up to the solemn and immediate obligation of repentance and conversion. To this solemn and immediate duty, interest, and *privilege*, it is the design of this discourse to persuade the impenitent and unconverted. Repentance or perdition are the alternatives in your case. "Except ye repent," said the faithful, loving Jesus, to a promiscuous assembly of sinners, "ye shall all likewise perish."

Casting aside all idle speculations, it is not difficult for candid minds to understand the nature of true repentance and conversion. The Holy Scriptures reveal the *character* and *will* of God—the *one* every way worthy of supreme reverence, adoration, and love; the *other* a sublimely and supremely excellent and authoritative rule of feeling and action, in every relation and path of life. They represent this world, with all its objects and interests, as the moral domain of Jehovah, where all the faculties of the souls and bodies of men may and ought to be employed in the grateful and obedient recognition and improvement of every gift of His bounty, and ordering of His Word and providence, to His honor and glory. THIS IS THE RIGHT WAY—the way of truth, integrity, and honor; of real happiness and peace for mankind. This way it was in which the race started its career in Eden. God smiled, and the human soul was glad. Love, gratitude, and cheerful duty, were the sweetest perfumes of paradise; and the unclouded morning of creation witnessed the offering of this holy incense from the hearts of creatures to their approving Creator. This way has been departed from by all the descendants of apostate Adam, begotten in his apostate likeness, and following in his apostate steps. The call to repentance and conversion is a call from GOD to *His creatures*, to *come back* to Him, to change their minds, their affections, and aims. It is a most righteous call for God to make. It is a most righteous and noble obligation for man, the sinner, to meet and respond to at once, without evasion or reserve.

In genuine repentance, the seed principle of opposition toward God, and indifference to his will and honor, is abjured, with virtuous shame and sorrow. There is baseness, disgrace, and peril, in sin, and the repentant heart realizes and confesses it. God's order of things in his moral government is right, useful, and tends to His glory and the good of His creatures, and the repentant heart assents to and rejoices in it. The way of apostacy from God is the way of the arch tempter, and of all bad men; the way of vice and all crime; the way of delusion and folly now, and of hopeless ruin and remorse beyond the unknown limits of divine forbearance.

The *repenting* and *converting* soul—moved thereto by just views of spiritual and eternal things, as urged upon it by the Word and Spirit of God—trusting in the graciously-proffered remission of sins through the blood of Christ, and the promised aids of Divine grace to persevere in the right way, *comes back to God*, saying, Forgive me! Uphold me! Guide me! Save me!

Blessed change! Blessed is the soul that experiences it! It is a change from darkness to light—from the power of sin and Satan unto God. Moral order takes the place of impious disorder in the heart. Satan is dethroned, and God is enthroned in His proper place.

All who love God and truth, and who take pleasure in man's highest interests—his only true happiness—rejoice over this change; the good on earth and the good in heaven are glad; "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God, over one sinner that repenteth."

The philanthropy of heaven and earth is in deep and holy sympathy with this triumph of truth and grace in the penitent's soul, and the echoing refrain swells upward, and downward, and onward—

"O how divine, how sweet the joy,  
When but one sinner turns,  
And with an humble, broken heart,  
His sins and errors mourns!

"Pleased with the news, the saints below  
In songs their tongues employ;  
Beyond the skies the tidings go,  
And heaven is filled with joy.

"Well pleased, the Father sees and hears  
The conscious sinner's moan;  
Jesus receives him in His arms,  
And claims him for His own.

“Nor angels can their joys contain,  
 But kindle with new fire :  
 ‘The sinner lost is found,’ they sing,  
 And strike the sounding lyre.”

Repentance and conversion is no abstract, cold, difficult dogma of religion, but a thing of plain and practical sense, and of vital interest and experience. Some sinners—yea, a great multitude—have experienced this change, and are examples and witnesses for it, in heaven, and also now upon the earth. This experience is the line of demarcation between all that is pure and ennobling and all that is impure and corrupting among mankind.

Why, O sinner, with these motives and calls from the revelations of God, urged upon you by the blessed Spirit, why should not *you* REPENT AND TURN TO GOD? The delusion of sin has led you, it may be, far, far away from the way of purity and peace. That delusion, strong as it is now, grows stronger by delay. If ever saved, you must repent. Continued impenitency is itself a growing vice in the heart, and crime in the life. It is *utterly indefensible*; if persisted in, it must grieve and tend to quench the Spirit of God from your heart. It keeps you on the side of sin and guilt in this world, thus giving all the force of your example to public irreligion. It may quite possibly be said of some of you, in view of your respective positions in the family and in society, as the Saviour said to some in His day, “Ye shut up the Kingdom of Heaven against men; for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.” Turn, then. Oh, turn now to God in Christ, from the world’s delusive snares, renouncing all for God, and submitting all to God, as your soul’s proper sovereign and choice.

If it were a matter of uncertain propriety to which you are urged, you might hesitate; but this change is divinely appropriate.

If it were a question of abstract speculation, you might content yourself with neutrality; but, so far from this, it is your personal, immediate, chief concern.

Declining or deferring immediate repentance and conversion, is it not obvious that you give moral preference to that which is evil, over that which is good? and do you not virtually say to God your Maker and Christ your Saviour, “Depart from me, and follow me no more with Divine counsels and merciful proposals?” Do you not virtually say to the Holy Spirit, “Depart from me, and leave my conscience to

slumber in sin, my heart to harden in impiety, and my soul under the present displeasure and the suspended, avenging wrath of a holy God?"

Will you not, *now*, be won to repentance and conversion—NOW?

"Behold the SAVIOUR at *thy door!*  
He gently knocks—has knocked before;  
Has waited long—is waiting still;  
You treat no other *Friend* so ill.

"Oh, lovely attitude! He stands  
With melting heart and outstretched hands!  
O matchless kindness! And He shows  
This matchless kindness to His foes.

"Admit Him; for the human breast  
Ne'er entertained so kind a guest;  
Admit Him, or the hour's at hand  
When at His bar denied you'll stand."

Let it be your grateful and glad response—

"Open my heart, Lord; enter in;  
Slay every foe, and conquer sin.  
I now to Thee my all resign;  
My body, soul, and all, are Thine."