

3:10-12 pt.]. The devil will draw you on, by little and little, into his snares and fetters, till you are as fast bound as if girt with chains of brass. God's books of remembrance have every vicious deed, idle word and sinful thought registered; and the Almighty's wrath is poised over your 'never-dying' soul! *He that believeth not, is condemned already,...and the wrath of God abideth on him.* [John 3:18, 36 pt.]. "The pleasures of sin are momentary; but its punishments are eternal." (Augustine). *The way of transgressors is hard.* [Proverbs 13:15 pt.].

Self-deception is dangerous! *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know it?* [Jeremiah 17:9]. It is easy to deceive yourself and become insensible to your OWN sins. Sin, though black as Hell, is glossed over with fair words and false colours. Outrages are termed *frolics*, drinking, swearing and sodomy, are the *gay life*. Religion is called melancholy, and mocked. *Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil;* [Isaiah 5:20 pt.]. Beware!! Be willing to know the worst of yourself to avoid delusion. Look into your imagination, understanding, conscience and affections to see the wickedness now there and in the past. Don't be a stranger to your heart. Labour to gain a full view of the majesty and holiness of God; then you will see the infinite evil of sin, and your own depravity as a sinner. A little time spent in close self-examination may do you more good than reading a thousand books.

II. ON THE NATURE OF REPENTANCE

Most impenitents turn away from true repentance with hatred and scorn. The blinding and hardening nature of sin first deceives, next stupefies, and finally destroys them. *What is the Almighty, that we should serve him?* [Job 21:15 pt.]. They try doing better, reforming or getting religious in place of Biblical repentance. Today's 'easy believeism' is also a vain counterfeit.

The true penitent has a thorough change of mind, contrition of heart and deep self-abhorrence. He sees God as supremely great, infinitely gracious, and worthy of the highest love and reverence of every creature. He honors God as a rock, His work perfect, His Word pure, and His ways wonderful and past finding out. He abases himself in the dust as vile and undeserving of God's grace. He sees the fullness of the Godhead in Christ his Saviour, and all the promises and provisions of the gospel – as well as the keys of hell and death in His mighty and faithful hands. *I... have the keys of hell and of death.* [Revelation 1:18 pt.].

The genuine penitent's priorities shift from the body to the immortal soul. Contrition of heart brings acute awareness of the nearness of death, the certainty and solemnity of the last judgment, and the endless unutterable misery of Hell that its sin has procured. It is expressed as, *What must I do to be saved?* [Acts. 16:30, Title]. If my soul be lost, it can never be recovered, and will be utterly undone! King David, broken-hearted, and contrite, cried out for forgiveness and pardoning grace: *For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight:..Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.* [Psalm 51:3-4, 2]. The publican in Lk. 18:13, *standing*

afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven; but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner!

And now, Reader, ask yourself whether you know anything of this godly sorrow? There is misery and blame in every sin, in the degree that it opposes the truth, holiness, and goodness of God. Have you been abased and confounded with a view of the number and greatness of your sins (millions and millions), your ingratitude and rebellion of the past toward divine grace...and the offer of forgiveness now available? *But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound:* [Romans 5:20 pt.]. When you see YOUR sin in the full and hate it, you cannot but lie abased before God in godly sorrow. *Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.* [Job 42:6].

Genuine repentance is not moral effort, confession of sin or an occasional melting of natural affection (tears). There was not a drop of godly sorrow in Esau's tears, Felix's trembling or Agrippa's "Almost." You must hate your sins, abhor yourself for committing them, and want to forsake them completely to find grace [II Corinthians 7:9-11]. A moral life can flow only from a renewed heart, and repentance must precede training to true, God-pleasing obedience.

III. ON THE NECESSITY OF REPENTANCE

Repentance is absolutely, universally and immediately necessary, because *All have sinned; and come short of the glory of God;* [Romans 3:23 pt.] and *God...now commandeth all men every where to repent:* [Acts 17:30]. You can lose your life, reputation and material wealth on this side; BUT without repentance (conversion) you will miss Heaven and end up in Hell. If the gospel does not change you, your impenitence will not change God's councils (Word). *I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.* [Lk. 13:3, 5]. *Follow...holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.* [Heb. 12:14 pt.]. *Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.* [John 3:7]. We must be holy, or we cannot be happy. We must be like Christ, or we can never be with Christ. The wicked (unsaved) will go *into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels...but the righteous (saved) into life eternal.* [Matthew 25:41, 46 pt.].

I address (1) the profligate and presumptuous; (2) the negligent and careless; (3) the self-righteous and hypocritical. To (1) – you are without excuse...a conscience seared as with a hot iron, is a sure presage of everlasting burnings. *Who hath hardened himself against him, and hath prospered?* [Job 9:4 pt.]. To (2) – if you be estranged from God, unmindful of the gospel of Christ, and unconcerned about an eternal world, your souls are exposed to ruin. *Choose you this day whom ye will serve.* [Josh. 24:15 pt.]. To (3) – don't rest on the wretched foundation of your own goodness...*There is none that doeth good, no, not one.* [Romans 3:12 pt.]. You need deeep repentance! Don't delay, by presuming the mercy of God on a death bed: the forerunners and messengers of death are all around you ready to sweep you into the fire. *Your life is even a vapour,*" [James 4:14 pt.]. *Behold! NOW is the day of salvation.* [II Corinthians 6:2 pt.].

IV. THE MEANS OF PROMOTING REPENTANCE

Every man in his natural state helplessly yields himself to sin. Only the Son can loose him, and let him go; raise him, and renew his mind – but no other can. *If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.* [John 8:36]. Christ sends the Holy Ghost to open the fountain of repentance in the heart.

His instruments are as follows: (1) reading the Holy Scriptures and other good books (e.g., Pilgrim's Progress, Allien's Alarm, etc.), (2) preaching of the gospel, (3) prudent counsels, and faithful, affectionate reproofs and (4) affliction. By reading and preaching, the fire and hammer of God's Word can melt and break the hardest of hearts (Jeremiah 23:22). *By the law is the knowledge of sin.* [Romans 3:20 pt.]. *It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.* [I Corinthians 1:21]. Plain and powerful preaching is the great instrument used by God in every age for the conversion of sinners. Philip Henry said, If I should die in the pulpit, I wish to die preaching repentance. (3) A few words of kind counsel in private have led many to repentance. Nathan's words, *Thou art the man*, led mighty King David to repentance. [II Sam. 12:7]. Severe affliction has oft been a messenger of mercy bringing a sinner to God.

O Impenitent, the duty and privilege of the witness is to use every lawful means, with serious consideration and prayer, to exhort you to repentance. *Repent ye, and believe the gospel.* [Mark 1:15 pt.]. Compassionate appeals, in searching and solemn words, from hearts glowing with zeal (and tears) for the conversion of your soul are sent to you. Pour your heart out to God, saying, "O Lord! Thou hast sent thy gospel to my ears – apply it to my heart!" Do not make light of private counsels and afflictions – open your heart to God and His Word, for your life will soon be over, and it will be too late.

To promote your repentance; meditate on the shortness of time, and the awful importance of eternity. O, retire to solitude, and look to your future state. *Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still.* [Psalm 4:4]. Seek to see forgotten sins and your guilty conscience exposed in the light of God's glorious perfections...*Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts:* but, *I am vile, and undone.* [Isaiah 6:3, 5; Job 40:4 pt.]. Meditate on the life, and sin-atonement death of Jesus Christ and His mighty resurrection. See the wonderful love of Christ in giving Himself as a sacrifice for you. Behold the Lamb of God taking away the sin of the world, and yours in particular. *For God so loved the world (you), that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever (you incl.) believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* [John 3:16].

V. WHAT REPENTANCE IS NOT

He is not a Christian who is so in name, in form, and in profession only. A man may change his religious behaviour, opinions, denomination or ceremonies, and never be converted or changed by the gospel. He may have the garb of a penitent, the speech of a believer without one drop of sincere sorrow for sin or precious faith in the heart. Worldly sorrows arising from life's losses and disappointments, or from bodily weaknesses or infirmities are no proof of repentance. They choke the Word. Nor are lively hopes and confident joys coming from a stony-ground

hearer, without a root. If, like Herod, you have some particular sin for which you cannot bear reproof, you are deceiving yourself by supposing your joys are proof of your conversion. You are yet in your sins. O, dreadful state! To be given up to a reprobate mind, to work all uncleanness with greediness, is the most wretched condition this side of hell! Blood-chilling is this state. *Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?* [II Corinthians 13:5].

VI. THE EVIDENCES OF REPENTANCE

Be very careful in examining yourself, or your labour will all be lost. If you cannot go to God with a broken heart, go to him for a broken heart. A true penitent will forsake his sin, renounce the world, resist the devil, love Christ, and long to be fully conformed to Him. He will lay aside every plea for sin, and give up the practice of it. *He that covereth his sins shall not prosper, but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.* [Proverbs 28:13]. Bring forth fruits meet for repentance, for by such fruits only can it be known. Indulging one lust in secret is destructive. The least sin was painful to Christ, hateful to God, and hurtful to the soul. Set yourself against secret sins, as much as against those which are open and well known. *I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way.* [Psalm 119:128].

The penitent is yielding and submissive to God. Do you know your weak side, and place a double guard there, such as a covenant with the eyes and a bridle on the tongue, or avoid the very appearance of evil? Though many sins rise, they do not reign. You will carry on a constant war against sin. When he fails, he will confess his sin, and seek God's help to forsake it. *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* [I John 1:9]. Use bolts and locks, if necessary. He is thankful for every providential restraint that prevents his committing sin.

He renounces the world; and shuns and flees its sinful occasions and company, that are summed up as *vanity and vexation of spirit* [Ecclesiastes 2:11 pt.]. Bad examples have great power to draw men into sin, so don't mix with the worldly-minded and wicked. *If any man love the world* (lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life), *the love of the Father is not in him.* [I Jn. 15 pt.]. He will also repair, as far as possible, the mischief he did in impenitence. Resist the devil, crying out with the martyrs, "None but Christ!" *Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.* [Js. 4:7 pt.]. Don't change your sins, as you do your clothes, and so wait on your old infernal master in a new livery. He who loves Christ also longs to be like Him. A real love like this can't be hid.

If you have some evidences of repentance don't be always doubting and complaining, or you will grieve the Spirit. A weakly penitent is like, "the cornfield which had millions of weeds in it, but it is nevertheless, still a cornfield; or, a rosebush with a single rose on it, is still a rose bush." He will still weed and prune you.

If the evidence suggests you have an ill-grounded assurance of salvation, and are still in a state of impenitence, there is not a

moment to be lost. Fly, fly without delay to the Redeemer. Whenever there is a due sense of sin unforgiven, I would say, hasten to the Lord Jesus Christ.

VII. ENCOURAGEMENTS TO THE REPENTANT

Every word in the gospel speaks encouragement enough to animate the contrite and humble soul to repentance. All the promises of God are *yea* and *Amen* in Christ Jesus [II Cor. 1:20]. I direct you to those promises which hold out (1) pardon, (2) adoption, and (3) the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit.

Pardon (1) is a blessing that can't be too earnestly sought or too highly valued. God (a) commands and (b) invites you to accept pardon; (c) pleads with you to receive it; (d) points to the blood of atonement, (e) the intercession of his Son and (f) the examples of those who have obtained forgiveness to prevail with you to receive it for yourself. It is (a) commanded: *Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out,* [Acts 3:19 pt.]. You are (b) invited to accept it. *Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy on him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.* [Isaiah 55:6, 7]. He (c) pleads with you to accept it. *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.* [Isaiah 1:18]. If you are deaf to other calls, hear the voice of (d) a Saviour's blood crying 'pardon and peace to penitents.' *In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.* [Colossians 1:14]. The intercession of God's Son calls: *Come unto me; Behold, I stand at the door and knock; I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me.* [Matthew 11:28, Revelation 3:20, John 14:6 pt.] Examples such as Manasseh, Zacchaeus, Mary Magdalen, the bloody Saul of Tarsus and the thief on the cross shows Jesus' blood has not lost its merit or its power to save even the vilest of sinners. A heavy burden of sin extinguishes joy. But joy overflows its banks when a strong persuasion of forgiveness comes after a deep sense of sin, and a full view of approaching punishment. The Ethiopian *went on his way rejoicing*, following his conversion [Acts 8:39 pt.].

Adoption (2) brings the penitent great, manifold and unspeakable mercies by a new birth into God's family. Looking back at your wicked ways and doings, you can see your soul stripped and undone, and wisely resolve, like the prodigal son to return to your Heavenly Father. Arise then and go to Him. It is death to return to the world. *There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.* [Proverbs 16:25]. Adoption will give you a name and a place in God's house higher than any pinnacle of earthly greatness. *Behold, what manner of love the father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God:* [I John 3:1 pt.]. It is a privilege of the highest honor. With it comes God's promises of provision (supply) and correction (discipline), which help wean the penitent from the world's folly, grow him in faith and make him a partaker of God's holiness. *For whom the Lord loveth he*

chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth...that we might be partakers of his holiness. [Hebrews 12:6, 10 pt.]. At life's end, death admits the Christian into the best possessions. *We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.* [II Corinthians 5:8]. Let it then be your great concern to make sure your name is in the book of life. *And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.* [Revelation 20:15].

Finally, (3) the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit is promised to the penitent. The greatest favour which crowns and completes the promises of pardon and adoption is the gift of the indwelling Divine Spirit to fit us for sufferings and service below, and for happiness above. *Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also given unto us the earnest [promise] of the Spirit.* [II Cor. 5:5]. He only gives holy dispositions to engage in holy duties and services below, and heavenly desires to qualify us for heavenly delights above. No Spirit-no salvation-no fruit.

The Holy Spirit's office is to (a) enlighten, (b) sanctify and (c) comfort the soul. All true wisdom comes from above, from God alone. The Sun of Righteousness sheds his (a) enlightenment on the humble and contrite. *Thus saith the high and lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite (broken and lowly) and humble (meek, obscure) spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.* [Isaiah 57:15]. Holy Ghost conviction through the Scriptures makes the sinner *wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.* [II Timothy 3:15]. Without his washing and regeneration you cannot serve God with true purity of heart or holiness, fitting you for the bright mansions of glory. *Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his.* [Romans 8:9 pt.]. Living proofs of his sanctifying influence are the proud becoming humble, and the profane pious. As He did of old, He does today. *As such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.* [I Cor. 6:11]. Look and pray to God for his sanctifying grace. Seek him with all your heart. *And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.* [Jer. 29:13]. Put the language of penitent David into a prayer for yourself. *Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence,* [Psalm 51:10, 11 pt.]. By his assistance you shall taste and see that the Lord is gracious, and quitting every vain refuge, firmly lay hold on eternal life. *Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be (c) comforted.* [Matthew 5:3, 4]. Wherever the Holy Spirit dwells these words, and all the Beatitudes, are able to be fulfilled. The penitent will find burdens lightened, bitter things sweetened, wounds healed, supplies met, woes removed and peace amid any prideful defamation, prejudice or persecution. Would you not rather choose these things than the devil's bitter bondage and the second death?

It is not a light matter to enter upon the service of God. The Holy Ghost alone equips for this service – your end being the promotion of his own glory. The melting penitent must become

an obedient servant. *Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.* [I Samuel 15:22 pt.]. O what joy will follow the transient sorrows of time!

Closing in with God – Be not afraid you will offend God by your earnestness. Come boldly to the throne of grace, but also wrestle like Jacob, until you prevail and win the blessing of salvation. Don't draw back. *But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them who believe to the saving of the soul.* [Hebrews 10:39]. Never mind what the world says if you give your life to Christ. It's doomed. Don't sink with it. A faithful minister will say: "Now I rejoice, not that you are made sorrowful, but that you sorrowed after a godly sort." *For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.* [II Cor. 7: 10]. The conversion of a sinner creates a triumph in heaven. Weary, heavy laden sinner, come to Jesus and he will give you rest. In the world thou shalt have tribulation, but in him you will find peace.

With these encouragements set your hand to the covenant of God, and solemnly surrender your soul to him. Jehovah is ready to receive you! Peace is made by the blood of the cross; you have nothing to do but accept the blessing, and adore the Giver of it. *When thou sadist, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, LORD, will I seek.* [Psalm 27:8]. In the most solemn and deliberate manner, make a full and absolute surrender of all you have, and all you are, into his hands for ever. You cannot carry any offering to Christ so pleasing to him as yourself. Let your language be:

"O God, I had sold myself to sin, and was enslaved by Satan, and the present evil world. Thou hast redeemed me, and at thy footstool I bow myself with entire submission. Other lords, besides thee, have had dominion over me, but now by thee only will I make mention of thy name. Thou art my God, and I will praise thee; my father's God, and I will exalt thee. Whatsoever thou choosest me to be, to have, to want, to do, or to suffer, I cheerfully acquiesce in thy wise and righteous appointments. Instruct me to know thy will, and assist me to do it. O, my Father, I now join myself to thee in a perpetual covenant, never to be forgotten! I had rather be a door-keeper in thy house, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness. Let me but feel thy supporting hand, hear thy gracious voice, and see thy reconciled countenance, and I can go on my way rejoicing. O, Jesus, thou Prince of life! Thou Lover and Saviour of men! Receive a worthless sinner. Thou only art my master, my guide, my deliverer, my portion! May I never, no never deny or dishonour thee. O, Holy Spirit of grace! I desire to resign myself to thy quickening, illuminating, and sanctifying power. Take possession of my soul. Turn out every rival, and reign over all my affections with uncontrolled authority. Prepare me for every good word and work on earth, and for everlasting joy in heaven." Amen."

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REPENTANCE: EXPLAINED AND ENFORCED



And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled. But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here. Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. [Acts 16:27-31]

Adapted from a Book by J. Thornton (1834)

This book was written as a serious appeal to every man's conscience on the nature, necessity and evidences of repentance. The present life is but the porch, by which we enter into an eternal state. Every messenger that God has sent to perishing sinners has brought a call to repentance. Jesus warned twice to his own people, the Jews, "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." [Luke 13:3, 5].

I. THE STATE OF THE UNREPENTANT

O Reader: You are gliding down the stream of time, into a shoreless and bottomless ocean (eternity). After death, the Word of God teaches that you must be either eternally happy, or eternally miserable. Look into the Old and New Testaments and read with what zeal, solemn earnestness and compassion the prophets, and Christ and His apostles exhorted thoughtless, worldly-minded and wicked sinners to forsake their sins, and cast themselves upon the mercy of a pardoning, Holy God.

All men are by nature in spiritual darkness and distant from God, defiled with sin and exposed to future punishment. Sin is a dark cloud upon the mind, a thick veil drawn over the heart, blocking out the precious light of divine truth. *"The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."* [I Corinthians 2:14] Darkened minds thoughtlessly dance and sport on the borders of the bottomless pit (Hell). You are at a distance from God. *All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way;* [Isaiah 53:6 pt.]. Jesus said, wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: [Matthew 7:13 pt.]. In this broad way are the paths of *gaiety-pleasure* (amusements, entertainment, toys), *profligacy* (adulterers, drunkards, liars and swearers), *self-righteousness* (the proud, religious, high-minded), *deceit* (fakers, hypocrites) and *covetousness* (materialism, pride, greed). How blind must that man be who cannot see scarlet – his own SIN!

O Impenitent; whither are you driving on in fury with such hasty strides; vile, corrupt, deeply polluted, guilty and condemned, and in bondage and misery? *There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. there is none that doeth good, no, not one.* [Romans